

## **Stability and socialist autonomy: The SPD, the PSI and the Italian political crisis of the 1970s**

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This article aims at assessing the influence of the German SPD, one of the leading forces of European socialism in the second half of the twentieth century, on the evolution of the Italian Socialist Party during the crisis of the Italian political system in the 1970s. Research has been conducted in the ‘Archiv der sozialen Demokratie’ at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn, where the central files of the party, as well as the personal records of the leaders of the SPD, offer the opportunity to explore the developments of the manifold foreign activity deployed by the party.<sup>1</sup>

In the first part will briefly be sketched the role played by non-state actors (such as the political parties) in the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Subsequently, the focus will shift on to the shape and goals of SPD foreign activities during the 1970s and on its relation to the conduct of the foreign policy of the SPD-led governments in the same years. Thirdly, the specific features of the Italian crisis will be examined in the context of the broader European political scenario. In the last and more substantial part, a closer look will be devoted to the bilateral SPD-PSI relations and to its effects on the evolution of the latter, especially after the appointment of Bettino Craxi as secretary of the Italian party in 1976.

### **Non-governmental actors in the German foreign policy**

Several publications have recently emphasised the unusual role that non-state actors have played in the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany since its establishment in 1949.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, this evolution was a by-product of the slow recovery of full sovereignty by the government over the country’s international relations. Furthermore, it was favoured by the high degree of international institutionalization that the Western Allies imposed on the German

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1. The author wants to thank especially the archivists Harry Scholz, Christoph Stamm, Mario Bungert and Wolfgang Stärcke for their indispensable help, as well as former chancellor Helmut Schmidt and former minister Horst Ehmke for allowing the access to their personal archives.
  2. According to a common operative definition, non-state actors are intended as actors operating on the international level which are not states. In the case presented here, the group is further restricted to actors which have a clear national origin, namely the Federal Republic of Germany during the Cold War years.

state as a precondition for its rebirth.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the federal, thus highly fragmented, institutional make-up of the FRG allowed a plethora of societal actors to progressively emerge and to influence the official foreign policy in the following decades. This was initially the case of various religious and secular organizations propelled by the moral obligation to rehabilitate Germany's history and values in the international community after the Nazi era.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, the focus of more 'political-oriented' non-governmental activities shifted to the promotion of 'Western values' of liberal democracy and 'social market economy', especially in conjunction with the first wave of decolonization in vast areas of the so-called 'Third World'.<sup>5</sup>

This was hardly a novelty in international relations, since the participation of non-state actors in the reshaping of the post-war world and politics was a typical feature of the American 'soft power' approach, which was especially aimed at Western Europe even before the outbreak of the Second World War, according to some interpretations.<sup>6</sup> Far from mechanically transposing this pattern from one shore of the Atlantic to the other, it is undeniable that the 'polyphony' of the post-war German foreign policy had absorbed and updated the lessons coming from the United States, and that its main goals merged in great measure with the broader Western approach to the Cold War: namely, the containment of Soviet influence and of revolutionary tendencies through the assertion of personal and economic liberties, political participation through a parliamentary system, high social mobility, mass consumption and so on.<sup>7</sup> It was a feature of the German case that the central and local authorities voluntarily gave considerable leeway to these actors.<sup>8</sup> Such a co-operative attitude among governmental agencies and non-state actors was rooted in the high degree of ideological cohesion characterizing German post-war society, engendered by the full-blown success of the 'German model' in distributing the dividends of the 'economic miracle' among all the social classes.<sup>9</sup> Although promoting different political nuances (social democratic, liberal, Christian-conservative), the German non-state actors had absorbed, shared and in turn spread fundamental values which had full citizenship at home and in the Western world.

3. A.-M. LE GLOANNEC, *Non-state actors and 'their' state: an introduction*, in: A.-M. LE GLOANNEC (ed.), *Non-state actors in international relations. The case of Germany*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007, p.6.
4. L.G. FELDMAN, *The role of non-state actors in Germany's foreign policy of reconciliation: catalysts, complements, conduits or competitors?*, in: A.-M. LE GLOANNEC (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.17 and f.
5. P. VON ZUR MÜHLEN, *Die internationale Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Ost-West-Konflikts*, Dietz Verlag, Bonn, 2007, p.10.
6. A. DOERING-MANTEUFFEL, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1999); V. DE GRAZIA, *Irresistible Empire. America's advance through 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2005.
7. O.A. WESTAD, *Deviations and Desires: On the Uses of Cold War History*, in: *Cold War History*, 3(August 2006), pp.373-376.
8. A.-M. LE GLOANNEC (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp.6 f.
9. P. VON ZUR MÜHLEN, *op.cit.*, pp.59-61.

Thus, the (partly) unintentional result was the attempt to export a German model of parliamentary democracy, whose main feature was the political competition between a conservative and a social-democratic party contending for government *inside* the system, not about its fundamental laws and structure.

This process reached its fulfilment at the end of the 1950s, with a congress held by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Bad Godesberg in 1959. The impressive success of the economic recovery driven by the conservative governments for a decade had forced the party to reappraise its ideological stance and to conform to the daily experience of the German masses.<sup>10</sup> The *Wirtschaftswunder* was becoming “a model able to provide for the pressing individual needs” of the masses, as well as “a historical projection for all the classes”, and thus also for the working class that the SPD strove to represent.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the SPD abandoned its traditional aim of an ultimate social palingenesis, fully accepting the capitalist mode of production and turning itself from a ‘Klassenpartei’ (class party) to a ‘Volkspartei’ (people’s party).<sup>12</sup>

Legitimation was not only a matter of internal politics. The consolidation of the Cold War order in Europe had more irreversible effects on German political life than elsewhere, after the ‘iron curtain’ had divided the national territory into two states belonging to different international blocs. The inclusion of the FRG in the Western military association, as well as active participation in the European integration process since its first steps, were increasingly regarded by the population as a positive element of defence in the face of the Soviet expansionism and of faster recovery from the ruins of the war. Therefore, the SPD felt also compelled to reassess its traditional position based on a choice of neutrality between the two blocs to achieve reunification, and on a relentless mistrust of the economic European integration.<sup>13</sup> In a famous speech to the Bundestag in June 1960, Herbert Wehner (a historical leader of the party)

“publicly acknowledged the failure of the party’s past foreign policy and stressed the commonalities that bound the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats to all facets of the Western Alliance”,

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10. However, it is undeniable that the occupants, and especially the United States authorities, had imposed such constraints to every project of (West) German collectivism that they “effectively condemned the left wings of the SPD and of the CDU to a political desert”. C.S. MAIER, *The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II*, in: C.S. MAIER (ed.), *The Cold War in Europe. Era of a Divided Continent*, Markus Wiener Publisher, Princeton, 1996, pp.189-190.
  11. J. HOFFMAN, *Compromesso di classe keynesiano e socialdemocrazia nella RFT*, in: E. COLLOTTI, L. CASTELLI, *La Germania socialdemocratica. SPD, società e Stato*, De Donato, Bari, 1982, pp.151.
  12. D. ORLOW, *Common Destiny: A Comparative History of the Dutch, French and German Social Democratic Parties*, Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2000, p.233.
  13. T. WIELGOSS, *PS und SPD im europäischen Integrationsprozess*, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden Baden, 2002, pp.55 f.

as well as to the challenges of European integration.<sup>14</sup> Far more than a *mea culpa*, the speech was aimed at doing to the party's foreign activities what the Bad Godesberg program had done on the domestic side. The ultimate goal was to propose the SPD as a legitimate candidate to accede to power at every level of the federal state, in the face of the public opinion as well as of the Western Alliance.<sup>15</sup>

This political and cultural evolution brought direct repercussions on the international activity of the party. The traditional 'internationalism' deeply rooted in the history of the German Social Democracy and trade unions was overcome by a new spirit of international activism whose aims coincided more than ever with those of the official German foreign policy. Consequently the SPD, the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB), and the *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (the cultural political foundation close to both the aforementioned actors), abandoned during the 1960s their simplistic self-representation as "ambassadors of German goodwill abroad" to head for more challenging tasks.<sup>16</sup>

### The 1970s of the SPD: Social Democracy for Europe

It was especially after the accession to government in 1967, and later during the 'long 1970s' of the SPD-led governments in coalition with the Liberal Party (FDP), that three main areas of intervention emerged to the attention of the German Social Democracy: apart from the co-operation with Third World countries, the activities of the party concentrated on the two halves of the European continent, with different strategies and goals. The 'New Ostpolitik' deployed by the government of chancellor Willy Brandt after 1969 had unquestionably both enhanced the prestige of the SPD at the continental level, and increased the political leverage of the FRG in East-West relations. The contacts between the SPD and the institutions of the communist countries had the main goal of preserving and even expanding the human, political and economic results of the normalization of relations. On the other hand, the activities of the party in the Occidental field were increasingly aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of the 'German model' of social democracy on the Western side of the continent, and especially in the face of the persistence of right-wing dictatorships and of the diffusion of communist tendencies in the South.<sup>17</sup> It is apparent how such a project effectively merged the traditional Cold War struggle against communism with the promotion of a higher

14. D. ORLOW, op.cit., p.222.

15. B.W. BOUVIER, *Zwischen Godesberg und Grosser Koalition. Der Weg der SPD in die Regierungsverantwortung*, Dietz Verlag, Bonn, 1990, pp.57 f.

16. C. HIEPEL, *Die SPD und der Weg vom "Socialist information and liason office" zur "Sozialdemokratische Partei Europas"*, p.8; paper published from the website of the University of Bochum, [www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/iga/isb/isb-hauptframe/forschung/Tagungspapiere/Hiepel.pdf](http://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/iga/isb/isb-hauptframe/forschung/Tagungspapiere/Hiepel.pdf).

17. P. VON ZUR MÜHLEN, op.cit., p.29.

level of Western European integration of more homogeneous political national systems.<sup>18</sup>

Bruno Friedrich, the SPD speaker for foreign policy at the Bundestag, effectively epitomized the new priorities for the social democracy: the European attitude toward the Northern shore of the Mediterranean had been relying exclusively on military opposition to the Soviet expansion for far too long. This had silenced the critics against the Spanish, Portuguese and Greek dictatorship, ultimately undermining the moral credibility of the West. The time had come to shift the attention toward more articulated measures in order to raise the Southern part of the continent from its political instability and its economic backwardness, so that those populations would naturally increase their aspiration to adhere to the Western model and to the European integration process.<sup>19</sup>

The SPD had to pursue the twofold goal of ensuring a democratic evolution, at the same time favouring the success of local social democratic factions. The leaders of those forces had found a safe harbour in Bonn during their long exile, allowing the SPD to influence their personal political development. The return to democracy presented new challenges to the SPD mentors, since the brother parties were “urgently in need of [...] organisational and material support” in resurfacing from dictatorship.<sup>20</sup> Unless such help might come from the very heart of Europe, those countries could pass through political experiences that might be destabilizing for the whole European balance and to which the American administration might respond with a “Chilean-like solution” that would hinder the progress of democracy on the continent.<sup>21</sup> The need to give a fresh start to its policy drove the SPD to establish a specific working group on Southern Europe under the Commission for foreign relations of the *Partei Vorstand*; Horst Ehmke, one of the most loyal co-workers of secretary Willy Brandt, was appointed director.<sup>22</sup>

Although anti-communism was a traditional fall-back for the SPD, enhanced by the Cold War framework, it found new motivations in the European political development of the 1970s. After its electoral success in 1972, the SPD identified itself with the economic and social success of the ‘German Model’ of a ‘social market economy’, to which “million of citizens in other countries [looked at] with envy”, since it was able to grant “social and political stability” and a high degree of personal freedom, and in which the class struggle gave way to a solidarity enabling

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18. D.J. BAILEY, *Obfuscation through integration: legitimating “New” Social Democracy in the European Union*, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1(March 2005), pp.13-35.
  19. Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Nachlass Bruno Friedrich (NBF), 66, speech of Bruno Friedrich in Bruxelles, 22 May 1975.
  20. AdsD, NBF, 342, Resolution of the SPD Parteivorstand, 16 September 1974.
  21. On the policy of the Ford Administration toward Portugal, see: M. del Pero, ‘I limiti della distensione: gli Stati Uniti e l’implosione del regime portoghese’, in Antonio Varsori (ed.), *Alle origini del presente. L’Europa occidentale nella crisi degli anni Settanta* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007).
  22. AdsD, NBF, 542, Letter of Horst Ehmke to the participants of the working group on Southern Europe, 3 July 1975.

a positive progress in general material conditions.<sup>23</sup> Thus, both the government in Bonn and the majority party were determined to exploit the new economic and diplomatic weight of the FRG to speed up a process of Western European homogenization and integration around West German standards. Together with the more traditional communist tendencies, the SPD also explicitly contested every alternative path that the European left parties undertook or just designed in order to overcome the economic crisis of the 1970s.<sup>24</sup> Confronting a structural crisis of Keynesian precepts, several European socialist and labour parties considered a deeper public intervention in the production sphere, to “democratize” the economy and to foster the technical and organizational innovations that the market seemed no longer able to provide.<sup>25</sup>

The SPD did not lose any opportunity to oppose these trends through its national experience, since it claimed to “have achieved exemplary accomplishments” thanks to its autonomist course in contrast to more radical examples.<sup>26</sup> This strategy was pursued by the German government especially after the appointment of Helmut Schmidt as chancellor in 1974. Coming from the moderate wing of the party, Schmidt deemed the traditional Keynesian-like approach to the economic crisis as no longer effective.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the German social democracy had to overcome the difficulties of the 1970s by deeply reassessing its historical tasks, namely consolidating the national identity of the RFT based on the extraordinary results achieved by the ‘German system’, and acting consistently with its political and economic strength at the international level.<sup>28</sup> Western European governments were urged to pursue a more ‘market-oriented’ course, both at national and communitarian level, thus reducing public intervention in the production and leaving aside the traditional post-war aim of full employment.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the German government had an active part in translating those precepts into new rules for the international economy, especially since the first summit of the five most industrialized countries of the West in Rambouillet in 1975. Schmidt was persuaded that only the imposition of a more *laissez faire*-oriented approach to the international economy could avoid a global

23. E. COLLOTTI, *Esempio Germania: socialdemocrazia tedesca e coalizione social-liberale, 1969-1976*, Feltrinelli, Milan, 1977, p.132.

24. A. GLYN, *Aspirations, Constraints, and Outcomes*, in: A. GLYN (ed.), *Social Democracy in Neoliberal Times. The Left and Economic Policy since 1980*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, p.5.

25. A. GLYN, *Capitalism unleashed: finance, globalization, and Welfare*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, pp.44-48; K. HICKSON, *The IMF crisis of 1976 and British politics*, Taurus Academic Studies, Londra, 2005, chapter 7.

26. E. COLLOTTI, op.cit., pp.107 f.

27. M D’ANGELILLO, *Crisi economica e identità nazionale nella politica di governo della socialdemocrazia tedesca*, in: L. PAGGI (ed.), *Americanismo e riformismo. La socialdemocrazia europea nell’economia mondiale aperta*, Einaudi, Turin, 1989, p.152.

28. AdsD, Helmut Schmidt Archiv – Bundeskanzler (HSA-BK), 9302, Erwägungen für 1977, 5 January 1977.

29. AdsD, Parteivorstand (PV), 285, Speech of chancellor Schmidt at the ‘Conference of the European Social Democratic parties and Trade Unions’ in Oslo, 1 April 1977.

depression “worse than in 1932”.<sup>30</sup> The Western economic powers had to take the lead of the process, influencing their partners through the international economic institutions to reduce their protectionist tendencies concerning the free flow of goods and capitals, as well as the governmental interventions that were bound to distort the efficient allocation of resources at the global scale.<sup>31</sup>

As far as the SPD was concerned, its activities in Western Europe were basically in line with this conduct of the German government, aimed at reaffirming its leadership over the European ‘democratic left’ and to promote its line of ‘social democratic autonomy’ in opposition to more radical tendencies. The main concerns came from the project for a “Popular Front” among the French socialist and communist parties promoted by François Mitterrand since the beginning of the 1970s. Indeed, the secretary of the French Party asserted that the socialists could not exclude co-operation with the local communist parties where the latter represented a not-marginal component of the political spectrum.<sup>32</sup> This again was the case in the Southern part of the continent, where the communist parties had gained considerable popular favour. Some of them, under the leadership of the Italian secretary Enrico Berlinguer, seemed to match Mitterrand’s expectations, as they were working on the new project of ‘Eurocommunism’ intended as a democratic political force autonomous from the Soviet experience.<sup>33</sup> Such coalitions were intended to promote a more radical economic and social stance than those proposed by the Northern social democratic forces, thus influencing the common programme that the European socialist forces had to work out in view of the first popular elections for the European Parliament scheduled in 1979.<sup>34</sup> Although recognizing the increasing gap between some western communist parties and Moscow as a favourable development, the official doctrine of the SPD continued to deny the very existence of Eurocommunist beyond the public professions of its party members.<sup>35</sup> The growing strains between the two main authors of the Eurocommunist project, namely the French and the Italian Communist parties, proved that this opinion was not far from the truth; nevertheless, a fully legitimised Eurocommunism was inevitably to become a serious competitor for the socialist parties in the same elections. More reasons for opposition came from internal German politics: while the 1976 elections were

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30. AdsD, NBF, 365, Speech of chancellor Schmidt to the SPD Parteivorstand, 22 March 1976.

31. D. BASOSI, G. BERNADINI, *The Puerto Rico summit of 1976 and the end of Eurocommunism*, in: L. NUTI (ed.), *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, Routledge, London, 2008.

32. P. BUTON, *I socialisti francesi e la questione italiana*, in: A. SPIRI (ed.), *Bettino Craxi, il socialismo europeo e il sistema internazionale*, Marsilio, Venice, 2006.

33. On the complex subject of Eurocommunism, see among others: S. PONS, *Berlinguer e la fine del comunismo*, Einaudi, Turin, 2006; F. BARBAGALLO, *Enrico Berlinguer*, Carocci, Rome, 2006.

34. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11617, Speech of Wilhelm Dröscher (president of the federation of the Social Democratic Parties of the European Community) at the SPD Congress in Hamburg, 19 October 1976.

35. H. EHMKE, *Democratic Socialism and Eurocommunism: the policy of Détente and ideological controversy*, F.E.S., Bonn, 1977.

approaching, the CDU was ready to present the legitimisation of the Western communist parties as a side effect of the Ostpolitik pursued by the SPD-led governments, thus undermining its achievement in front of the German public opinion.<sup>36</sup>

This ideological dispute had especially dangerous geo-political implications. The SPD leaders repeatedly expressed their concern that the strategy of the French secretary could define a limit between a Mediterranean and a Northern-European socialism, thus endangering the cohesion of the Western European socialist group on standards of moderation and undermining its potential influence on the future of the European integration process.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the German party exerted its influence in bi- and multilateral *fora* to counter the spread of a ‘frontist’ tendency. As an example, in the case of the Spanish exiles, several socialist factions contended for an international recognition as the sole representatives in the international arena: the SPD finally gave its preference to the group represented by the later Prime minister Felipe Gonzalez since it most clearly expressed its orientation toward an ‘autonomous’ model of socialism and against a co-operation with the communist party.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the ‘frontist’ model never reached a continental dimension, due to scant interest displayed by the Spanish, along with the deterioration of relations between the Portuguese socialist and communist parties after 1974, and the sudden interruption of co-operation among socialists and communists in France in 1978. Nevertheless, during the 1970s, another European country would become a battleground for this dispute inside the European socialist family.

### The Italian political scene

According to the analysts in Bonn, during the 1970s Italian democracy went through a period of political, social and economic instability that threatened to spread across the whole of Southern Europe. The country was set to become a perpetual source of apprehension in international relations, due to its status as a full member of the Western Alliance and of the European Communities.<sup>39</sup> The opening in Rome in 1973 of the first permanent bureau of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in

36. AdsD, NBF, 365, Transcription of a meeting of the SPD Parteivorstand, 25 March 1976.

37. AdsD, Willy-Brandt-Archiv (WBA) – Parteivorsitzender, 127, Memorandum of Hans-Eberhard Dingels (SPD secretary for foreign relations) to secretary Willy Brandt, 14 May 1975.

38. N. SARTORIUS, A. SABIO, *El final de la Dictadura. La conquista de la democracia en España*, Ediciones Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 2007, pp.656 f.; P. VON ZUR MÜHLEN, op.cit., pp.211 f.; A. MUNOZ SANCHEZ, *La Fundación Ebert y el socialismo español de la dictadura a la democracia*, in: *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea*, 29(2007), pp.257-278.

39. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11531, Memorandum of Dingels to the chancellery, 30 August 1974.

the Western world attests the interest of the German Social Democracy in improving its understanding of the Italian vicissitudes.<sup>40</sup>

The main feature of the Italian political crisis was the persistence of the Christian Democracy (DC) in government since 1945 and “beyond every reasonable limit”: the majority party, permanently divided in opposed factions, extended its “capillary system of patronage” over all the viewed domains of the public life. Even the representatives of the CDU thought of their Italian brother party during the 1970s as “the political expression of a feudal thinking”, so deprived of moral orientation that it would have accepted every political co-operation to remain in power.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the very identification of the DC with that democratic institution also risked dragging the latter along with the permanent crisis of the majority party. The paralysis of the political system seemed to aggravate the structural problems of the country and to postpone indefinitely the necessary economic and social reforms. The sensational and unexpected defeat of the DC in a popular referendum about the introduction of divorce into Italian legislation finally certified the difficulties of the party in understanding and governing the widespread demands of renewal coming from the Italian society.<sup>42</sup> The revival of the ‘*centro-sinistra*’ (centre-left) coalition between the DC and the increasingly restless Italian Socialist Party in 1973 seemed to offer only a temporary compromise, while the two main components assessed their options for the future.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, the PCI was experiencing a season of considerable electoral growth under the leadership of secretary Enrico Berlinguer, reaching one third of the national vote. Berlinguer took advantage of the climate of continental Détente to drive his party toward a “different and responsible” attitude, proposing the PCI as a serious candidate to rule the country in the foreseeable future, even if in a coalition with the DC. Such a proposal stemmed from the observation that only a vast coalition with socialist and moderate forces would have allowed the PCI to access government without engendering violent reactions such as those that had ultimately determined the success of the Pinochet *coup d'état* in Chile over the democratic elected government of president Salvador Allende. In two articles on the official PCI magazine “Rinascita” at the end of 1973, Berlinguer proposed a stable collaboration among communist, socialist and catholic popular forces to avoid authoritarian tendencies and to help the country to overcome the economic and social turmoil. This strategy was soon labelled “*compromesso storico*” (historic compromise), and it relied on the assumption that the international

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40. P. VON ZUR MÜHLEN, op.cit., p.187.

41. The expressions were referred to Dingsels from the director of the Foreign bureau of the CDU, Boex, during a meeting. AdsD, WBA – Parteivorsitzender, 126, Memorandum of Dingsels to Wischnewski, 9 August 1974.

42. AdsD, HSA-BK, 6638, *Innenpolitische Lage Italiens*, Memorandum for chancellor Schmidt, 21 August 1974.

43. AdsD, NBF, 490, Memorandum from the FES bureau in Rome to the SPD Commission for Foreign Relations, 30 October 1973.

constraints of the Italian democracy would have not allowed the communist and socialist forces to exclude the DC from power, even if the former could have reached the threshold of 51 % in the popular vote.<sup>44</sup> Such orientation seemed to find interested interlocutors in the DC, especially Aldo Moro, one of its historical leaders. A temporary co-operation with the communists seemed to offer to the DC the opportunity to associate the PCI in the necessary renewal of the political, administrative and economic system.<sup>45</sup>

The SPD had a different viewpoint, stemming from its observation of the international situation. It is undeniable that the German Social Democracy had shown interest for this development inside the major communist party of the West. On the basis of common personal experiences (such as European anti-fascism, the Spanish civil war, the exile), Brandt and the former secretary of the PCI Luigi Longo had launched a private dialogue that had favoured the first secret opening moves of the *Ostpolitik* toward the Eastern German and Soviet ruling parties during the 1960s.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Berlinguer and Brandt shared similar opinions concerning the limits of the Western model of development, especially after the latter was appointed chairman of the Independent Commission for International Developmental Issues in 1977.<sup>47</sup> However, when confronted with the very real prospect of the *compromesso storico*, the SPD restated its traditional stance against the participation of communist parties in governments of free countries.<sup>48</sup> Brandt publicly conceded that the PCI could “turn itself into something different”, but this process would “last the time of a new generation” of leaders.<sup>49</sup> Even if some optimistic analyses of Berlinguer’s line of conduct were assessed in an internal debate, the approval of the SPD to the inclusion of the PCI in a government coalition was out of question.<sup>50</sup> As summarized by chancellor Schmidt to the press, the SPD did not like the idea of communists in government “in any place of the world, be it in Italy or elsewhere”.<sup>51</sup>

While the social democratic leaders agreed in condemning the *compromesso storico*, they were also aware that their party had narrower room to manoeuvre in Italy than elsewhere. Answering the concerns of US State secretary Henry Kissinger, Brandt reassured his American interlocutor that the position of his party concerning the Italian communists was unchanged, and that the SPD was

44. P. GINSBORG, *Berlinguer tra passato e presente*, in: M. BATTINI (ed.), *Dialogo su Berlinguer*, Firenze, Giunti, 1994, pp.56-95; S. TARROW, *The Italian Party System Between Crisis and Transition*, in: *American Journal of Political Science*, 2(May, 1977), pp.193-224.

45. AdsD, HSA-BK, 6638, Innenpolitische Lage Italiens, op.cit.

46. F. LUSSANA, *Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie e la ricerca di un nuovo socialismo nell'ultimo Berlinguer*, in: *Studi Storici*, 2(2004), pp.461-488.

47. F. LUSSANA, *Il confronto con le socialdemocrazie e la ricerca di un nuovo socialismo nell'ultimo Berlinguer*, in: D. CAVIGLIA, A. Varsori (eds.), *Dollari, petrolio e aiuti allo sviluppo. Il confronto Nord-Sud negli anni '60-70*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2008.

48. AdsD, NBF, 71, Statement of Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski to the German press, 27 January 1976.

49. AdsD, Parteivorstand (PV), 12124, Interview of Willy Brandt to *Die Zeit*, 29 October 1975.

50. AdsD, Horst Ehmke Archiv (HEA), 793, Letter of Ehmke to Schmidt, 7 November 1979.

51. AdsD, HSA, 6681, Interview of Schmidt to the German press, 23 July 1976.

committed to encourage its brother parties to refuse any co-operation with the local communist parties.<sup>52</sup> However, Brandt had to admit that the SPD had almost no leverage with the two major Italian political parties, since none of them was related to the European socialist family. Concerning the forces of Italian ‘democratic socialism’, they were divided into two small parties, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Social Democratic Party (PSDI), which the electoral progression of the PCI pushed into an almost irrelevant position.

The Bureau of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Rome shared Brandt’s frustration concerning the behaviour of the two Italian parties. Despite the favourable reaction of the PSI and the PSDI to the opening of the Bureau, their contacts had not improved significantly. The “permanent confusion” of the Italian party system negatively influenced the work of the Bureau, and the search for reliable interlocutors was nullified by a shared “non-committal attitude” inside the two brother parties, more interested in internal disputes than in working out a common political project.<sup>53</sup> Both parties seemed to share the same passive attitude toward the “irresistible” electoral growth of the PCI, as well as a similar feeling of apprehension toward the dialogue between the two major Italian political forces. In particular PSI secretary Francesco de Martino felt compelled to take a schizophrenic stance toward the severe economic measures that the government was working out in order to tackle the economic crisis: on the one hand, the party continued to take part in the majority coalition; on the other hand, a publicly critical attitude was calculated to characterize his party as the defender of the working class, trying thus to halt the erosion of the PSI’s electoral foundations to the PCI’s advantage. Such a short-sighted strategy did not allow the party to work out innovative solutions to the structural problems of the country, which in turn originated from the unstable and corrupt political system, both at central and local level.<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, the relations between the SPD and the PSI were considerably worsening, as emphasised by the debate at the European Socialist meeting of Helsingor in January 1976. The conference offered to Mitterrand the opportunity to promote his ‘frontist’ strategy on a continental level, at the same time criticising the “Northern socialists” for their “lack of tolerance”. Although underlining the differences between the two national political landscapes, De Martino supported the French position against the objections coming from the SPD representatives.<sup>55</sup> In the following days, Mitterrand had convened a meeting of the socialist parties of Southern Europe in Paris. While strongly restating his loyalty to the European socialist group, Mitterrand urged his international interlocutors to work for a common project of structural co-operation with the local communist parties and

52. AdsD, HSA-BK, 6356, Willy Brandt to Henry Kissinger, 10 February 1976.

53. AdsD, NBF, 490, Memorandum from the FES bureau in Rome to the SPD Commission for Foreign Relations, 30 October 1973.

54. AdsD, HSA-BK, 6638, Innenpolitische Lage Italiens, Memorandum for chancellor Schmidt, 21 August 1974.

55. AdsD, SPD-Präsidium, 25, Memorandum of Dingels on the Helsingor Conference, 20 January 1976.

trade unions. The results were disappointing for the future French president: the Portuguese secretary Mario Soares confirmed that the socialist and communist positions in his country were incompatible, and the Spanish representatives denied that the “common anti-Franco front” would last after the return to democracy. Nevertheless, the Italian Foreign secretary Mario Zagari assured Mitterrand of the solidarity of his party, before exposing a long (and for the German observers disconcerting) defence of the Italian PCI: in his opinion, the party of Berlinguer had become a democratic and pro-European force, that the PSI intended to drive to the government of the country.<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, the first task that the SPD had to confront was to

“increase the interest and the understanding of the PSI in improving its co-operation with all the parties of the democratic socialism in Europe [...] to divert its strong orientation toward the Latin countries”.<sup>57</sup>

A carefully driven intervention from outside was more than necessary, since the leadership of the PSI looked paralysed by the electoral decline and was permanently uncertain about the future of its alliance with the DC.<sup>58</sup> Only the strengthening of the link between the PSI and the SPD could save the Italian socialism from its ‘provincialism’, while improving its consciousness of the tasks that the European ‘democratic left’ had to face.

This engagement notwithstanding, the situation worsened further during the first months of the 1976, when De Martino drove the PSI out of the centre-left coalition supporting the government of Aldo Moro. While the new political elections approached, the PSI looked determined to avoid the ‘historic compromise’ in an erroneous way: the final resolution approved by the socialist Congress held in March 1976 submitted to the Italian electors the project of a ‘left alternative’, that is to say, a coalition with the PCI to govern the country and to confine the DC to the opposition for the first time in the history of Italian democracy.<sup>59</sup> Such a programme looked like a dangerous derivation of the French ‘frontism’, made worse by the political, cultural and above all numeric communist preponderance. Paradoxically, Berlinguer did not reserve any enthusiasm for the socialist proposal that he judged untimely: the PCI continued to propose the co-operation with the DC as the only viable strategy in the short run.<sup>60</sup> The result for the PSI was a dramatic although not unpredicted defeat that brought to the party a meagre 9.8 % of the electorate, its worst score ever. Furthermore, the

56. AdsD, NBF, 363, Memorandum of the SPD observer to the meeting, Veronika Isenberg, to the Commission for International Relations, 26 January 1976.

57. AdsD, PV, 10785, Resolution of the Working Group on Southern Europe, 17 March 1976.

58. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11224, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome, 31 March 1974.

59. AdsD, WBA-Parteivorsitzender, 155, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to Brandt, 17 March 1976.

60. AdsD, NBF 537, Memorandum of Isenberg to the SPD Commission for Foreign Relations, 31 May 1976.

Italian electors had favoured a further polarization of the political system, with both the DC and the PCI well over the 30 % mark.

Although seriously concerned, the SPD had resolved to support the campaign of the PSI among the Italian workers in Germany, hoping that a good result would favour the renewal of the party leadership.<sup>61</sup> In their public post-electoral evaluation, the German speakers severely urged the Italian socialists to reconsider their strategy of the 'left alternative', since it had proved unpalatable even to their traditional electorate.<sup>62</sup> A similar analysis of the Italian electoral results came from Mitterrand. In a private conversation with Brandt, the French secretary surprisingly revealed his relief for the failure of the 'Left alternative', since the unpreparedness of the PSI to lead the coalition would have definitively conceded the leadership of the Italian left to the PCI. Before promoting a new 'frontist' strategy, the PSI had to come through a deep process of renewal, a reassessment of its ideological stances, and a complete replacement of its manifestly inadequate leaders.<sup>63</sup>

### A new 'autonomist' leadership for the PSI

The heavy defeat produced a dramatic development only a few weeks after the election: during a meeting of the Central Committee of the PSI in mid June, a coalition of young leaders coming from the different factions managed to overthrow the sitting board and to take control of the party.<sup>64</sup> The news of the 'Midas plot' (from the name of the Hotel hosting the meeting) spread quickly through the national and international media, and forced the SPD to reconsider its stance toward Bettino Craxi, the new young secretary coming from the 'autonomist' (from the PCI) wing of the PSI. As a pupil of the former socialist secretary and Foreign minister Pietro Nenni, Craxi had become the youngest member of the board in the late 1960s, and had represented his party at several international socialist meetings.<sup>65</sup> In his conversations with the German representatives only a few weeks after his election, Craxi described the condition of his party as serious. Before entering a new government coalition with the DC, the socialist party needed a deep renewal of its central and local structures, as well as a consolidation of his precarious autonomist leadership.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, it was

61. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11332, Meeting of the SPD Parteivorstand, 10 June 1976.

62. AdsD, NBF, 72, Comments by Friedrich. SPD-PresseDienst, 22 June 1976.

63. AdsD, SPD-Präsidium, 39, Meeting between Brandt and Mitterrand in Paris, 25 June 1976.

64. S. COLARIZI, M. GERVASONI, *La cruna dell'ago. Craxi, il partito socialista e la crisi della Repubblica*, Laterza, Bari, 2005, pp.18-27.

65. Although the archives of the SPD do not contain any information about Craxi before his appointment as secretary, several Italian sources consider his international activities during the early 1970s as a key component of his later success. M. PINI, *Craxi*, Mondadori, Milan, 2006, p. 77 f.

66. AdsD, WB-PV, 155, Report of Wischnewski on his meeting with Craxi in Rome to the Parteivorstand, 19 July 1976.

necessary for the PSI to strengthen its ideological profile to escape its perpetual inferiority complex toward the PCI. Craxi looked determined to challenge the image of the Italian communists as a fully reliable political force, stressing its disturbing cultural heritage and its cultural and emotional link with the experience of the Soviet Union.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, the PSI needed to increase its relations with those parties that based their political strategy on the practice of ‘socialist autonomy’ to remove the debris of the ‘frontist legacy’ that the former leadership had left behind.<sup>68</sup>

With his first statements to his German interlocutors, Craxi seemed to have won the interest of Brandt, the leading figure of the European socialism that the young secretary repeatedly quoted in his interviews with the press. Their first meeting took place during the German campaign for the political elections, in September 1976. Only a few days before, Craxi had addressed an open letter to the European socialist leaders in which he reaffirmed the pro-European attitude of the PSI and his own willingness to take part in elaborating a common socialist strategy in view of the forthcoming European elections, as well as in taking the influence of the Socialist International (SI) beyond the European borders: intentionally or not, the Italian secretary had mentioned several topics that Brandt would finally include among his priorities in officially assuming the leadership of the SI at the end of the year.<sup>69</sup> During the meeting, Craxi exposed his long-term plans for a revival of the centre-left coalition, provided that the new socialist leading group could accomplish the ‘autonomist’ process away from the influence of the PCI, all the while achieving a more respectable status towards the DC. The ultimate ambitious goal of the young secretary was to force the majority party to concede the premiership to a socialist, as a concrete sign of renewal to Italian public opinion.<sup>70</sup> The communists could take part in this coalition from an external position, but the PSI would never allow them to accede to government. Concerning the PCI, Brandt committed himself to promptly informing the Italian socialists about the state of the relations between the party of Berlinguer and the SPD. Furthermore, the German secretary proposed to establish mixed groups among his party and the PSI to work out common positions on every aspect of international co-operation, and he offered Craxi the opportunity to meet chancellor Schmidt within a few months, so as to enhance the prestige of the new Italian secretary in front of international public opinion. Despite the still precarious internal support of his leadership, Craxi seemed to have persuaded Brandt that the cooperation of the SPD was necessary for driving the Italian brother party through the programme of renewal that the new

67. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10785, *Craxi*, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to the Parteivorstand, 6 August 1976.

68. AdsD, WBA-P, 155, *Bettino Craxi*, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to secretary Brandt, 21 August 1976.

69. B. ROTHER, *Between East and West – social democracy as an alternative to communism and capitalism: Willy Brandt’s strategy as president of the Socialist International*, in: L. NUTI (ed.), op.cit. pp.217 f.

70. AdsD, WBA-Parteivorsitzender, 155, Transcript of the meeting between Brandt and Craxi, 18 September 1976.

secretary had outlined, since it represented the last chance to prevent the *compromesso storico*. A qualitative improvement in the relations with the ‘champions’ of socialist autonomy was a precondition to strengthen the new autonomous profile that Craxi strove to give to the party.<sup>71</sup> The project of the “young and vigorous” Italian secretary appeared so sound to Brandt that the former chancellor pleaded Craxi’s cause even in Washington: meeting the new Carter administration, he assured to State secretary Cyrus Vance that Craxi would ultimately drive the PSI back to a revival of the centre-left coalition, as soon as he could strengthen his leadership over his own party.<sup>72</sup>

The first public evidence that Brandt had committed himself to enhance the prestige of the new Italian secretary was the appointment of Craxi to the vice-presidency of the (SI) in February, after the former German chancellor had taken the lead of the organization. The new status allowed Craxi to maintain more frequent relations with the other leaders of European socialism. Furthermore, Brandt promoted the summoning of a highly publicized meeting of the SI Bureau in Rome, where the Italian representative exposed the views of the party concerning the relations between Western Europe and the Middle East (one of the strongest points of Craxi’s foreign policy in the years to come).<sup>73</sup> Against the resistance of the SPD direction, which deemed it necessary to await a further strengthening of the new Italian leadership before engaging the German party in a substantial improvement of relations, Brandt urged the *Parteivorstand* to send a high profile delegation to Rome, so as to further attract the attention of the media.<sup>74</sup> The German representatives took advantage of a separate bilateral meeting to convey to the Italian comrades the encouragement of the leadership of the SPD to pursue the new course. To this end, the German leadership was ready to supply “concrete help” to the PSI, provided that the latter would consider the SPD as its “main interlocutor” in working out a common socialist programme for the European elections.<sup>75</sup> Only a few weeks before the meeting took place, and after careful examination of the course of events, the SPD Commission for Foreign Relations strongly recommended that the *Parteivorstand* make every possible effort to help Craxi in his new course, since it fully matched the German national interest as well as that of the SPD.<sup>76</sup>

The German party was especially interested in the cultural struggle that Craxi had launched against the communist ‘cultural hegemony’ in Italy. According to the new secretary, it was a necessary precondition to redress the balance of power

71. A. SPIRI (ed.), op.cit., p.7.

72. AdsD, Depositum Horst Ehmke (DHE), 790, Notes of the meeting between Brandt and Vance, 7 March 1977.

73. AdsD, SPD-PV, 12098, Memorandum of Dingels to the SPD Präsidium, 6 June 1977.

74. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10946, Note from Dingels to Brandt, 5 April 1977; WBA-P, 129, Memorandum of Dingels to Brandt, 31 May 1977.

75. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10788, Memorandum of Dingels on the SPD-PSI meeting in Rome, 1 June 1976.

76. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11616, Final recommendations of the SPD Commission for Foreign Relations, 14 April 1978.

inside the Italian left.<sup>77</sup> During the controversy over the cultural heritage of the PCI, which became particularly harsh between 1976 and 1979, Craxi received the unexpected support of young intellectuals gathered around several socialist magazines.<sup>78</sup> Although more interested in daily political activities rather than in ideological disputes, the new secretary took advantage of such contributions to publicly dispute the reputation of the PCI as a fully democratic and autonomous (from Moscow) political force that Berlinguer had successfully proposed to the Italian public opinion in the recent years.

This cooperation would ultimately be broken at the end of the 1970s, when it became apparent that it was based on different premises from the two sides: most of the young intellectuals intended to press Berlinguer toward a faster and deeper ‘de-Leninization’ of the Italian communists, with the ultimate goal of a fully democratic left alternative to the DC; on the other hand, Craxi’s short-term goal was to regain for his party those younger or traditional socialist electors that had been tempted away by the new communist respectability.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the SPD did not underestimate the effects on the ‘frontist’ project that the quarrel would produce both at the Italian and at the international level. Brandt offered Craxi the opportunity to reveal his reasons to an international public opinion by proposing that a speech of the Italian secretary would open the official celebration for the thirty years of the reopening of the Karl Marx House and Museum in Trier.<sup>80</sup> Even before the meeting, the German secretary envisaged that the theme of the conference, “The relation between socialism and freedom”, would become the main subject of “a permanent institution within the SI under the leadership of Bettino Craxi”.

From the highly symbolic stage in Trier, Craxi harshly attacked Leninism as a degenerate and extreme interpretation of Marx’s writings, which inevitably led to dictatorial forms of government. Thus, every political force committed to the values of freedom and democracy should reject it, and learn the lesson of European democratic socialism. The latter had mixed Marxist heritage with the highest respect for personal freedoms: the result was that the working class had an unprecedented influence on political life in those countries that were ruled by social democratic forces.<sup>81</sup> The speech of the Italian secretary had followed the path that Brandt had traced in his opening remarks: although the Western communists had recently undertaken a promising process of ideological revision, a firm-based cooperation with the forces of democratic socialism was still out of

77. Interview with secretary Craxi, *La Stampa*, 17 July 1976.

78. F. COEN, P. BORIONI, *Le Cassandre di Mondoperaio, Una stagione creativa della cultura socialista*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1999, p.19.

79. S. COLARIZI, M. GERVAISONI, op.cit., pp.8 f.

80. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10765, Minutes of the *Sechserkreis*, restricted organ of the Parteivorstand, 14 January 1977.

81. U. FINETTI (ed.), *Il Socialismo di Craxi. Relazioni e documenti dei congressi socialisti, 1978-1991*, M&B Publishing, Milan, 2003, p.18; M. PINI, op.cit., p.119.

question.<sup>82</sup> The international and Italian press concluded that the concurrence of opinions between the two leaders proved that the ‘Eurosocialist’ project that Craxi had repeatedly evoked was no longer a mere European electoral slogan, and that socialist autonomy was its main feature for the foreseeable future.<sup>83</sup> Although the institutionalisation of the debate inside the SI never materialized, the SPD continued to support the activities of the Italian socialists aimed at calling into question the respectability of the PCI. It was the case of the conference “Marxism, Leninism, socialism” held in Rome in 1978, where again the *Parteivorstand* resolved to send a high-profile delegation.<sup>84</sup>

The ideological dispute did not resolve the sensitive subject of relations between the SPD and the PCI. As previously stated, Berlinguer pursued during the 1970s a complex correspondence with the leaders of European socialism, among them Willy Brandt, about the new challenges confronting the world, such as the North-South relations, the environmental decline, the outbreak of new inequalities, the relationship between technological advances and social welfare.<sup>85</sup> As the PSI leadership underscored towards their German interlocutors, the Italian socialists were disposed to tolerate and even to favour such a dialogue, provided that it would be confined to the aforementioned subjects. On the contrary, the SPD was warned that any praise of the Eurocommunist strategy would give new strength to those inside the PSI who strove to bring the party back to the old ‘frontist’ strategy, thus undermining the new autonomist course.<sup>86</sup> Especially difficult were the relations between Craxi and Horst Ehmke, who consistently visited Rome during the late 1970s to report to the *Parteivorstand* on the political developments in Italy.<sup>87</sup> Ehmke periodically met the representatives of all the parties represented in the Parliament (except the neo-fascist MSI). During his tour in 1976, the newspaper *La Stampa* published an interview in which the German representative allegedly praised the progress of Western communism during recent years. Facing the harsh protests of Italian socialists, the leadership of the SPD immediately demanded that the newspaper rectify the content of the article.<sup>88</sup> In the following year the SPD seemed to have accepted the reserves of the Italian brother party, as evidenced by the substantial reduction of contacts with the Italian PCI.<sup>89</sup> The frustration of the Italian communists was increased by the evidence that the reluctance of the SPD was the consequence of a veto coming from the Italian socialist leadership.<sup>90</sup>

82. F. OSTERROTH, D. SCHUSTER, *Chronik der deutschen Sozialdemokratie. Band 3: 1974 bis 1982*, Dietz, Bonn, 2005, pp.126 f.

83. AdSD, WBA-Parteivorsitzender, 155, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to Brandt, 1 June 1977.

84. AdSD, SPD-PV, 10768, Memorandum of Karsten Voigt to the Parteivorstand, 2 December 1978.

85. G. ARFÈ (ed.), *Brandt-Palme-Kreisky. Quale socialismo per l'Europa*, Lerici, Cosenza, 1976).

86. AdSD, SPD-PV, 10652, Letter from Carlo Ripa di Meana to Karsten Voigt, December 1978.

87. M. PINI, op.cit., pp.117 f.

88. AdSD, WBA-Parteivorsitzender, 128, Memorandum from Dingels to Brandt, 15 October 1976.

89. AdSD, SPD-PV, 10947, Memorandum of Dingels to Ehmke, 19 July 1978.

90. AdSD, SPD-PV, 10948, Memorandum of Dingels to Voigt, 28 March 1979.

A specific feature of the controversy between the Italian socialists and communists had more serious implications for the SPD. Since 1976, the PSI chose to defy the PCI on the basis of its support to dissidents in the socialist countries, to prove that Berlinguer had not severed his last links with Moscow.<sup>91</sup> However, the SPD had to balance its support for Craxi with the need to avoid jeopardizing the results of the *Ostpolitik* that it had pursued since the 1960s. In Trier, Brandt had implicitly warned Craxi that the ideological dispute with Western communists should not bring East-West relations back to the worst Cold War climate.<sup>92</sup> Although the later PSI accusations toward the German social democracy for its alleged indifference towards dissent in the communist countries seem unfair, the SPD also refrained from sending its moral and material support to controversial events in that field, such as the ‘Biennale del Dissenso’ in Venice in 1977, the exhibition that the PSI had sponsored to bring to the attention of the international public opinion the conditions of living of the Eastern bloc dissidents.<sup>93</sup> Even if the SPD was concerned by the international reverberations of such public events, the negative reactions from the PCI brought the analysts in Bonn to conclude that Craxi had succeeded again in publicizing the persistence of an emotional, if not political, tie between the party of Berlinguer and the communist ruling parties of Eastern Europe.<sup>94</sup>

The three years following the electoral success of 1976 were exceptionally hard for the PCI. While supporting the DC-only governments led by Premier Giulio Andreotti by abstaining in parliamentary confidence votes until march 1978 (and then taking part in the national solidarity coalition after the kidnapping of Aldo Moro), the PCI was never allowed to enter the ‘button room’ of government, although it was called to share the responsibility for unpopular economic and social policies. Its loss of votes in the 1978 administrative elections, together with an encouraging socialist recovery, was a clear sign to Bonn that the offensive strategy followed by Craxi was even exceeding his (and his international partners’) expectations.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusions

After having contributed to enhancing the internal and international prestige of Bettino Craxi, the SPD assisted with the first consolidation of his autonomist

91. On the complex relation of the PCI with the dissidence of the communist countries, see: V. LOMELLINI, *Il Partito comunista italiano al banco di prova del dissenso nell’Est (1975-1979)*, in: F. ROMERO, A. VARSORI (eds.), *Nazione, interdipendenza, integrazione. Le relazioni internazionali dell’Italia (1917-1989)*, Carocci, Rome, 2006.

92. F. OSTERROTH, D. SCHUSTER, op.cit., pp.126 f.

93. S. COLARIZI, M. GERVASONI, op.cit., p.38.

94. AdsD, NBF, 449, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to the Parteivorstand, 23 January 1979.

95. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10652, Memorandum from Isenberg to Brandt, 16 May 1978.

project inside his own party. During his first two years as secretary, the observers in Bonn had to recognize his tactical skill in repulsing the frequent attacks coming from internal oppositions. The old and young leaders of the several socialist wings seemed to lack a shared political project to oppose the ‘socialist autonomy’, since the ‘left alternative’ was frustrated by the PCI’s apparent lack of interest. The common goal of overthrowing the new party leadership was not sufficient to overcome traditional personal rivalries: in these conditions, it was easy for Craxi to play them off against each other, lavishing offices and honours inside the party and in public, economic and administrative institutions.<sup>96</sup> The 61<sup>st</sup> Socialist Congress held in Turin in 1978 approved his appointment as secretary with an unprecedented 65 % of party members, while the German newspapers greeted the meeting as the ‘Italian Bad Godesberg’.<sup>97</sup> The programme of the secretary postponed the ‘left alternative’ to an undefined date, and not one before the PSI itself would be able to lead the alliance and urge the PCI to fully accept the principles of democratic socialism.<sup>98</sup> The final resolutions of the Congress constantly referred to the ‘*Orientierungsrahmen* ‘85’, the official economic programme of the SPD for the decade 1975-1985, as a model for the future political activities of the party.<sup>99</sup> Even the pronouncements of Craxi were manifestly inspired by the internal German debate, such as the overcoming of a strict Marxist interpretation of a classist society and the acknowledgement of the primacy of the market economy, provided that it could be moderated by social requirements. Although internal opposition accused the secretary of dismissing the Marxist tradition of Italian socialism, the vast majority of the party delegates approved the document. Surrounded by the attention of the media, Craxi restated the ‘Europeanist’ mark of his leadership, pledged his (and his party’s) loyalty to the European integration process, and urged a continuous dialogue with the continental brother parties in order to work out a common autonomist strategy.<sup>100</sup>

Within a few months, the tragic conclusion of the Moro kidnapping and the consequent ultimate defeat of the ‘historic compromise’ inside the DC made possible a return to the centre-left coalition. It was an all too promising opportunity for the new socialist leadership to refuse, after five years of self-exclusion from the government. A month before the political elections of 1979, which gave a contradictory result and a disappointing score to the PSI, Craxi privately revealed to the SPD parliamentary group that his party was ready to ensure “governmental stability” to the country with a renewed alliance with the DC, although this time the socialists would avoid the subordinate state that had characterized the previous experiences.<sup>101</sup>

96. AdsD, SPD-PV, 10793, Memorandum from the FES bureau in Rome to Brandt, 3 February 1977.

97. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11840, Note of the DPA, 3 April 1978.

98. AdsD, SPD-PV, 11616, Memorandum of Dingels to the Präsidium, 3 April 1978.

99. AdSD, SPD-PV 10652, Memorandum of Karsten Voigt to the Parteivorstand, 28 March 1978.

100. AdsD, DHE, 459, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to the Parteivorstand, 7 April 1978.

101. AdsD, NBF, 1530, Speech of Craxi to a group of SPD members, 9 May 1979.

The new centre-left coalition became a reality in 1980, and it was undoubtedly welcomed as a major success in Bonn, especially since the foreign policy of the government led by Prime minister Francesco Cossiga concerning the nuclear rearmament of Western Europe and the progress of European economic integration was in line with the German government. Nevertheless, the analysts in Bonn questioned what real possibility there was that the ‘conservative’ choice of a revived centre-left coalition might ultimately bring Italy the structural reforms that its political system as well as the economic system urgently required.<sup>102</sup> The following years, when Craxi was finally appointed Prime minister between 1983 and 1987, would even show Bonn that a mere return to governmental stability would not suffice to overcome the distortions of the Italian political life that had emerged during the 1970s.

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102. AdsD, WBA-P, 132, Memorandum of the FES bureau in Rome to the Parteivorstand, 3 April 1980.