

# Western Europe's approval of Europe's Eastward enlargement – a starting point for Europe's new future

## Italy's attempts at integrating East-Central Europe in a new continental balance: an early response to the crisis of the Communist bloc (1989-1991)

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*Abstract: Since the late Nineteenth Century, Central Europe was regarded by Italy as an area where the new unified nation aimed at exerting political and economic influence. Such an ambition faded with Italy's defeat in the Second World War and especially as a consequence of the Cold War and the partition of Europe. In spite of that, Italy always paid attention to the developments in this part of the continent; especially the future of Yugoslavia was a concern of Italy's policy. In the 1970s at a local level some Italian regions took part to the creation of the "Alpe Adria" organization. During the second half of the 1980s with the impending crisis of the Communist régimes Italy tried to launch a new policy of cooperation with its neighbors. The pillars of this policy was on one hand the "Adriatic Initiative", which envisaged economic cooperation with Yugoslavia, and perhaps Albania, on the other the so-called "Quadrangolare" which was formed by Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary and Austria. Through the "Adriatic initiative" Italy hoped to counter the growing internal problems both Yugoslavia and Albania were facing, but the fall of Communism and the implosion of the Yugoslav Federation posed by far serious challenges to the Italian Government. As far as the "Quadrangolare", it appeared more successful and in a few years Czechoslovakia and Poland joined the organization. Nevertheless Italy's ambitions were partly frustrated by the rapid and dramatic changes which characterized East-Central Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall which led to the creation of a new European balance.*

*Keywords: Italy, Central Europe, "Adriatic Initiative", "Quadrangolare", Communism, European integration*

In July 1989, after a long political crisis the Italian President of the Republic Francesco Cossiga appointed the Christian Democrat leader Giulio Andreotti President of the Council. Andreotti formed a five-party centre-left coalition government, a political formula which had characterized Italy's political scenario since the early 1980s and had assured some stability to the country.<sup>1</sup> The Prime

1 On Italy during the 1980s. See S. Colarizi, P. Craveri, S. Pons, G. Quagliariello (eds), *Gli anni Ottanta come storia*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2004; on Italy's international role

Minister, who had led the Italian Foreign Ministry between 1983 and 1989 choose as his successor Gianni De Michelis, an emerging figure of Craxi's Socialist Party. In his inaugural speech in the Parliament De Michelis pointed out that, owing to the relevant political developments which were shaping the shaky Communist bloc Italy had the opportunity to renew friendly and fruitful relations with some of its eastern neighbors.<sup>2</sup> In those days a non-Communist leader, the Catholic Mazowiecki, has been appointed Prime Minister in Poland, while in Budapest the Hungarian Communist Party was promoting a multi-party political system and was going to dismantle the so-called iron curtain along the Hungarian-Austrian border.<sup>3</sup> De Michelis's statements expressed Italy's ambitions, which had deep roots in Italian foreign policy tradition. Since the Unification Italy had always regarded the Adriatic, the Balkan region and the Danube area as a privileged sphere of influence. Especially after the end of the First World War and with the collapse of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire Italy had strengthened its position in countries such as Austria and Albania, the latter became a sort of Italian protectorate.<sup>4</sup> Close relations were established by the Fascist régime with Horthy's Hungary and Italy supported Budapest's revisionist policy. In spite of the bond with Hungary, Italy was able to develop good relations with Romania as well. As far as Yugoslavia was concerned, Mussolini constantly aimed at destroying the new South-Slav state in order to impose what US historian James Burgwyn has labeled "il Duce's Adriatic Empire", an attempt which characterized Fascist Italy's policy during the Second World War.<sup>5</sup> Obviously such ambitions were frustrated by Italy's defeat.

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see E. Di Nolfo (ed.), *La politica estera italiana negli anni Ottanta*, Manduria, Lacaita, 2003.

- 2 On De Michelis' experience as Foreign Minister see G. De Michelis, *La lunga ombra di Yalta. La specificità della politica estera italiana*, Venice, Marsilio, 2003. On Giulio Andreotti see the biography by M. Franco, *Andreotti. La vita di un uomo politico, la storia di un'epoca*, Milan, Mondadori, 2010, see also M. Barone and E. Di Nolfo (ed.), *Giulio Andreotti, l'uomo, il cattolico, lo statista*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010.
- 3 On the developments which were taking place in Poland and in Hungary see for example: F. Fejto, *La fin des démocraties poulaires. Les chemins du post-communisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, pp. 253-274; P. Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989 The Fall of the Soviet Empire*, London, Phoenix, 2009, *passim*.
- 4 On Italy's policy towards Albania see for example P. Pastorelli, *L'Albania nella politica estera italiana 1914-1920*, Naples, Jovene, 1970; M. Borgogni, *Tra continuità e incertezza. Italia e Albania (1914-1939). La strategia politico-militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'operazione "Oltremare Tirana"*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2007.
- 5 H. J. Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'Adriatico. Mussolini e la conquista della Jugoslavia 1941-1943*, Gorizia, Leg, 2006; see also M. Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922-1939)*, Bari, Edizioni B. A. Graphics, 2006. On Fascist policy towards Eastern Europe see S. Santoro, *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918-1943*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2005. On the relations between Italy and Romania see G. Caroli, *La Romania nella politica estera italiana 1919-1965. Luci e ombre di un'amicizia storica*, Milano, Edizioni Nagard, 2009.

In the immediate post-war period Republican Italy showed some interest in renewing traditional bonds with its eastern neighbors, but the Cold War provoked a sharp division of the European continent and Italy almost immediately chose to be a part of the western system through the adhesion to both the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic alliance, as well as the deep involvement in the integration process, which for at least forty years meant the integration of Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> But since the second half of the 1980s, owing to Gorbachev's coming to power and the emerging of the so-called "Sinatra doctrine", new opportunities appeared to surface in East-Central Europe. Actually, in spite of the division of the "old continent", especially since the 1970s, Italy had already focused its attention on its immediate neighbors, especially neutral Austria and Communist, but non-aligned Yugoslavia. For some time the relations with Vienna were negatively influenced by the South Tyrol question, but especially after the so-called package deal offered by Italy to the South Tyrolean German-speaking minority the relations with Austria improved.<sup>7</sup> As far as Yugoslavia was concerned, for long time the relations with Belgrade had been poisoned by the peace treaty settlement of Italy's eastern border, especially by the "ethnic cleansing" that had compelled about 250,000 Italians to leave Yugoslavia; on the part of the Yugoslavs, they could not forget the bitter memories of the Fascist aggression. In the early 1970s however, the appearance of the Kosovo problem and the so-called "Croatian spring" rang an alarm bell in Rome about the stability of the Yugoslav federation. In 1975 Italy and Yugoslavia signed the Osimo treaty which definitively settled the thorny and still unsolved issues related to the Second World War and the peace treaty; the Italian governments began to support Yugoslavia as it was in Rome's interest to rely on a stable, non-aligned and prosperous neighbor in a period of renewed tensions between East and West.<sup>8</sup>

During the 1980s, especially after Tito's death, Yugoslavia experienced growing economic problems and political instability. The Italian authorities showed increasing concern about this state's future; so they went on supporting Belgrade's economy and favored the involvement of the European Community in the support

6 On Italy's foreign policy in the post-war period see A. Varsori, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1998. On Italy's attempt at developing an autonomous "Ostpolitik" see S. Tavani, *L'Ostpolitik italiana nella politica estera di Andreotti*, in M. Barone and E. Di Nolfo (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 243-304.

7 On the South Tyrol question see the traditional contribution by M. Toscano, *Storia diplomatica della questione dell'Alto Adige*, Bari, Laterza, 1968; see also the recent volume by G. Grote, *The South Tyrol question, 1866-2010: from national rage to regional state*, Oxford/Bern, Peter Lang, 2012; on the "package deal" see M. Marcantoni and G. Postal, *Il pacchetto della Commissione dei 19 alla seconda autonomia del Trentino-Alto Adige*, Trento, Fondazione Museo storico del Trentino, 2012. On the relationship between Italy and Austria see also M. Gehler and M. Guiotto (eds), *Italien, Oesterreich und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Europa*, Wien, Böhlau, 2012.

8 In general see M. Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2007.

to Yugoslavia's crumbling economic system; in 1985, for example Italy favored the grant by the EC of 480 million ECU to Belgrade.<sup>9</sup> The Italian Foreign Ministry, which appeared already worried about the Kosovo too, did not disregard the possibility of creating some contact also with Albania, especially when with the approaching of Hoxha's disappearance the Albanian Communist régime appeared to show some early openings to the external world.<sup>10</sup> Other incentives to more determined Italian efforts towards its eastern neighbors came from Italian local authorities. During the 1970s Italy's North East regions experienced a dramatic economic development and they became among the leading factors in Italy's industrial export system. Although Germany was Italy's main commercial partner, industrialists and local politicians from the Veneto and the Friuli began to look to their eastern neighbors as obvious commercial partners and promising new markets. In the mid-1970s some Italian regions – Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli and Trentino – had joined some regions of Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia in the creation of the “Alpe Adria” Community, whose main goal was the strengthening of economic and cultural relations of this geographic area. Although the “Alpe Adria” organization had no declared political ambitions it favored the setting-up of a transnational network and it concurred in helping Belgrade which appeared unable to solve its serious economic plights.<sup>11</sup> On its part the Yugoslav leadership was looking to Italy as a partner which can offer some financial and political support. In early 1988 the Yugoslav authorities began to talk of an “Adriatic project” which would involve close economic cooperation between the two nations. Actually in that same year Italy granted various forms of financial support to Yugoslavia which amounted to 500 billion lire.<sup>12</sup>

In early 1989 the Italian Foreign Ministry began to elaborate on the project for an “Adriatic initiative”. The plan was still a bit vague, but it envisaged close forms of economic cooperation between Rome and Belgrade; moreover it was thought

9 Archivio Storico Istituto Luigi Sturzo (hereafter ASILS), Archivio Giulio Andreotti (hereafter AGA), “Jugoslavia”, box 542, memorandum “Nota informativa CEE-Jugoslavia” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but January 1985. In this connection I would like to thank Senator Giulio Andreotti for the permission to examine his papers, Dr. Flavia Nardelli, former secretary general of the Sturzo Institute for her kind support and Dr. Luciana Devoti, chief archivist at the Sturzo Institute for her precious help.

10 On Italy's early concern about the Kosovo see for example ASILS, AGA, “Jugoslavia”, box 542, memorandum “Yugoslavia – politica interna” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but early 1985. On the relations between Italy and Albania see ASILS, AGA, “Albania”, box 329, tel. No. 407 Italian Embassy (Tirana) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 12.12.1983. and tel. No. 90 Italian Embassy (Tirana) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 1.3.1984.

11 On the Alpe-Adria organisation see the remarks in G. A. Pozzi, *La cooperazione regionale*, in F. Argentieri (ed.), *Post comunismo terra incognita. Rapporto sull'Europa centrale e orientale*, Rome, Edizioni Associate, 1994, pp. 134-135.

12 Asils, Aga, “Jugoslavia”, box 542, memorandum “relazioni italo-jugoslave” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but early 1989.

that such a project could be joined later by Albania. In the Farnesina's opinion the European Community would have to support the "Adriatic initiative" through its financial aid.<sup>13</sup> Such a positive and optimistic view was strengthened by the appointment of Ante Markovic as federal prime minister and by its efforts to deal in a more effective way with the nation's economic crisis, especially the high rate of inflation of the Yugoslav currency.<sup>14</sup> So the "Adriatic initiative" became the object of serious analysis on the part of both Italian and Yugoslav diplomats. In this period there was a further stimulus to Italy's taking the lead in creating forms of cooperation in the Adriatic/Balkan area. In spite of Markovic's efforts and of some positive result in the economic field Yugoslavia's political situation further worsened. Such a negative development was pointed out in spring 1989 by the Italian Ambassador to Belgrade, Sergio Vento in a report to Giulio Andreotti. In the Ambassador's opinion, the Yugoslav crisis could be solved through further economic support and a more determined effort by the European Community.<sup>15</sup>

The creation of the Andreotti government, especially the appointment of De Michelis as Foreign Minister had a relevant impact on Italy's policy towards their eastern neighbors. De Michelis came from an influential Venetian family and his political career has started in the Veneto region where he had his constituency and he maintained influential connections. So he was very much interested in Italy's economic and political projection towards East-Central Europe. As it has already stated, in his inaugural speech De Michelis pointed out the new government's interest in renewing Italy's bonds with its neighbors. Yugoslavia appeared to be the new Foreign Minister's major concern. In early August De Michelis and the President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga had a meeting in Venice with the Federal Yugoslav President Drnovsek and the Yugoslav Foreign Minister Loncar. The Italian leaders pointed out Italy's interest in supporting the efforts by the Belgrade federal government in order to solve Belgrade's serious economic crisis. De Michelis suggested the implementation of the "Adriatic initiative": while the "Alpe Adria" had been limited to Slovenia and Croatia, in the opinion of the Italian Foreign Minister, the "Adriatic initiative" had to involve also the Southern and more backward republics from the South of the Yugoslav federation, especially Montenegro and Kosovo, as well as some southern Italian regions.<sup>16</sup> The Italian authorities were more and more worried about the situation in the Kosovo region and they hoped that a wider plan of economic development could

13 Asils, Aga, "Jugoslavia", box 542, memorandum "Iniziativa adriatica – aspetti politici" by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but early 1989.

14 On The early stage of the Yugoslav crisis see M. Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia. The Third Balkan War*, London, Penguin Books, 1992. In general see J. Pirjevec, *Le guerre jugoslave 1991-1999*, Turin, Einaudi, 2001.

15 Asils, Aga, "Jugoslavia", box 542, letter No. 1187, S. Vento (Belgrade) to G. Andreotti (Italian Foreign Ministry), 10.4.1989.

16 G. De Michelis, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

solve the problems which plighted the Yugoslav region inhabited by the Albanian community, so appeasing the ethnic and political rivalries which were characterizing this area. Moreover De Michelis informed his Yugoslav partners that there had been a proposal by the Hungarian government in order to held regular meetings at foreign ministers level among Italy, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia. This was the early idea of the “Quadrangolare” project; although Budapest had been at the origins of such a plan, Italy would play a central role. It was obvious that in this phase of quick democratization the Hungarian Communist leadership was looking for a strong western partner and Italy was the most obvious one. On their part the Italian authorities had followed with increasing interest the democratization process which was characterizing the Hungarian political scenario.<sup>17</sup> In this same period the Bush administration was putting pressure on some EEC leading nations, especially Italy and France, in order to favor some determined economic effort in order to help both Poland and Hungary, which appeared the standard-bearers of the liberalization process in East-Central Europe.<sup>18</sup> Yugoslavia’s reaction to Italy’s suggestion was a positive one. Probably in those days few decision-makers had noticed the big rally which in 1987 the new Serbian leader, Slobodan Milosevic, had organized at Kosovo Polje, an event which would have marked the path towards the implosion of the Yugoslav federation.

Nevertheless, in September 1989 the Italian and the Yugoslav governments organized an important bilateral conference which was held at Umago and Buje. The choice of these two small villages was a symbolic one, as they were located in the Istria peninsula, a disputed area between Rome and Belgrade, and on this occasion those localities had to become the symbol of reconciliation and renewed friendship between Italy and Yugoslavia. For Italy Andreotti and De Michelis took part to the conference, while for Yugoslavia Markovic and Loncar were present. On this occasion the two delegations released a joint statement which marked the official launching of the “Adriatic initiative”. The project aimed at the economic development of the Adriatic area, through investments in transports, tourism and infrastructures. For example the project for building of a highway along the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia was discussed.<sup>19</sup> Moreover the two delegations agreed that the Albanian diplomacy had to be approached in order to ascertain Albania’s interest in such an initiative.<sup>20</sup> It may be wondered whether such a vague and long-term project could solve the growing problems which were affecting

17 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 675, letter No. 933, J. Nitti (Budapest) to G. Andreotti (Italian Foreign Ministry), 8.5.1989; tels. No. 1347 and 1348, Italian Embassy (Budapest) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 9.10.1989. and 10.10.1989.

18 Asils, Aga, “Francia”, box 411, tel. G. Bush to G. Andreotti, 4.10.1989., secret.

19 On this conference see the records in Asils, Aga, “Yugoslavia”, box 542.

20 On Italy’s policy towards Albania see A. Varsori, *Italy and the End of Communism in Albania, 1989-1991*, in “Cold War History” vol. 12, No. 4, November 2012, pp. 615-635.



Yugoslavia, but in this period nobody envisaged what would happen in a few years in East-Central Europe. Moreover the Italian authorities were optimistic and they hoped that the “Adriatic initiative” could lead the European Community and other international organizations to grant further financial support to Belgrade. In this same period, for example, the Italian representative in the NATO Atlantic Council pointed out that western support to Yugoslavia was an important factor in order to stabilize the situation in the Balkan area.<sup>21</sup> As far as the “Quadrangolare” was concerned, in the Italian authorities’ opinion this organization would mainly have a political and wider goal, a way to fill the gap between western Europe and the former Communist bloc through regular meetings at Prime Ministers’ and Foreign Ministers’ level, while the “Adriatic initiative” through economic instruments aimed at stabilizing the Balkan area, mainly Yugoslavia and Albania. Yugoslavia would be a bridge between the two initiatives. Nevertheless also in the case of Hungary, the Italian government thought that economic and financial help would favor the democratization process and once again the Rome authorities hoped that in this connection it would be possible to mobilize the European Community.<sup>22</sup>

In a short while Italy’s projects, which appeared to have a long-term character, would be largely influenced by the sudden acceleration of the dynamics in East-Central Europe, so paving the way to the implosion of the Communist bloc. In November the fall of the Berlin wall, the perspective of a quick German reunification and the “velvet revolutions” which in few weeks wiped out the Communist régimes in East-Central Europe, as well as the crumbling of the Soviet Union radically changed the political scenario in East-Central Europe. Moreover between late 1989 and early 1991, as a consequence of the end of the Cold War, the Italian authorities were compelled to focus their attention on new more compelling issues such as the German reunification, the Gulf War and the political process which would lead to the Maastricht Treaty. Nevertheless the plans which aimed at renewing close contacts between Italy and the Balkan and Danube areas were not abandoned. Especially Hungary appeared interested in the plan for closer cooperation with Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy. An official declaration was signed in Budapest in mid-November 1989. As far as the Italian government was concerned, it hoped that such an agreement would favor both democratization and stabilization in Central Europe and it would be a boost to economic and technological cooperation.<sup>23</sup> Such hopes were strengthened by the official visit paid by the Hungarian Foreign

21 Asils, Aga, “Yugoslavia”, box 542, tel. No. 1264, P. Fulci (NATO) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 11.9.1989., strictly confidential.

22 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 675, tels. 6338 and 6339 P. Calamia (Brussels EC) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 22.9.1989. On the situation in Hungary see for example F. Argentieri, *La breve stagione del governo Antall*, in F. Argentieri (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 107-126.

23 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 677, memorandum “Iniziativa quadrangolare – Aspetti politici” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but late 1989.

Minister, Gyula Horn, in Rome in January 1990. The evaluation by the Italian Foreign Ministry of the developments which were taking place in Budapest was a positive one and the Andreotti government appeared eager to strengthen further the contacts with the Hungarian régime.<sup>24</sup> The Italian authorities were particularly interested in developing some form of economic aid to Budapest, which could represent the basis for future Italian investments in the former Communist country.<sup>25</sup> Very early the countries involved in the “Quadrangolare” decided to widen the initiative to Czechoslovakia. In May 1990 on the occasion of a conference held in Vienna at Foreign Ministers level the “Quadrangolare” became officially the “Pentagonale” with Prague’s adhesion. Italy got the first chairmanship of the “Pentagonale” and in August 1990 a summit was held in Venice. On this occasion it was agreed that every year there would be two meetings at Foreign Ministers’ and Prime Ministers’ level. Several working groups were created, which would deal with forms of cooperation in various fields: from tourism to transports, from environment to culture, from telecommunications to energy.<sup>26</sup> Although Italy played a relevant role in the “Pentagonale” initiative and the Rome authorities hoped to profit from this cooperation, especially in the economic field, the Farnesina regarded this organization mainly as a medium-term political instrument. In a memorandum drafted by the Italian Foreign Ministry it was stated that the “Pentagonale” would not substitute the existing European organizations, as well as the Atlantic Alliance, but it would be a way on one hand to avoid a dangerous instability in this area, on the other to favor the gradual involvement of former Communist régime in the structures of the European Community.<sup>27</sup> In fact, if before the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Communist bloc some forms of cooperation with countries such as Italy could be regarded by Budapest, Prague and Belgrade as the obvious way to renew close bonds with western Europe, now the new post-Communist leaderships would directly appeal to Brussels and to the West in order to become full members of the western system, that is the European Community and NATO. Last but not least it became quickly obvious that a reunified Germany would become the most influential actor in Central Europe, so recovering the influence Berlin had exerted in countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In this context Italy would appear a minor partner if compared with Germany.

As far as the “Adriatic initiative” was concerned, that was a different matter, and Italy appeared to have some chance to influence the developments in Yugoslavia and

24 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 677, memorandum “Ungheria – rapporti politici con l’Italia” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but early 1990.

25 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 677, memorandum “Oggetto: Ungheria – cooperazione allo sviluppo” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date but early 1990.

26 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 677, memorandum “Iniziativa esagonale” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date but early 1992.

27 Asils, Aga, “Ungheria”, box 678, memorandum “Iniziativa Pentagonale” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but June 1990.



Albania. Between 1990 and early 1991 for example Albania, where the Communists were still in power, showed a definite interest in developing close form of cooperation with Italy and they showed some willingness to be involved in the “Adriatic initiative”.<sup>28</sup> But in that same period the Yugoslav situation worsened and Italy’s cautious policy, based on the support to the economic efforts by the federal authorities, appeared to become obsolete. The Andreotti government, especially De Michelis and the Farnesina obviously feared very much the implosion of Yugoslavia, in particular the perspective of a series of bloody civil wars, which would take place at Italy’s doorstep. So they did every effort in order to support the moderate federal leaders and to avoid the declaration of full independence by Croatia and Slovenia. In March 1990 Andreotti and De Michelis paid an official visit in the US and they met President Bush and his advisers. On this occasion the Italian leaders still showed an optimist outlook about the “Quadrangolare”, which was going to become the “Pentagonale”, and the “Adriatic initiative” as well.<sup>29</sup> Moreover in this same year a new declaration about forms of Adriatic cooperation was signed and it involved Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania.<sup>30</sup> In early 1991 however, it became quite obvious that Slovenia and Croatia were heading towards a full independence and the federal authorities were becoming more and more weaker. In a dispatch he sent to the Farnesina in February 1991 Ambassador Vento sketched out a worrisome picture of the Yugoslav situation and he appeared to imply that both the “Pentagonale” and the “Adriatic initiative” would not be able to cope with a situation which was becoming very dangerous.<sup>31</sup> The Slovenian and Croatian declaration of independence and the so-called Slovenian war were evidence of the impending implosion of Yugoslavia. In spite of that Italy still thought it was possible to save form of confederation and now the Italian authorities tried to favor the direct involvement of the European Community. The so-called EC troika, with the participation of De Michelis, appeared able in June to achieve some compromise between the federal authorities and the separatist republics.<sup>32</sup> Moreover the Italian Government supported the initiative launched by the Austrian Foreign Minister, Alois Mock, in order to create an international committee formed by independent and well-known figures

28 A. Varsori, *Italy ... cit.*, p. 622.

29 Asils, Aga, “USA”, box 637, memorandum “Jugoslavia – nota riassuntiva”, by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but early March 1990; memorandum “Iniziativa Quadrangolare aspetti politici”, no date but early March 1990; and memorandum “Iniziativa Adriatica – aspetti politici”, no date but early March 1990.

30 M. Bucarelli, *La Slovenia nella politica italiana di fine Novecento dalla disgregazione jugoslava all'integrazione euro-atlantica*, in M. Bucarelli and L. Monzali (eds), *Italia e Slovenia fra passato, presente e futuro*, Rome, edizioni Studium, 2009, pp. 116-117.

31 Asils, Aga, “Jugoslavia”, box 544, despatch No. 0855, S. Vento (Belgrade) to G. De Michelis (Rome), 27.2.1991.

32 For Italy’s policy towards the Yugoslav question in this period see A. Varsori, *L’Italia ... cit.*, pp. 137-144.

who would deal with the Yugoslav crisis.<sup>33</sup> In the meantime Poland would join the “Pentagonale”, which would become the “Esagonale”. July 1991, Italy did a last effort to resort to this organization in order to stabilize the Yugoslav situation; De Michelis convinced his Austrian and Hungarian colleagues to favor the convening of a top level meeting of the “Pentagonale” on the occasion of Poland’s adhesion, but with the major goal of demonstrating that the Yugoslav federation was still alive.<sup>34</sup> So an official conference of the “Pentagonale” was convened in Dubrovnik. The atmosphere of the conference was a surreal one, as both the representatives of the Yugoslav federal government and the separatist republics attended the meeting. Official statements were drafted and signed, and everybody appeared to believe that the conference had been a success. Actually in his memoirs Andreotti wrote that the meeting had been a complete failure.<sup>35</sup> A few months later open hostilities were renewed and Dubrovnik would become the target of the federal artillery, which would have shelled the historical town.<sup>36</sup> In that same period the Albanian Communist regime collapsed and flows of immigrants began to land on the Italian territory, creating new serious problems to the Italian authorities, problems which obviously neither the moribund “Adriatic initiative” nor the “Esagonale” could solve.<sup>37</sup> Actually the Italian authorities still regarded the “Esagonale” as a useful instrument and in a memorandum drafted in late 1991 the Italian Foreign Ministry gave a positive evaluation of the organization, which appeared part of the flourishing of several forms of regional European cooperation –the Balkan cooperation, the Baltic Cooperation, the Nordic Cooperation, the Black Sea Cooperation.<sup>38</sup> As far as the “Esagonale” was concerned, Italy’s interest appeared to focus on the economic aspects; in a memorandum by the Farnesina which was drafted in December 1991 on the occasion of the visit to Rome by the Czechoslovak Prime Minister, the creation of close economic and financial links between the two states was highlighted and regarded as a positive starting point.<sup>39</sup> Similar hopes emerged on the occasion of the

33 Asils, Aga, “Jugoslavia”, box 544, message by fax, S. Vento (Belgrade) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 8.6.1991., confidential.

34 Asils, Aga, “Jugoslavia”, box 544, memorandum “Riunione dei ministri degli Esteri di Austria, Italia e Ungheria sulla situazione jugoslava” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, 9.7.1991.

35 G. Andreotti, *De (prima) Re publica*, Milan, Rizzoli, 1996, p. 255.

36 On the development of the Yugoslav conflict see M. Glenney, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

37 See in general A. Varsori, *Italy ... cit.*, *passim*.

38 Asils, Aga, “Calfa Marian primo ministro”, box 364, memorandum “Cooperazione regionale europea” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date but December 1991. On Italy’s economic interests see M. Guandalini, *La presenza economica italiana all’Est*, in F. Argentieri (ed.), *op. ci.*, pp. 325-380.

39 Asils, Aga, “Calfa Marian primo ministro”, box 364, memorandum “Appunto di sintesi” by the Italian Foreign Ministry, 10.12.1991. On the situation in Czechoslovakia see for example F. Leoncini, *Cechi e Slovachi: dalla rinascita civile alla separazione*, in F. Argentieri (ed.), *op., cit.*, pp. 47-78.

visit to Rome in July 1991 by the Hungarian Finance Minister<sup>40</sup>, Italy's aspirations were confirmed a few months later in some Foreign Ministry's documents dealing with the relationship between Italy and Hungary.<sup>41</sup> Last but not least the "Esagonale" was regarded by the Italian authorities as an effective forum through which Italy and some countries from Central Europe could positively influence the Yugoslav crisis.<sup>42</sup> Actually the "Esagonale" was not able to offer any viable solution to the implosion of the Yugoslav state. Nevertheless in the following years the organisation's membership steadily increased and it transformed itself into the Central European Initiative (CEI), a loose organization which now comprise 18 members, of which nine are part of the EU (Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria) and 9 are non-EU members (Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania, Moldova). Its mission, as it is stated in its official website is the promotion, through an international forum of "political, economic, cultural and scientific cooperation among its member states". Such cooperation would aim at favoring the future accession to the EU of its non-member states.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of the useful role which the CEI seems to play in favoring forms of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the central-eastern European countries which are not full members of the EU, it is obvious that such an organization is something very different in both its goals and structures, from the plans the Italian governments had worked out in the late 1980s. Moreover, since 1992 Italy experienced a period of serious economic, political and institutional crisis and for some years its ability to play a leading international role was seriously threatened. The "Adriatic initiative" quickly collapsed as a consequence of Yugoslavia's violent implosion, while, besides Italy, for the other countries which had put forward the original "Quadrangolare", the adhesion to the EU was the main goal and in this connection a direct dialogue with Brussels, as well as other agreements, such as the Visegrad group, were more influential in favoring the accession by Austria, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to the European Union.<sup>44</sup> So both the

40 Asils, Aga, "Ungheria", box 677, memorandum "Ungheria" by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but June 1991 and memorandum "Appunto" by the Italian Foreign Ministry, June 1990.

41 Asils, Aga, "Ungheria", box 677, memorandum "Ungheria", by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but late 1991.

42 Asils, Aga, "Ungheria" box 677, memorandum "Ristrutturazione dell'Esagonale a seguito della crisi jugoslava", by the Italian Foreign Ministry, no date, but late 1991 and tel. No. 1905, J. Nitti (Budapest) to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 19.11.1991.

43 See the information in [www.cei.int](http://www.cei.int). It must be pointed out that the secretariat of the Central European Initiative is located in Trieste.

44 On the enlargement process see for example L. Mattina (ed.), *La sfida dell'allargamento. L'Unione Europea e la democratizzazione dell'Europa centro-orientale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2004; F. Carlucci and F. Cavone, *La grande Europa. Allargamento, integrazione, sviluppo*,

“Adriatic initiative” and the “Quadrangolare” were quickly forgotten by both the Italian authorities and public opinion. Nevertheless these initiatives may be still recorded by historians as an early attempt by the Italian government at favoring a cautious and gradual integration of East-Central Europe in the European construction during a difficult phase of transition from the Communist system towards a stable post-Communist reality.

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Milan, Franco Angeli, 2004; R. Scartezzini and J. O. Milanese (eds), *L'allargamento dell'UE nello scenario geo-politico europeo*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2005.