

Italy's Foreign Policy and the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Case of the Nuclear Dossier

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Abstract

Italy has been, throughout history, a descent trade partner for Iran. However, the political relations of the two countries have never been as deep and expanded as the economic ones. During the years of the nuclear stand-off, as the most significant issue in Iran foreign policy, one ever-present question was why Italy is not a negotiating partner with Iran? In this paper, the most important paradigms of Italian foreign policy and those factors affecting its relations with Iran are dealt with. The paper argues that, the two paradigms of Eurocentrism and Atlanticism have taken terms to dominate Italian foreign policy. With changes within the Italian governments, one of these paradigms gains precedence, accordingly Italian foreign policy changed toward Iran. The current paper makes use of the neoclassical realism in which both internal and external factors impacting foreign policy are taken into consideration. The paper argues that being or not being a party to negotiation with Iran was not a matter of consensus among Italian governments. The shifts in the governments with rise and fall of left and right parties brings about paradigm shifts which in turn lead to change in policies with respect to Iran.

Keywords: Italy's foreign policy, Eurocentrism, Atlanticism, second republic, Iran's nuclear dossier.

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Introduction

Italy has been the best trade partner of Iran for years and despite all ebbs and flows has sustained its relations with Iran. It has been the first destination of Iranian presidents' foreign visits after the revolution. Italian trade commissions have been among the first economic groups visiting Iran once after the end of the Iran–Iraq war and later after settlement of Iran's nuclear dispute. In spite of that, Italy was absent from nuclear negotiations with Iran. The reasons for this diplomatic absence are related to the factors that impact Italy's foreign policy towards Iran and they are in turn a part of Italian foreign policy as a whole. There are three influential factors in Italy's foreign policy: Europe, the United States and the Middle East – Mediterranean. Italy has been always known for its short-lived governments; some of them stay in power even less than six months. This is indicative of the internal political instability of the country. Such changes in the governments have led to constant shifts in foreign policy orientations. To answer our question about the reasons for Italy's absence from negotiations with Iran, we start with a theoretical framework that can help us understand Italian foreign policy, then we will discuss the paradigms governing Italy's foreign policy and draw connections between them and Italian-Iranian relations.

I. Italy's Foreign Policy Paradigms

Understanding Italian foreign policy is to possible without having an overall picture of its foreign policy particularly after the end of the

cold war. The foundations of Italy's foreign policy are based on the two pillars of Atlanticism and Eurocentrism (Brighi, 2007: 100). This is a tradition followed in Italy from the first days after the end of the Second World War and Italian governments have pursued it to enhance their role-playing in international politics. The necessities of the cold war put Italy at this juncture. The 1947 peace treaty was considered by some Italians a second Versailles. In the Far East, Trieste was separated from Italy and the left-inclined parties had acquired more than 40 per cent of the votes. The catholic and peace-seeking parties were also against Italy's accession to NATO and confrontation with the Soviet Union. In this atmosphere, if it wasn't for the Marshal Plan assistances, fear of being excluded from the central European democratic states and gaining prominence of the parties supporting Moscow, Italy could have opted for neutrality between the East and the West (Gilbert, 2010: 239). The first column of Italian foreign policy that is Atlanticism meant that Italy should become a member of NATO and bandwagon the United States during the cold war. Being a part of NATO had three major functions for Italy. First, it supported Italy against the threats of the eastern bloc. Second, strengthened and buttressed its national sovereignty and finally helped Italy to stay in the western bloc (Howorth and Menon, 1997: 68).

The Second pillar is Eurocentrism. Italy is among the founding members of the European Union and fully supports European integrity. This support however does not exceed verbal services in some cases due to Italy's institutional and economic weaknesses. Italy has been always seeking a balance against Germany and France. One reason for Italy's traditional support for expansion of the European Union to the East and even accession of Turkey to the European Union is that if the union had remained limited to the west of Europe the role of France would have increased to the expense of Italy's position (Gilbert, 2010: 244). The Mediterranean is known as the third ring in Italy's foreign policy that along with Turkey is regarded as

significant to Italy in energy and security provisions. The importance of the region is so high for Italy that drove it to side with the Arab states during Arab-Israeli conflict in the midst of the Cold War independent of its European and American partners (Abadi, 2002: 81 – 83).

By the end of the cold war the threat of the Soviet Union had vanished but the two paradigms of Eurocentrism and Atlanticism remained as determinants of Italian foreign policy. The new post-soviet era changed Italy's threat perception and the threat of Moscow was replaced with a series of multidimensional threats. Before 2001, these threats were regional and mostly concerned with the stability of Balkan and countering immigration. After 2001, the threats became international such as terrorism, immigration and countering economic crises (Faradori and Rosa, 2007: 70). End of the cold war coincided with the change of Italian party system. Although there occurred no institutional change in Italy but the changes were interpreted as formation of the second republic. This meant that the party system known as “partitocrazia” shaped during the cold war in Italy was casted away with coming of new parties and individuals in Italian political scene.

Foreign policy that was ignored during the cold war turned into a challenging issue. While the turbulent political atmosphere was shortening the life-span of Italian governments, ironically, its foreign policy was triggered and Italy interfered militarily in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya (Jiacomello and Verbek, 2011: 218). By studying Italian foreign policy in this era we reach a model: whenever the left parties gain power, Italy's foreign policy gets closer to the European axis, the efforts to put Italy into the European integration process intensifies and Italy follows European Union in its foreign policy (Andreatta, 2008: 174). In contrast, when the right wing parties have formed governments, the Atlanticism comes to the fore in foreign policy and the government stands beside the United States in

foreign policy decisions (Del Sarto and Tocci, 2010: 138). This contrast between right and left parties has given Italian foreign policy pendulum-like moves between Europe and America (Brighi, 2007: 114).

Is the same pattern observable in Italy–Iran relations? Does change of governments in Italy and acting in accordance with either paradigms of foreign policy affect Iran–Italy relations? To understand this, we present a brief history of Iran–Italy relations and then we will discuss the most complicated foreign policy issue of Iran namely Iran’s nuclear dossier and why Italy did not get involved in nuclear negotiations with Iran. This opens way to the more general discussion about Italian foreign policy on Iran.

II. Historical Interactions

The Islamic revolution in Iran coincided with an era of turmoil and crisis in Italian politics. The increase in the number of leftist factions in Italy in the 1970s and expansion of labor and student movements made some right wing parties in Italy to adopt what is known as “*strategia della tensione*”. This strategy was conducted in practice through assassination of leftist elements by some factions within security and intelligence agencies and some members of the judiciary. Such actions did not remain unretaliated and radicals from left formed the “*brigate rosse*” and some other small organizations to counter the authoritarian part of the state. The result was a period of unrest and terror (Lipset, 2004: 334). At the same time Italy was engaged in the oil crisis of 1970 and was in need of Iranian oil. Therefore, Italy did not take any position vis-a-vis Iranian revolution and the Italian reaction remained limited to only some leftist demonstrations in support of the revolution. The country was forced to make its stance on Iran clear when the hostage taking crisis took place. Even then Italy was always against military action against Iran and before aligning with the sanctioning states of Iran made some efforts to release the hostages (Keyhan, 1980). With the advent of

Iran–Iraq war Italy declared independence and the Iranian export of oil to Italy was never stopped during the war. In 1988 Iran was providing more than 11 percent of Italy's oil demands and Italy was the fourth exporter of goods to Iran (Resalat, 2008). From beginning of the war Italy wanted a peaceful resolution to the conflict and embarked on extensive efforts to put an end to the war from 1986 onwards (Islamic Republic of Iran's News Agency, 1987).

By the end of the Iran–Iraq war, the relations between the two countries were severed. The decree for killing of Salman Roshdi the author of the book “Satanic Verses” by Imam Khomeini and the subsequent departure from Tehran by the European ambassadors was followed by activities of the Islamic Republic opposition groups in in Rome. These were all paving the grounds for increased tensions between the two countries. The critical dialogue between Iran and Europe was not going on well (Hunter, 2010: 84) and the Mykonos court's decision made the European countries to recall their ambassadors from Tehran once again. The European Union did not have a unified voice on the Mykonos issue. Italy had declared that it recalled its ambassador only to participate in the foreign ministers meeting; Italy along with Greece and France opposed any sanctions against Iran. However, other european countries wanted taking practical measures against Iran (Hass, 1999: 82).

The shadow of the Mykonos was casted away when the reformist president Mohammad Khatami came to power in autumn 1997. Bilateral meetings were held in highest levels between Iranian president and Italian prime minister and the level of the two countries interactions mounted. Italy was against the extraterritorial sanctions of the United States and asked its companies not to obey D'amato and Holmes-Bretton sanctions (Khaloozadeh, 2003: 50). Despite that the country did not enter negotiations with Iran in 2003 over the nuclear dossier.

With the ascendance of Ahmadinejad, the nuclear issue found

its way to the center of Iran's foreign policy issues. Italians tried to get into the process of negotiation with Iran between 2006 and 2008 but from this time onward, a series of issues like imposition of full sanctions against Iranian oil and central bank, Holocaust, human rights issues, the 2009 presidential elections disputes in Iran, invitation of the Iranian opposition leaders by the Italian parliament and detention of Iran's national broadcasting service correspondent in Rome all affected Italy-Iran relations. Ahmadinejad's trip to Rome to attend the FAO meeting was a disappointment and invitation of Iran to attend the G8 summit was cancelled. Between 2011 and 2013 the change of Iranian president opened way for exchange of visits; however, the bilateral relations were not exceeding issues pertaining to Iran's sanctions and their economic consequences. In autumn 2014 an Italian figure Federica Mogherini entered nuclear negotiations with Iran as the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs. Despite this Italy remained absent from the nuclear negotiations.

III. Italy and Iran's Nuclear Dossier

There are a number of reasons for Italy's absence from nuclear negotiations; following are the most important reasons:

Iran's Unwillingness. In the early phases of Iran's nuclear dispute in 2003, Iran faced two types of countries. First the G3 including the United States, Canada and Australia and Second, EU3 comprising of Germany, France and England. Italy and the Netherlands also wanted to enter negotiations but Iran desired to keep the number of the countries involved in the negotiations limited to the great powers (Rouhani, 201: 645). With the change of Iranian president the composition of the nuclear negotiating team changed as well. Negotiations with the great powers was replaced by negotiations with medium powers like Turkey and Brazil. The aim of the middle-sized powers is to increase their role and influence in the international system and one of their instruments is participation in

multilateral mechanisms of conflict resolution. One year before the joint statement of Iran, Brazil and Turkey in 2010, Rubens Ricupero the Brazilian ex-secretary General of the United Nations Trade and Development Conference wrote: Brazil has wanted to be an important global actor in all fields from trade negotiations to climate issues and Iran is a significant case that shows Brazil's intention to become an international political actor (Downie, 2010).

So, where was Italy while such countries as Brazil and Turkey were actively involved in Iran's nuclear dispute resolution? In the sidelines of Iranian parliamentary visit to Rome in 2007, there were whispers of probability of Italian mediation to solve Iran's nuclear issue (Mehr News Agency: 2007). In the same year Italy hosted nuclear negotiations between Solana, Larijani and Jalili with participation of Romano Prodi (Mardomsalarai Newspaper: 2007). Italian president changed in May 2008. Franco Frattinni the foreign minister of Berlusconi declared at the same year that Washington will try to include Italy in negotiations underway with Iran (Donya Eghtesad Newspaper: 2008). From 2008 to 2010 there occurred some important events in Iranian – Italian relations including Berlusconi's refraining from welcoming Ahmadinejad in his visit to Italy to take part in FAO meeting, as well as Iran's invitation to take part in the G8 summit on Afghanistan and its subsequent withdrawal and finally cancellation of Fratini's visit of Tehran. Since it could be the first visit of a high ranking European official of Tehran its cancellation was reflected widely in the media. Iranian ministry of foreign affairs declared that this has nothing to do with the Iranian probable decision to welcome Berlusconi in the city of Semnan where a new Iranian missile had been tested some time ago (Keyhan: 2009).

Italy's reaction to the post 2009 presidential election incidents in Iran made the bilateral relations more complicated. In February 2009 Italy was after preparing draft of a resolution against Iran supported by Turkey, Egypt and the Arab League (Asr-e-Iran: 2009). Berlusconi

also called Italy the older brother of Israel (Isna, 2009). Attacking Italy's embassy in Tehran made the two countries relations more tense. As a result while Turkey as a country trying to expand its regional influence and Brazil as a country seeking permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council were negotiating with Iran, Iran – Italy relations was going through the most severe periods. In this atmosphere Italy could never be a part of nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Italian Reluctance: in 2003, when the three European countries declared their readiness to negotiate with Iran to resolve the nuclear dispute by negotiations Italy was the head of the European Union. In response to its European counterparts Berlusconi responded, “Thank you. We are not interested” and in this way the letter was sent to Iran without Italy's signature. Later on Bonino declared in the *Corriere della Sera* that this position was short sighted and return to the game is no easy job” (Rampino, 2013). There could be a number of reasons why Italy took such a position including Italy's institutional restrictions as the head of the European Union (Kuchesfahani, 2006: 5) and the ambiguity surrounding the fate of negotiations (Acconcia, 2013).

The answer is in a closer look to the 2003 incidents. Berlusconi the Italian prime minister has close and friendly relations with George Bush who was after attacking Iraq at the same year. In January 30th 2003 Berlusconi wrote a letter to the American president together with seven other European leaders expressing their consent with US invasion of Iraq. After the invasion he stated “using force against Iraq is legitimate and Italy will not leave the United States alone in its fight against terrorism” (Financial Times: 2013). Italian public opinion was against this action. A poll conducted by the Gallup indicated that 80 percent of Italians were not approving invasion of Iraq without permission from the United Nations (EOS-Gallup Europe poll of January: 2003). Another poll showed that 77 percent of Italians supported Italy's cooperation with the European Union (Transatlantic

Trends Survey: 2002-2004). After the military campaign started Romano Prodi the head of the European Union Commission who replaced Berlusconi in 2006 said that “this is an unfortunate day for all nations of the world. The start of the war against Iraq is an end to the international society’s efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the Iraqi crisis in the United Nations. Today we have to pray that the war is short and with minimum bloodshed and inflict the least damage to the region”⁽¹⁾.

When talking about Italy’s reluctance to enter nuclear negotiations with Iran one should ask which Italy? Not only right and left parties positions differ on Iran the two Berlusconi governments taking office in 2003 and 2008 also had different procedures on Iran. This shift in approach has two reasons. First is the change in the United States administration with coming to power of Barack Obama and Second the approaching Iranian oil sanctions that were supposed to be enforced in case the negotiations would fail. In Franco Frattini’s plan which was published in 2009 (New York Times: 2009) it was mentioned that Iran’s nuclear issue is tied to other regional issues like the Middle East stability and confronting Taliban in Afghanistan and it was supposed that Iran take part in the G8 meeting in Rome. However, the incidents after 2009 Iranian presidential elections and coming to fore of human rights issues failed a plan that seemed to be presented in a right time (Giuliani and Jones, 2010: 155). Therefore it cannot be said that Italy had no interest in participating in Iran’s nuclear talks and has always adopted a stable approach towards Iran.

Exclusion of Italy: Some believe that Italy was excluded from nuclear negotiations and was hurt by that (Waizer, 2015: 11). At the beginning of the negotiations the European Union did not enter direct talks with Iran and the EU3 was negotiating with Iran on behalf of the European Union which was a matter of discontent among some European countries like Italy who felt that they are unfairly put aside from negotiations with Iran (Tocci and Voltolini, 2010: 126).

After the Second World War, Italy has been always sensitive to being excluded from international institutions and multilateral mechanisms. One example of that is the 1976 meeting of the six industrial countries in the Rambouillet palace in Paris forming later on the seven industrial countries by Canada joining. Italy was not a part of this. The second was the Guadeloupe meeting in 1979 in which important decisions were made on the future of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran and installation of the Cruise Missile System in Western Europe. The Italian policymakers and political elites considered noninvolvement of Italy in that conference a sign of their country's marginalization in the international system and a matter for Italy's humiliation (Gilbert, 2010: 242). In the 1990s, Italy could not play a prominent role in the European-Mediterranean partnership, which cleared the way for Spain and France to play the major parts (Marinda, 2011: 11). In 1994, Italy was absent from the Bosnia contact group to facilitate talks between Moscow and NATO members. The Italian officials reacted by pointing to their interests in the region demanded their participation in the peace keeping operation and membership in the group. This was not materialized till 1995 when Susanna Agnelli the then Italian foreign minister threatened that its country will deny F-17 bombers access to its air bases (Avidson, 2011: 159).

When it comes to Iran's nuclear issue Italians blame Germany for their absence from negotiations with Iran. Joschka Fischer writes in this respect: they were after disrupting the trilateral European formula in negotiations with Iran following the logic that Germany and Italy lost the Second World War together. From Italy's perspective the trilateral formula was nothing more than Germany's skillful diplomatic maneuver to make the international community believe that Germany is in a similar position as the other two great European powers. In the negotiations with Iran we did not believe in Rome's persistence for forceful entrance into the negotiations. If a change was necessary that could be inviting Javier Solana the high

representative of the common foreign and security policy of the European Union (Rouhani, 2012: 234). Germany used the same tool for keeping Italy out of negotiations with Iran as the Italians, for years, used to prevent Germany from reaching a permanent Security Council seat. The four countries of Germany, Brazil, India and Japan were seeking membership in the United Nations Security Council from the early 1990s. Against this, Italy together with Mexico, Egypt and Pakistan were opposing reforms in the United Nations and inclusion of what they initially were calling “the coffee club” into this international organization (Bourantonis, 2005: 71). Italy was suggesting a permanent seat for the European Union in the Security Council and increasing the number of non-permanent members instead of Germany’s accession. In response Germany was supporting the entrance of the European Union's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy to the negotiations with Iran instead of Italy.

Each of these factors made clear why Italy was absent from negotiations with Iran. At the same time they make two other points. First is the change in Italy’s foreign policy with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran and second the huge gap between Italy’s willingness and capabilities to become an active international actor. With the changes in the governments in Italy its foreign policy undergoes changes as well but the choices of any cabinet remain limited to either Atlanticism or Eurocentrism.

IV. Political Parties and Italian Foreign Policy

The collapse of the Berlin wall, the end of the cold war and the domestic political developments between 1989 and 1993 brought about crises that diminished Italy’s role in foreign policy. The origin of Italy’s foreign policy after the cold war began in 1994 with Berlusconi’s taking office known as the formation of the second republic. This period until 2000 (except for the short terms of Berlusconi) is

known for the prominence of eurocentrism and increase in Italy's participation in multilateral mechanisms like NATO and the United Nations; through such mechanisms Italy was trying to increase its role in international politics. The indicators of this approach are Italy's efforts to amend the United Nations structure (from 1995 onward), joining the European economic and financial union in the government of Romano Prodi (1996-1998) and Italy's participation in resolving the Balkan crisis particularly military, political and humanitarian intervention in Albania in the government of Massimo D'Alema (1998 – 1999).

The period of eurocentrism and multilateralism in Italian foreign policy coincided with the late years of Hashemi Rafsanjani in office and Mohammad Khatami's presidential terms in Iran. Before that, some issues like the verdict of Salman Roshdi Killing, assassination of Bakhtiar and activities of Iranian government's opposition in Rome had stagnated Iran's relations with the European countries. These talks were rooted in Iran's position on the Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The neutrality first and then declaring support for the United Nations decision paved the grounds for visit of the representatives of three European countries to Iran (Holland, Luxembourg and Italy). In the closure of the Edinburgh summit in 1992, The European Union member states emphasized on the necessity for critical dialogue with Iran over issues such as the decree for the assassination of Salman Roshdi, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and Middle East peace (Abbasi, 2006: 237). In 1995, Senator Giulio Andreotti traveled to Tehran and visited some Iranian officials including Hashemi Rafsanjani and Velayati. Iran was worried that the United States can have the cooperation of the European countries in sanctioning Iran. Andreotti believed that "we should move against the currents. To demonize the other is easy but we should find a resolution" (La Repubblica 12/06/1995). Denmark retreated from the critical dialogues with Iran in 1996 claiming that such talks are useless (Mousavian, 2008: 197). In 1997, only some months after the Italian

foreign minister declared that the talks will go on with Iran the Mykonos court crisis put an end to the dialogue and the European countries summoned their ambassadors from Tehran (Abbasi, 2006: 237). Such talks were the sources for one of the most serious disagreements between Europe and the United States, which was trying to isolate Iran through imposing sanctions (Mousavian, 2008: 137).

The change of the administration in Iran and rise of Mohammad Khatami to power replaced the pragmatist approaches of foreign policy with the policy of détente and the constructive dialogue. The first four years of Khatami in power are the golden era of Iran–Italy relations. The Italian ambassador was the first European ambassador to return to Iran after the Mykonos affair. In addition to that the Italians dispatched Lamberto Dini and Romano Prodi the then foreign minister and prime minister to Iran and encouraged the AGIN and ENI oil companies to sign contracts with Tehran and consequently expand economic and political relations (Soleimani, 2009: 140). Mohammad Khatami's visit of Rome in 1999 opened a new window to the two countries relations. The economic relations were in the rise and reached 5 billion and 700 million dollars in 2016 from 2 billion in 1999 (Iran-Italy Chamber of Commerce, 2007: 4). The second term of Khatami in power coincided with the presidency of Berlusconi in Italy who entered the world of politics from business claiming that he would utilize the two principles of adherence to the pledges and reliance on the personal ties in politics (Crocì, 2008: 147). His presidency was popular by attributions such as neo-conservatism, anti-Eurocentrism, Atlanticism (Sguelia, 2011: 20) as well as nationalism and conservatism in foreign policy (Brighi, 2007: 110). The Iranian nuclear issue was posed in the midst of this era in 2003. As we saw earlier the Berlusconi administration was not interested in entering negotiations with Iran. Berlusconi who had earlier demonstrated his inclination to the United States on issues like Iraq

and Afghanistan did not want to take distance from the Atlanticism in foreign policy. Berlusconi used to try to make Germany and France close to the United States whenever these two were paring with America and if this failed get close to the United States. He was of the belief that France wanted to question the United States hegemony using the European Union and close German-French ties has no impact on the Italian influence or advancement of European Union's joint security policies (Croci, 2008: 148). Despite this rapport between Italy and the United States, the relations between Italy and Iran remained as it was, the economic ties went on and high officials of the two countries continued to visit each other.

In the spring 2006, Romano Prodi replaced Berlusconi in a close competition. Prodi did not have a party and was acting through a coalition of leftist parties from the middle ground to the radicals. Therefore he was facing two types of opponents, one the supporters of Berlusconi and the other members of his own coalition who had convergent views on a few subjects and were ready to exist the coalition when needed. He was after returning a balance between the two main axes in Italian foreign policy that seemed to be tilted towards the Atlantic pole during Berlusconi. His support of the Lebanese Hezbollah, the exit of the Italian forces from Iraq (the symbol of American unilateralism) and preserving Italian forces in Afghanistan (strengthening the multilateralism through NATO) were among the most disputed measures he took and led to the collapse of his government in 2008 (Caldi and Webber, 2011: 215). He was pursuing the same approach with respect to Iran. In 2006 during Ahmadinejad's first tenure there were rumors of Iran's oil embargo. Italy supported negotiations with Iran and was condemning intensification of sanctions against Iran and a possible military action. Massimo D'Alema participated in the 5+1 foreign ministers meeting (Ilna, 2006) and Romano Prodi visited Iran in the sidelines of the General Assembly of the United Nations with Ahmadinejad talking about the nuclear issue (ISNA, 2006). Later on Ali Larijani the high-

ranking Iranian negotiator talked about Italy's plan to resolve the nuclear dossier (Fars News Agency, 2006). All these efforts ran aground with the change in Italian government.

The third government of Berlusconi coincided with the change in the United States administration. Obama was insisting on direct and unconditional talks with Iran in the first years of his tenure as a way to guarantee the United States interests. At the same time in Obama's view the Bush strategies of threatening Iran on one hand and using mediators like Europe, China and Russia to contain Iran were failures (Abdollah and Esmaili, 2013, 118). As mentioned earlier Berlusconi also embarked on efforts to enter negotiations with Iran in the first term of his premiership. Although Berlusconi's close relations with Israel and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's positions on Holocaust had affected the two countries relations but the Italian foreign ministry wanted to help resolution of Iran's nuclear dossier through engaging Iran in resolution of regional disputes (Iraq and Afghanistan). However, after the 2009 election incidents, human rights issues turned into the most important controversy between the two countries. Italy reacted to the detaining of some local employees of the British embassy in Tehran and threatened that the European ambassadors may be recalled collectively. Berlusconi further said that this will be the priority for the eight industrial countries meeting in Italy in which the intensification of sanctions against Iran may also be discussed (Donya-ye Eghtesad, 2009). In continuation, Iran reacted to the way Italian police behaved with those demonstrating against the G8 meeting held in Italy and henceforth an era of tensions between the two countries started.

In 2011, when the technocrat Mario Monti the liberal economist and the ex-European Union commissioner took office Italy was seriously involved in the economic crisis of the euro zone and its security and foreign policy was focused on the military intervention in Libya. From another perspective, the failure of the nuclear

negotiations and issuance of a series of the United Nations Security Council resolutions had given shape to a global consensus over Iran. In this way the two most important axes of Italian foreign policy i.e. Eurocentrism and Atlanticism were both pursuing a similar strategy with respect to Iran. The foreign ministry of Monti's administration was a supporter of intensifying sanctions on Iran (www.wsws.org) and was supporting harsh and multilateral sanctions against it (Abdeelah and Esmaili, 2013: 119). In this era the relations between the two countries was limited and was only pursued in limited economic scopes (ICE, 2014: 12). The Italian oil companies stopped importing Iranian oil and Iran's oil export to Italy was taking place in limited amounts and through barter agreements.

Between 2013 and 2015, two administrations were in place in Italy: One under premiership of Enrico Letta comprising a coalition of left and right parties and the other the administration of Matteo Renzi who led the Italian democrat party and took power casting Letta aside. Although Letta's premiership was short and his administration was entangled with economic problems and internal opposition but the Iranian –Italian relations were boosted in this era and a new chapter in bilateral relations was opened after Emma Bonino, the Italian foreign minister visited Tehran. Bonino was against Berlusconi's policy to keep Italy out of nuclear negotiations with Iran and considered the change in the administration and the trend of negotiations with Iran a chance to increase Italian role in this field. Matteo Renzi is the youngest prime minister in Italy's history and is the ex-mayor of Florence. His moderate political party was only formed in 2007 comprising eight leftist parties. What distinguishes his administration from the leftist governments before him is that he took office when the second republic in Italy was in demise and a new political era was on the rise in Italy. Paolo Gentiloni the foreign minister of Renzi administration introduced the four principles of Italian foreign policy as: Eurocentrism, Atlanticism, freedom of trade interactions, and commitment to preserving international peace and human rights. Africa

and the Mediterranean are considered the priorities of this policy. There are differences between Renzi's foreign policy and the leftist administrations. For example on the issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict his administration is tied more to the Israeli positions in stark difference between other leftist Italian parties. He has also did not focus on Iranian nuclear issue. Although he has supported Iran and 5+1 negotiations, the two sides economic and political exchanges were increased during his term and Iranian president was invited to visit Italy but his previous remarks including those that have pointed to Iran as a part of the Middle East problems indicate that close ties with Israel have affected his policy with respect to Iran.

Conclusion

The present paper studied the factors directing Italian foreign policy with respect to Iran and its continuation and change. To answer the question of the paper, neo-classical realism was used. In this theory the state is not death with like a black box. The foreign policy decisions are made by the political parties and elites who have to negotiate with internal forces. In the post-cold war Italy two coalitions of left and right parties have risen to power and retreated in sequence. The country's foreign policy has changed accordingly. The first thing that neoclassical realism tells us is that the change in the ruling elites results in change in foreign policy. This is because each of the ruling elites belongs to different identity and interest groups.

This has happened for a number of times in Italian political arena between Eurocentrism and Atlanticism. As demonstrated that when left parties take control of the executive in Italy one should expect the prominence of Eurocentrism in foreign policy and in contrast when the right wing parties rise to power one should expect execution of the Atlanticism in foreign policy. The focus of the neoclassic realism theory is on finding the reasons for this change. The moderate left parties in Italy were viewing the European society/union as a middle ground

between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Christian Democrat party of Italy was a supporter of the European Union establishment and many of the independent Italian political elites or those close to the left parties had taken posts in the European Union and were considered among the economic and political leaders of the union. In contrast, in the right, Berlusconi was a close friend of George Bush and one of the most important points the Italian northern and southern right parties agreed on was disagreeing with the European Union policies and even calls for exit from the union.

The second point the neoclassic realism theory draws our attention to is the amount of power a country has among other states. Italy is a middle ranking power in this respect. Such powers are after increasing their role and elevating their status in the international system through participation in multilateral settings, internationalism and mediation in the conflicts. However, Italy has not been able to achieve its foreign policy goals despite its readiness to take more active roles internationally. Studying Italian foreign policy vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear issue, the first thing that attracts observers' attention is Italy's absence from negotiation with Iran. The reason should be sought in Italian internal politics: the frequent shifts among parties and the changes in its foreign policy approaches. These two paradigms have emerged in form of a model, which has affected Italian foreign policy with respect to the Islamic republic of Iran. In cases that there is no universal consensus on Iran and there are disagreements between Europe and the United States, Italy's approach to Iran oscillates between cooperation and conflict as a response to changes in the administrations. Although there has been economic cooperation with Iran over oil but the ups and downs in the two countries relations have been more a matter related to the international community's positions on Iran. Italy's foreign policy on Iran has been always dependent to the approaches of the political parties in Italy and their inclination to each of the two Eurocentrism and Atlanticism paradigms.

Note

1. www.europea-cu-un.org

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