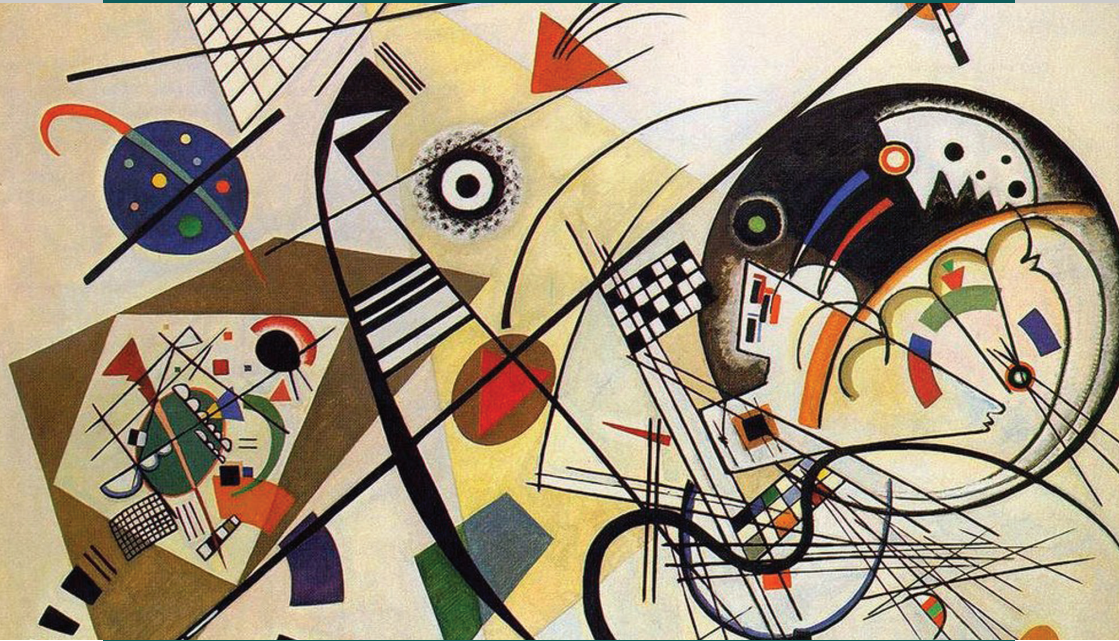




Human Right Studies



PIETRO DE PERINI

THE 'HUMAN RIGHTS COMPONENT' OF FOREIGN POLICY

THE CASE OF ITALY BETWEEN SELF-CONCEPTIONS
AND THE PURSUIT OF REPUTATION



Peter Lang

Framed into the broader conceptual debate that addresses the controversial role of human rights in the foreign policies of states, this book aims to critically investigate whether, how and to what extent human rights matter in the definition of Italy's external action. The focus of this study, which considers a period ranging from the end of the Cold War to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, is placed on the whole 'human rights component' of foreign policy, which is intended as the combination of three dimensions that are part of the same policy effort but can analytically be distinguished among them: 'institutional dialogue'; 'multilateral initiative' and 'bilateral emphasis'. This book investigates the consistency of this whole foreign policy component between the content and scope of the human rights discourse of Italian foreign policy-makers domestically and internationally and the actual efforts put in place by the country to advance the global human rights agenda, its institutions and procedures in both multilateral and bilateral settings.

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Peter Lang
Brussels



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The ‘Human Rights Component’ of Foreign Policy

The Case of Italy between Self-conceptions and the Pursuit of Reputation



P.I.E. Peter Lang

Bruxelles · Bern · Berlin · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

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of Foreign Policy**

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Self-conceptions and the Pursuit of
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No.12

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To Stefano, hard times create inner strength

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Table of Acronyms

AL:	League of Arab States
AU:	African Union
CAT:	International Convention against Torture
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CIDU:	Comitato interministeriale per i diritti umani (Interministerial Committee for Human Rights)
CoE:	Council of Europe
CPED:	Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearances
CRC:	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD:	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSCE:	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
EEG:	Eastern European Group (UN)
EU:	European Union
GRULAC:	Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (UN)
ICCPR:	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD:	Convention on Racial Discrimination
ICESCR:	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
MFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO:	Non-governmental Organisation
NHRI:	National Human Rights Institutions
NRC:	National Role Conceptions
OAS:	Organisation of American States
OP:	Optional Protocol
OP-AC:	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
OP-IC:	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure
OP-SC:	Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography

Table of Acronyms

OPCAT:	Optional Protocol to the International Convention against Torture
OSCE:	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PM:	Prime Minister
PR:	President of the Republic
UN:	United Nations
UNOHCHR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UPR:	Universal Periodic Review
WEOG:	Western European and Others Group (UN)

Introduction

This book aims to critically investigate the commitment of Italy to promote and protect human rights in its foreign policy. For several decades, especially after the end of the Cold War, Italian policy-makers have insisted on what they define as the country's traditional and firm support for an international agenda built on the advancement of human rights and other core values such as democracy, the rule of law, and good governance. However, even a cursory observation of the country's international behaviour on issues related to human rights exposes contradictions and shortcomings that eventually provide a less straightforward picture of Italy's 'role model' stance on these matters. Analysing the consistency between the content and scope of the human rights language spoken by Italian foreign policy-makers domestically and internationally, and the actual approach that the country has adopted to advance the international human rights agenda, its institutions and procedures, this book seeks to expose whether, how and to what extent human rights matter in the definition of the country's foreign policy.

Before elaborating on the research design, argument and structure of the book, however, a brief contextualisation of what is intended with international human rights agenda and how this agenda is conceptualised and empirically approached in this research needs being provided.

1. The International Human Rights Agenda and Its Political Relevance

Formally introduced in the international political order emerging after the Second World War with the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Charter in San Francisco in June 1945¹, human rights have increasingly achieved a crucial position in international politics and become, together with peace and development, one of the three pillars on which the Organisation has developed its global political agenda. For more than 75 years, this achievement has been substantiated through the creation and expansion of an impressive and dynamic system of norms,

¹ For the events and processes that led to the introduction of human rights in the UN Charter (see, among others, Simmons 2009; Roberts 2014; Donnelly and Whelan 2020).

standards, procedures and mechanisms, which scholars often refer to as the global or international human rights regime (Brysk 2009, 221; Donnelly and Whelan 2020). Over a similar time span, regional regimes (or systems) for the promotion and protection of human rights have been developed under the auspices of regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organisations such as the Council of Europe (CoE, since 1950), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, formerly the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe – CSCE, since 1975), the Organisation of American States (OAS, since 1948), the African Union (AU, formerly Organisation of African Unity, since 1981), and the League of Arab States (AL, since 2004). With the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, also the European Union (EU) has officially started recognising human rights as both a foundation of European integration and an objective of its incipient common foreign policy (Smith 2014).

At the global level, UN-mandated, which is rooted in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, there are currently 18 legally binding instruments which set forth internationally accepted human rights standards and related obligations for states parties. Some of these instruments have a more general scope, such as the two International Covenants of 1966, respectively, on civil and political rights and on economic, social and cultural rights. These are complemented by a set of international conventions and additional protocols that aim to protect the human rights of those belonging to specific social groups that are often in a vulnerable position (women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants workers) or prohibit repugnant practices by state authorities, such as torture, racial discrimination, and forced disappearances². Replicating this global pattern, sometimes even anticipating it³, a wealth of human rights legal instruments has been adopted by the mentioned regional organisations and opened to the acceptance of their members, favouring subsidiarity and a more inclusive and flexible ‘multi-level governance’ of human rights standards (for an overview of international and regional human rights law, see de Shutter 2019).

² The numbers of states’ ratifications change from treaty to treaty. For an updated overview, see the interactive dashboard provided by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

³ For instance, both the CoE and the OAS adopted a convention to prevent torture via a system of visits in places of detention by a committee of independent experts years before the UN managed to negotiate a similar instrument (the Optional Protocol to the Convention against torture, adopted in 2002).

Together with the definition and adoption of these standards, the UN and regional organisations have established mechanisms (composed of governmental representatives or independent experts) which are tasked with either negotiating and promoting human rights regionally and globally, or periodically assessing the compliance of states with the implementation of internationally agreed human rights obligations on their territory. This task, in particular, is performed by providing observations and recommendations on the actions that states should undertake to further improve and guarantee the enjoyment of protected rights by their citizens. As will be further elaborated in Chapter 3, states can also decide to allow these mechanisms to conduct country visits and receive and investigate individual complaints by victims of human rights violations (and indeed many states have done so) (see Simmons 2009; Forsythe 2018a). While these regimes may significantly differ in terms of the categories of rights covered by adopted norms and standards, the extent of tools made available to promote and protect these, and the effectiveness of enforcing and monitoring mechanisms⁴, they all share the continuous endeavour to make the dignity of all human beings, their equality, inclusion, safety and participation fulfilled everywhere, at times cooperating with, at times criticising involved states.

In addition to the periodic monitoring of national compliance and to the activities to advance the human rights agenda in *ad hoc* intergovernmental forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, these same goals are pursued also through a continuative, although not always coordinated and integrative, effort to maintain human rights as a central concern among the evolving priorities of international affairs, fostering an increased interaction (and intersection) with other core agendas. Such agendas include that on collective security and peacemaking – namely with regard to the doctrine of the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (ICISS 2001; Annan 2005) and the progressive evolution of the mandates of peacekeeping operations (Gledhill et al. 2021) – and that devoted to the promotion of development assistance (with increased attention to the environment), whose most recent blueprint is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted in 2015 (Fukuda-Parr 2016). The humanitarian agenda has also increasingly taken a human rights direction (Petrasek 2010), also

⁴ In particular, AU, CoE and OAS have established supranational courts which can adopt binding judgements on a state party’s human rights violation following a complaint submitted by an individual, an organisation or another state (each organization has its specific procedures to allow submitting these complaints). Other organisations, including the UN, the AL and OSCE only allow non-binding ‘observations’.

making aid conditional on the commitment of receiving states to human rights and democracy (Fox 2002).

These international advancements have been shaped primarily states' agency and negotiations in multilateral venues, and prompted/coordinated by international officials, primarily within the UN system. However, especially when human rights are concerned, the decision-making processes surrounding these advancements have increasingly engaged and benefited from a plurality of diverse actors. These include civil society organisations, social movements, local and regional authorities, and even businesses (Wettstein 2020) as recently reiterated in the report 'Our Common Agenda' presented by UN Secretary-general António Guterres in September 2021, following a coordinated request for action by a large group of UN member states (Guterres 2021).

This succinct overview of the existing legal/institutional framework hardly gives any satisfactory picture of the complexity and depth of the processes which have allowed human rights to occupy a relevant position in international politics. Neither it introduces and problematises the considerable political, economic, and socio-cultural criticisms that have increasingly tackled the proclaimed global consensus over human rights and their universality as an ordering principle of the post-war peace since their earliest proclamation. As Roberts (2014) notes in his *Contentious History of the International Bill of Human Rights*, indeed, 'as unassailable, obvious, and natural as these principles now appear, it is easy to overlook the fact that every word and phrase within the Universal Declaration [of human rights] is awash in the conflict that defines the modern epoch'. These conflicts have further developed over the last 75 years including through the consolidation of a cultural relativist criticism to human rights universality and the more widespread and often evidence-based criticism toward the exploitation by powerful liberal democracies in the West of human rights ideas and principles as a smokescreen to pursue specific interests in developing countries (Mutua 2001; Posner 2014). As opposition to and disregard for human rights have gradually grown within liberal democracies as well, favoured in particular by the wave of xenophobic populism in Europe and North America which has characterised the 2010s (Mudde 2016; Boucher and Thies, C. 2020), several experts and international officials pushed as far as to claim that 'human rights are under attack' globally and so is their linchpin which underlines their universality, interdependence, indivisibility and interrelatedness (Guterres 2017; Zeid 2018).

Neither this brief overview provides any insight into the many longstanding challenges related to international efforts to monitor both national compliance with human rights standards and domestic implementation

of recommendations made by what practitioners refer to, in their jargon, as ‘the human rights machinery’, that is, the set of mechanisms and procedures established over the years by international organisations to monitor and assess the commitment of states to accepted human rights standards (Subedi 2017). Such institutional efforts, in particular, are caught between limited economic and human resources for both monitoring bodies and human rights advocates within the civil society, little visibility of their outcomes in both the media and the national political discourse, and intermittent, at times reluctant, commitment by state authorities to actually comply with their recommendations (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2007).

International human rights constitute a large and still growing field of political, legal, economic, sociological, and even anthropological scholarship (see the various overview of ‘disciplinary’ contributions to them in Goodhart 2016). Without aiming to reduce this rich and stimulating debate, the above overview was intended as the basis on which postulating that human rights are a relevant global and widespread political project, which contributes to the constitutional relevance of foreign relations (Ginsburg 2017) and can foster either cooperation or tension in the life of the international community (Langlois 2016). Their complexity, contingent events and the critical claims raised by some scholars, political leaders and other institutions, whose privileges may also be threatened by the promise of universal and inclusive individual and collective empowerment that this project eventually advances as a global response to injustice (Donnelly and Whelan 2020), make them controversial but do not alter their relevance for the international community. Human rights have long been and still remain, despite periodic times of crisis, a central dimension of contemporary international relations. As such, they continue to encompass largely accepted norms and behaviours which states are legally bound to promote, protect, and fulfil domestically and are expected to show commitment to if they wish not risking to remain isolated internationally (Dunne and Hanson 2016), as it will be further discussed in Chapter 1. Still, the level of such commitment may significantly vary from state to state in both rhetoric and practice depending on how much and how serious investments a country has placed on supporting this and related global agendas.

Human rights, therefore, represent an essential international political area of interaction where the roles, posturing and expectations of states and other independent actors can be observed and assessed, uncovering relevant insights about their broader foreign policy choice and attitude. Based on these considerations, this book seeks to investigate Italy’s broader approach to the promotion and protection of international human

rights also in order to understand more about the definition and consistency of its foreign policy priorities.

2. The ‘Human Rights Component’ of Foreign Policy

As mentioned, human rights standards and goals are increasingly mainstreaming a wealth of interconnected global policy areas and agendas, from international peace and security to the environment, from development assistance to cultural diplomacy, from containing the negative economic and social outcomes of globalisation to the management of pandemics. Consequently, the field of investigation for what is termed here as ‘the human rights component’ of foreign policy is potentially boundless. In an effort to delimitate this field, Brysk (2009, 5) coined the label ‘humanitarian internationalism’ as an umbrella term for a variety of cooperative, value-oriented foreign policies involving aid, diplomacy, the use of force, and sometimes migration.’ Referring to this term is a convincing strategy. However, while considering the crucial and at times indispensable link with these value-oriented foreign policy areas during analysis, this book seeks to narrow further the focus of investigation to those acts and initiatives which refer explicitly to the specific standards and requirements of the global and regional human rights regimes outlined above (principles, norms, rules and procedures – Keohane 1982).

In particular, this book defines the ‘human rights component’ of foreign policy as the combination of three dimensions that represent layers of the same policy effort but can be analytically distinguished. These three dimensions are labelled: (1) ‘institutional dialogue’, (2) ‘multilateral initiative’, and (3) ‘bilateral emphasis’.

The first dimension encompasses the heterogeneous channels of interaction and participation between the authorities of states, their peers, and relevant mechanisms and institutions within multilateral political institutions that have human rights as one of their main purposes. For Italy, this ‘institutional dialogue’ is primarily conducted within the UN system and the CoE machinery, and occasionally within the institutional frameworks of the EU and the OSCE. Therefore, this dimension incorporates a large set of international interactions and procedures that are characterised by at least three common features: a generally non-confrontational and, at least in the form, cooperative behaviour by state representatives; the recognition that any member of the international community shows lights and shadows when it comes to analysing the domestic human rights situation; and the acceptance that both the pros and cons of a country’s commitment to human rights are open to international scrutiny and discussion. The second dimension is, too, connected to multilateral cooperation. However, rather than on the diligent participation and

respect of the elements on which a regime is based, it relates to a state's own spirit of initiative to propose new human rights priorities, often in an attempt to generate larger international and institutional support on these principles and raise them into the global political agenda. The third dimension of the 'human rights component' of foreign policy concerns the promotion of human rights principles, the encouragement to commit further and the introduction of conditionality elements among the issues at stake in the relations of a state with third countries. As suggested by the label chosen for this dimension, such action usually occurs at the bilateral level, but can occasionally be observed in 'minilateral' gatherings (Naim 2009).

There is a fundamental difference between the first and the other two dimensions of this analytical construct. The 'institutional dialogue' is substantially defined and framed by the obligation of states to cooperate and accept different levels of monitoring of internationally agreed human rights standards⁵. Therefore, the connected international participation is often padded by the rituals and ritualism which generally permeate monitoring procedures, especially at the UN (Charlesworth and Larkin 2014). 'Multilateral initiative' and 'bilateral emphasis', on the contrary, are not bound or regulated by any international legal standards. In other words, there is no legal duty or politically agreed standards specifically requiring states to launch new ideas related to human rights in their external relations⁶, or to champion human rights in their bilateral cooperation. Action is prompted by political willingness, which may be, in turn, explained by a wealth of moral, material and ideational factors, as will be discussed in Chapter 1.

Although these three dimensions are different from each other in nature, motivation, and operation, their combination is fundamental to create a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the actual commitment to human rights in a state's foreign policy. Analysing the first

⁵ In the majority of cases, such as in the context of mechanisms established by international or regional conventions, to undergo monitoring states must ratify the convention and deposit the instrument of ratification to the international organization's dedicated office; in few other cases, such as in the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and with Special Procedures (SP), or with regards to the CoE Commissioner for Human Rights' activity, country monitoring is performed regardless of the states' acceptance of specific legal obligations.

⁶ Although art. 7 of the 1998 non-binding Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms recognises that 'Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance'.

dimension may say little about the country's specific foreign policy priorities, but it is important to understand the level of respect and commitment to the multilateral cooperation framework that has established and protected the international human rights agenda and to assess the type of domestic grounding that supports international action. In particular, analysing 'institutional dialogue' also helps to grasp the actual consistency between the international and domestic human rights agendas of a country, which represents a fundamental indicator of its actual commitment and international credibility.

The other two dimensions are generally less widespread in the sense that only a limited number of countries, mostly within the liberal front, have developed them in their foreign policy, although, scholars found evidence of such entrepreneurship in very diverse national regimes (Forsythe 2000a; Brysk 2009). However, when present, 'multilateral initiative' and 'bilateral emphasis' are the result of a voluntary decision of the country's policy-makers and, therefore, are particularly expressive of the actual political reasoning behind the choice of human rights. This is especially relevant when one considers that not all partner countries may share the same enthusiasm for enhancing the international human rights agenda of the actor which is being analysed. Indeed, while accepting multilateral monitoring, at times reluctantly, many countries in the world stretch their interpretation of international human rights law to continue understanding (or pretend to understand) the promotion, protection and fulfilment of human rights as something which relates to their internal jurisdiction only. As Donnelly (2000) puts it, in fact, even the most internationalist countries reserve a near-exclusive national right to implement and enforce internationally recognised human rights. As a consequence, any external pressure on these matters is often perceived as inadmissible interferences in their domestic affairs, which can complicate and even hamper international cooperation on other relevant matters, pitting efforts to promote human rights and protect foreign nationals from mistreatments in the sending states in direct competition with other national priorities and interests.

3. Italian Foreign Policy and Human Rights: Why It Matters

Considering what has been outlined above, what are the political motivations at the basis of making human rights a foreign policy priority for a country like Italy? As mentioned, Italy is among those countries that claim their undisguised commitment to human rights in the context of their international relations both when this is expressed through cooperative and respectful cooperation with international human rights institutions

within multilateral organisations, and when the Italian authorities speak about their country and its human rights achievements internationally. As this book more thoroughly discusses in Chapter 2, a noteworthy number of official texts and documents – including parliamentary auditions by the ministers of foreign Affairs, official statements in multilateral venues, notices and press releases from the *Farnesina* (the metonymy used to refer to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, derived from the name of its headquarters in Rome) after bilateral meetings – recognise human rights as either a traditional commitment or a strong and sustained priority of the country's foreign policy. There are also several speeches and interviews in which Italy's policy-makers show a noteworthy self-awareness about the country's crucial contribution to advance the commitment of the international community toward very human rights-sensitive fields such as the death penalty, the promotion of religious freedom, the promotion of children and women's rights, the support of peacekeeping mandates and the creation and support of international criminal law infrastructures. Human rights are therefore unquestionably presented as an important building block in Italian foreign policy discourse. Investigating in depth this component, therefore, promises to provide also an original angle from which to look at the overall international relations of the country, its orientations, behaviours and contradictions.

Looking at these available claims and pronouncements, one would expect that Italy's overall commitment to human rights is deeply rooted among decision-makers in a full-fledged, inclusive and specific policy with specific targets and priorities and is consistently advanced domestically to give the international agency a solid foundation of credibility. However, a number of contradictions and shortcomings question the picture displayed by Italian policy-makers and the consistence of their human rights discourse. Two of these are particularly relevant in motivating the investigation proposed in this book.

First, despite the parade of institutional commitment, Italy has been frequently criticised for its structural shortcomings when it comes to promoting and implementing human rights domestically. Part of this criticism – such as with regard to migration management, racism, hate speech, the discriminatory treatment of people belonging to some specific minorities such as Roma and Sinti, prison overcrowdings, and the lack of national human rights institutions (UP-HRC 2020) – suggests that Italy's long-standing international commitment is met with notable deficits in the domestic system and calls into question both the substantial determination and the actual capacity of the country to credibly play the international human rights 'role model'. In other words, there seems to be no

particular strong or consistent domestic human rights grounding, which for many scholars is the *sine qua non* condition to build a firm and sustained foreign policy in this sector (see Caffarena and Gabusi 2017).

From this perspective, it must certainly be recalled that receiving harsh human rights criticism by either peers, independent experts in human rights mechanisms, national and transnational civil society organisations or advocacy networks is a commonly shared condition for all members of the international community in the ‘institutional dialogue’ irrespective of how they claim to value human rights in their national and international policy. As Baehr and Castermans-Holleman (2004, 132) put it: ‘Concern for human rights is permanent in nature. Nobody ever does enough on behalf of human rights. That is true for governments, for intergovernmental organisations, for national parliaments, for NGOs and for private individuals’. Still, while overarching human rights fulfilment may be hard to achieve in practice, the commitment to reach that goal should represent the highest ambition states should aspire to and the compass to be followed. Therefore, the observed international/national gap in Italian politics is an area that is worth investigating from this perspective, to grasp the overall trend in Italian behaviour, rather than analysing single shortcomings. This is particularly relevant as this book understands foreign policy as a boundary activity where domestic and international factors concur affecting, at different levels, national policy-making (Putnam 1988; Brighi 2013; Isernia and Longo 2017).

Second, Italy appears to be particularly inconsistent and selective even when the attention is placed exclusively on its external action for human rights only (bilaterally and multilaterally). In parallel to the strong and recurrent voice that claims the country’s commitment to promote and enrich the international human rights agenda, the Italian authorities appear less determined when it comes to concretely pushing for human rights in some countries where other types of political, security, or economic cooperation are at stake (see also Zanon 2007). Evidence of these contradictions abounds, from the amenable relations with Libya’s President Muammar Gaddafi in the early 2000s to the wavering posture held in front of Egyptian authorities following the assassination of young doctoral researcher Giulio Regeni in that country (Colombo and Varvelli 2016), to the U-turn regarding the approval of the UN Global Compact for Migration (Monteleone 2021). Even in this case, as Chapter 1 elaborates more thoroughly, one has to remind the reader that trade-offs between different foreign policy priorities or between moral and material objectives are in order and, to some extent, ‘legitimate’ as part of the necessary balance between different sectorial interests that build up a country’s national interest, which is the ultimate goal of foreign policy (Donnelly

and Whelan 2020). Still, these inconsistencies clash with the moral integrity that Italy proclaims for itself. Therefore, they call for more investigation to expose the underlying motivations for giving human rights such a prominent position in foreign policy rhetoric if the resulting gap with (necessary) trade-offs may play such a prominent role in the actual international projection and perception of the country.

4. Research Objective, Conceptual Framework and Main Argumentation

Consistent with these lines of inquiry, the main objective of this book is to assess the extent and overall consistency of the ‘human rights component’ of Italy’s foreign policy during a broad time period that begins after the end of the Cold War (on the research cut-off points, see the next section, on methodology). The book, in other words, tries to grasp whether human rights really matter in the definition of Italy’s foreign policy and why. This main research question will be answered by looking at the following sub-questions which will be explored in-depth in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Why has Italy relied on the promotion of human rights in its foreign policy? To what extent is Italy’s human rights policy consistent with international human rights goals, standards, and expectations? That is, is Italy showing a dogmatic approach to human rights – which considers and advances human rights as universal, interdependent, indivisible and interdependent, or is it applying a more selective approach which develops the country’s commitment to human rights around specific interests and priorities? Are human rights primarily an objective or an instrument to other ends of Italian foreign policy? What is the actual divide between the institutional rhetoric of Italy to advance human rights and its actual commitment in terms of promoting reforms domestically and allocating resources internationally? What does the extent of this rhetoric-performance gap say about the overall place of human rights in broader Italian foreign policy-making?

Positioned in the niche strand of International Relations (IR) scholarship which has shown interest in the place and development of human rights (Donnelly 2000; Forsythe 2000a, 2018a; Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004; Risse et al. 2007; Goodhart 2008, 2016; Brysk 2009, 2015; Donnelly and Whelan 2020), the conceptual approach through which the book explores the set of questions listed above integrates elements from Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and Role Theory, in particular the National Role Conceptions (NRC) framework (the book’s conceptual framework is elaborated and discussed in Chapter 1).

FPA is primarily considered in the context of more recent theory developments supported by the work of, among others, Christopher Hill (2003; 2016), Valery Hudson (2005), Amnon Aran and Chris Alden (2011), Elisabetta Brighi (2013), Karen Smith (2014), and Pierangelo Isernia and Francesca Longo (2017). The main conceptual advantage of FPA is that of observing international politics from an actor-centred perspective, opening the black-box of policy-making focusing on individual agency within all institutions and entities which concur shaping foreign policy decisions and actions, including within the Government political and bureaucratic apparatuses, Parliament, and civil society. The second component of this approach, based on NRC, revolves around how and why this agency is shaped through both national actors' conceptions of how they think their country should orientate internationally (referred as the 'ego', or 'self' part of a given role) and how such orientation is either perceived, ascribed or shaped by its by peers in the international system (the 'alter' part of a given role) (see Holsti 1970; Thies 2010; Harnisch et al. 2011; Thies and Breuning 2012). Joining these two approaches together, the book is guided through an attempt to analyse both (a) how Italian policy-makers frame the country's commitment to human rights in relation to the broader set of national interests and foreign policy expectations available; and (b) how and to what extent, the promotion of human rights in foreign policy reflects policy-makers' conceptions of the roles their country is expected to play, 'navigating between domestic sources of identity and/or cultural heritage, taking advantage of the material resources at their disposal, circumnavigating as best as possible the obstacles imposed by their position in the international structure' (Breuning 2011, 26).

Taking into account the three dimensions of the 'human rights component' from this conceptual perspective, the main argument advanced in this book is that Italy has developed a general confused and eventually contradictory foreign policy in the field of human rights and that this result derives from two parallel but opposite pressures: one is more genuinely propositional, the other essentially instrumental.

On the one hand, many actors involved in Italy's foreign policy-making share a genuine deep-rooted conviction that human rights are in Italy's DNA and therefore should be promoted among the country's natural contributions to improving the life of the international community, that is, 'for an intrinsic interest in living in a more just world' (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). In particular, several politicians and officials from various ideological and professional backgrounds see a clear functional link between the global pursuit of human rights, democracy and good governance and Italy's historical, political, and cultural ('civilizational')

heritage. This link guarantees the country a solid and externally recognisable foundation to play the role-model and help other countries to deliver appropriately on these matters. In Italy, such assertiveness is particularly favoured by the support of national civil society. As demonstrated by Marchetti (2018) and more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3, Italy's main successes as a promoter of international norms are often based on some type of synergy between Italian authorities and the committed, reliable and stubborn agency of the country's exceptional social capital (see Putnam et al. 1994), which has occasionally made Italy's human rights diplomacy a particularly remarkable application of 'hybrid diplomacy' (see also Marchetti 2021).

On the other hand, many Italian actors seem to understand international human rights primarily as a niche policy area around which a 'middle power' can enhance its reputation and prestige with little costs. This consideration is not necessarily in opposition to the self-image of a responsible and cooperative member of the international community that some Italian elites may pursue based on their genuine role conceptions – because moral goals and their ideational sources can also be functional to material ones. However, from this second perspective human rights promotion is flaunted to satisfy Italy's existential needs. They thus become an instrument of Italy's material pursuit of international power and status. When competing interests arise, these two perspectives make the country's international image confusing and its foreign policy action at times inconsistent and occasionally hypocritical. An outcome which is reinforced by the lack of a strong domestic human rights policy and by little investment in dedicated infrastructures and resources.

5. Time-Frame of Analysis and Methodology

This book originates from a long-standing empirical observation of Italy's foreign policy commitment to multilateralism, peace and human rights rooted, in particular, in the work of the research group established in 2010 at the University of Padova Human Rights Centre 'Antonio Papisca' to edit the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights* (see UP-HRC 2011–2020). The book in large part draws from data and findings collected through the annual editions of this research effort, to which the author has contributed from the first volume.

The time-frame of reference is, in fact, much wider than that covered by the above-mentioned series (although the first edition digs deeper in time than 2010). The initial cut-off point is identified with the end of the Cold War. The early 1990s represent an important turning point in terms of both the consolidation of human rights in the international political

agenda and the orientation of Italy's foreign policy, as it will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.

Paradoxically, indeed, while characterised by the emergence of new international conflicts, glaring genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda and other crimes against humanity on a massive scale (Forsythe 2018b), which led many critics to declare the failure of the UN and its human rights system (Hopgood 2013; Prosser 2014), the period immediately following the end of the Cold War was also marked by some of the heydays for the global human rights movement. The end of the ideological confrontation between the two blocs, which had advanced instrumental claims going as far as to weaponise human rights for politico-ideological purposes (Simmons 2009; Roberts 2014), removed, or at least reduced, many of the impediments which existed to more effective international policies and cooperation on this matter (Donnelly 2000). This new phase provided those advocating for their promotion, at all levels of governance and in all sectors of civil society with a window of opportunity to enhance a new spring for the global human rights movement. This is well exemplified by the success of the UN-sponsored World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, and its ambitious and inclusive final Declaration and Plan of action (UN World Conference 1993).

At the same time, as many scholars who have investigated the evolution of Italian foreign policy acknowledge, the end of the Cold War represents an important 'critical juncture' in the development of Italian foreign policy (Diodato and Niglia, 2017). The disruptive repercussions that the events which unfolded in the early 1990s brought to power balances in the emerging world order, the advancement in European integration (with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty), together with the political party corruption scandal exposed by judicial operation '*mani pulite*' (clean hands) pushed Italy into its 'second Republic' period, which was also characterised by a new effort to reposition its foreign policy and redefine its priorities, raising its international assertiveness (see also Romano 2009; Isernia and Longo 2017).

The end of the research time-frame is represented by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in February-March 2020. While there are several possible motivations to choose this cut-off point, the most relevant is that, due to its unprecedented effects on the global enjoyment of human rights, especially those of the most marginalised, the pandemic has consolidated a significant reflection on how to reposition human rights commitments at the centre of multilateral cooperation (Guterres 2020). The reflection substantially started with concerned calls to action by key personalities in the global human rights movements, such as former UN Human Rights Chief Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein (2018) and is still underway while human

rights are further humiliated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a new global race to armaments, which could radically change also the traditional features of Italy's foreign policy stance and rethoric on these issues.

Human rights scholars stress that verbal sanctions and inducements provide the heart of most international human rights initiatives and that 'although words may be cheap, rarely are they free, especially in the world of diplomacy' (Donnelly 2000). Building on these considerations, the book analyses the broader foreign policy discourse of Italy with respect to the three dimensions of the 'human rights component' during these three decades. Although the specific methodological strategies employed will be described in detail in the single chapters, where pertinent, the overall research endeavour is primarily based on a content analysis of primary sources which combines computer-assisted investigation of the recurrence and type of key expressions in the broader Italian foreign policy discourse, and qualitative analysis of selected policy documents including parliamentary hearings, national and international statements, declarations, and interviews of key Italian personalities with foreign policy prerogatives, as publicly available.

A significant part of this analysis is conducted on the volumes that collect texts and documents published annually by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (up to the last published issue in 2008) – *La politica estera dell'Italia. Testi e Documenti* – which allow to grasp the actual place, diffusion and recurrence of human rights in the general construction of Italy's post-Cold War foreign policy discourse over a significant, albeit partial, period of reference within the time frame. Thus, these data are further integrated by annual analysis of Italy's foreign policy published by the *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (IAI, International Affairs Institute), surveys on national perceptions of foreign policy – including the more recent series of annual reports developed in joint venture with the University of Siena since 2013, the data presented in the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights* series (2011–2020), press releases and other interviews available from the current version of the *Farnesina* website (in particular with regard to Italy's initiatives in multilateral institutions), and outcomes of international monitoring mechanisms, also through available databases such as the UN Universal Human Rights Index and the Database of UPR recommendations provided by the Geneva-based NGO 'UPR-info'. Where provided in Italian, excerpts from texts and documents are translated into English by the author.

These data are collected through a diverse range of primary sources and cover different sub-periods within the broader time frame in reference.

Nonetheless, the systematic search for the role of and approach to human rights issues between the two identified critical junctures, as expressed through this range of policy documents, figures and recommendations is believed to provide sufficiently substantiated observations about why, how and to what extent human rights have actually mattered in Italy's foreign policy over the last three decades.

6. Structure of the Book

Following this general Introduction, the argumentation of the book develops throughout 4 chapters. The first is devoted to exploring and discussing the relationship between foreign policy and human rights from a conceptual perspective, with a view to presenting the adopted framework of analysis. Starting from the attempts of some prominent scholars to define what foreign policy is about, the chapter focuses specifically on the reasons that can motivate the introduction of human rights into the foreign policy of a country, exploring a variety of different conceptual explanations. After a general overview of how the main camps within IR theory – Realism, Liberalism, Idealism, and Constructivism – approach human rights questions, the chapter moves on to discuss a number of specific attempts at conceptualising the foreign policy-human rights conundrum, including the 'competing values balance' discussed by Donnelly (2000) and Donnelly and Whelan (2020) and the 'Global Good Samaritans' framework introduced by Brysk (2009). The chapter integrates the emerging discussions with insights from Role Theory, with particular attention to how and in what circumstances NRCs can contribute to explaining a country's self-image based on a commitment to human rights and multilateralism, and the themes that could be associated to these NRCs in policy discourse.

The second chapter aims to expose the scope and consistency of the human rights initiative in Italy's foreign policy. It does so by focusing primarily on how the second and third dimensions of the 'human rights component' – 'multilateral initiative' and 'bilateral emphasis' – are represented and developed in Italian foreign policy discourse. First, the chapter provides a brief overview of the key determinants, trends, and priorities of Italian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War drawing from the relevant strands of FPA/IR literature on the matter. Then the attention is paid to how Italy's 'middle power' status helps to explain the country's choice to improve multilateralism, its norms, procedures, and institutions. The chapter then presents and discusses the findings of the content analysis of Italy's foreign policy texts and documents, trying to unearth both the overall relevance and consistency that Italian policy-makers from governments of different colours and other national

institutions have attributed to human rights initiatives in their policy-making, and some underlying trends that characterise the most entrepreneurial dimensions of the ‘human rights component’ of Italian foreign policy.

The third chapter zooms into the analysis of how Italy’s foreign policy is sustained within the national system and in relation to the specialised international human rights machinery. Thus, it primarily addresses the first dimension of the ‘human rights component’, that is the ‘institutional dialogue’. First, it looks at the specific national infrastructure, its strengths and its limits and at the relevant role of non-state actors, civil society organisations *in primis*. Then, the chapter provides a snapshot of the overall commitment to the global and regional human rights regimes and of the main problems which emerge from monitoring outcomes in the framework of this dialogue. The analysis performed in this chapter helps to highlight both the merits, the shortcomings and the inconsistencies in Italy’s human rights performance in an institutionalised context, showing the contours and extent of the rhetoric-performance gap on human rights that Italy, as many other countries, inevitably experience, and adds another angle to evaluate Italy’s international credibility as a role model in human rights.

The fourth and last chapter aims to put together into one specific case study the trends and findings which have been exposed in Chapters 2 and 3. The chapter focuses on Italy’s participation and performance in the context of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council, a comprehensive monitoring mechanism launched in 2008 to foster peers’ assessment of the overall human rights commitment of all countries of the world, which Italy underwent three times in 2010, 2014 and 2019. The UPR is part of the ‘institutional dialogue’ established under the global human rights regime, but is based on intergovernmental peer reviews (which feeds the ‘bilateral emphasis’ dimension) and provides a much wider and more flexible scope than specific provisions of human rights law monitored by most international mechanisms, thus allowing for ‘multilateral initiative’ as well. As a consequence, analysing the behaviour and performance of Italy in this context provides complementary insights to assess and triangulate findings related to all three dimensions of the ‘human rights component’. This analysis, which includes vast parts of an article written with Dr Andrea Cofelice (see Cofelice and de Perini 2020), allows investigating further both the international-domestic gap in Italian human rights commitment and the possible ‘role conflict’ (Harnisch et al. 2011) existing between Italian authorities’ self-conceptions and the external perceptions of it.

Chapter 1 Foreign Policy and Human Rights: Between Moral Principles, Material Interests and Role Conceptions

Introduction

This chapter aims to conceptually frame the controversial role of human rights in the foreign policy of states. Although participation in the mechanisms and procedures that make up global and regional human rights regimes (or ‘institutional dialogue’, the first dimension of the ‘human rights component’) are to be considered *per se* an important element of any country’s foreign policy, as it involves forms of multilateral interaction, the focus of this chapter is primarily focused on the most proactive dimensions of state international efforts on these matters. These include both the purposeful contribution of a country to maintain, develop and advance additional human rights norms, rules, policies and procedures in the regimes established within intergovernmental organisations (‘multilateral initiative’, second dimension), and the introduction of human rights elements in bilateral or ‘minilateral’ policy initiatives (‘bilateral emphasis’, third dimension). The main goal of the chapter is, therefore, to conceptually discuss and frame the reasons and dilemmas related to the choice of fostering human rights in a country’s international agency in addition to what is required by the international organisation.

The chapter argues that while formal commitment to respect and advance human rights has gradually become a necessary and, to some extent, inescapable component in the definition of the style and scope of foreign policy-making in many countries, the actual performance to maintain such commitment is more ambiguous and requires the consideration of several complementary factors. More precisely, an effort to grasp and explain the presence of human rights in a country’s foreign policy has to consider and integrate, on the one hand, the complex and continuous attempt to balance objectives of different nature in the interplay of moral and material priorities that contribute to defining the national interest of one state, and, on the other hand, issues related to the domestically desired/sought role and the external expectations about the international agency of that state.

The motivation and consistence of human rights agency in foreign policy changes for each country according to the specific value that policy-makers eventually attribute to all these elements. In some cases, human rights may be mentioned in a foreign policy statement or included in bilateral cooperation initiatives mostly when a reference to universal principles or international law can help these states gain more weight on the international scene; trying to legitimise a controversial policy choice (see, for instance, the contradictions of those supporting ‘humanitarian’ or ‘human rights’ wars), or accessing a specific political, economic or cultural opportunity in a third country. In other cases, the presence of an independent and entrepreneurial agency on these matters may be the result of a more genuine desire of these countries to live in a more just and inclusive world. Human rights, therefore, can be understood either as a goal or as an instrument of foreign policy, or as both. Whatever approach is pursued, human rights-related policy goals and expected outcomes can either support, compete or eventually conflate with a range of other legitimate goals and desired outcomes, giving a complex picture which needs to be exposed and tested through careful empirical analysis.

The chapter begins with a discussion of selected definitions of foreign policy as a basis from which to extrapolate some key features characterising this policy-formulation process, and discuss whether, to what extent and how human rights initiative may fit in a country’s foreign policy and be consistent with internationally agreed standards to promote and protect them. Then, the chapter discusses some insights from the ‘niche literature’ which has conceptually addressed the intricate relation between human rights and foreign policy-making, exploring insights coming from different theoretical standpoints. Indeed, foreign policy, on the one hand, and international human rights, on the other, have individually been the subjects of endless scholars’ attention. However, their interaction has been conceptually under-researched, despite interest in this topic dating back to some decades (Vance 1977; Luard 1980), or addressed by empirically analysing a single country’s policy initiative or a leader’s agency on these matters (Carleton and Stohl 1985; Nathan 1994; Wood 2002; Lui 2012). The third section of this chapter outlines two more dedicated approaches to explain the controversial link between human rights and foreign policy: the one proposed by Alison Brysk’s ‘Global Good Samaritan’ metaphor (Brysk 2009) and the one developed by Jack Donnelly (2000; Donnelly and Whelan 2020), which will be labelled here as the ‘competing values balance’ explanation. As both approaches eventually stress the importance of ideational considerations in the interplay between moral and material objectives when it comes to defining foreign policy choices, the fourth and final section

introduces and discusses the contribution that ‘role theory’ can bring to understanding the determinants of such objectives. More specifically, the NRC framework is proposed as a conceptual refinement of the key findings emphasised in the relevant literature. The conclusions wrap up the key elements of all these approaches in a broader conceptual frame, which will then be used to empirically observe Italy’s commitment to promote human rights in the subsequent chapters of this book.

1. Foreign Policy: Some Key Considerations

The IR and FPA literatures are packed with efforts to define what foreign policy is about. These range from more minimalist attempts – such as Stuart’s (2008, 576), who defines foreign policy-making simply as ‘a specific foreign-policy choice by an international actor’ – to more descriptive and exhaustive accounts which linger on the types of actions that can be brought under the concept, by whom and toward whom and what. Among this group of definitions stands out the one proposed by Carlsnaes (2002), who understands foreign policy as:

‘those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed toward objectives, conditions and actors – both governmental and non-governmental – which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy’.

Somehow in the middle between these two attempts – a concise, but yet comprehensive and insightful contribution – is the definition provided by Christopher Hill (2016, 4) in his *Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*. According to this author, foreign policy is ‘the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations’. As the author elaborates in his book, this definition encompasses several fundamental considerations about the key features characterising foreign policy as a distinct process in the broader realm of international affairs. It also suggests relevant insights on how to approach this process, which is particularly helpful to investigate a complex and controversial niche as its ‘human rights component’, when present.

First, Hill’s definition is flexible enough to encompass different types of inputs and actors that can increasingly affect the outcome of the formulation and implementation of current foreign policy. In particular, using the term ‘independent actor’ to refer to the agent of the foreign policy process (instead of states as unitary actors, governmental representatives, or state authorities more generally, for instance) his conceptualisation

allows for the inclusion of non-state entities in the picture, provided that they are capable of some forms of independent agency in the international system. Such openness is likely derived from the heuristic necessity to accommodate under the frame of FPA also the international agency of supranational entities, such as the European Commission, something that the author has been pioneering (Hill 1996, XI). However, it also permits considering that national and transnational NGOs, social movements and business enterprises can both have their distinct foreign policy agency and affect the choices and actions of a given state. Considering the increased ‘pluralism’ that substantially characterises the contemporary system of international relations, especially when it comes to promotion and protection of human rights, this openness is thus a key to capture under the conceptual umbrella of foreign policy, the important function played by transnational or global civil society (Anheier et al. 2003; Shafir and Brysk 2005; Glasius and Lettinga 2016). In fact, civil society organisations have frequently proven to be able to bring inputs, opportunities, and even constraints to a country’s foreign policy-making either from a polarised and dichotomic perspective or from a more cooperative and, eventually, integrative one (Jünemann 2003, 88). With regard to the main subject of this book, human rights advocates and advocacy groups can indeed ‘serve as both pressure groups, sources of information, and expertise, and sometimes they can implement principled programs internationally’ (Brysk 2009, 38; see also Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Connected with this consideration, is the use of the adjective ‘official’ in Hill’s definition. On the one hand, this helps to draw the line between the actual outcome of the governing machinery of the actor considered and what could result from one of the many types of international/transnational transactions that happen daily between two or more entities in different states (Hill 2016, 5). On the other hand, the use of this terminology (instead of, for instance, the government’s external relations) also reminds the analyst that foreign policy-making results from multiple sources and inputs and not just from those institutions / bodies / individuals who are formally attributed foreign policy prerogatives, that is, official policy-making is not only about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To be sure, recognising this point does not detract from the central role that this Ministry and its head and personnel play in the majority of nation states, Italy included. In fact, a large part of the primary data analysed in this book is collected from the agency of ministers, deputy ministers, under-secretaries and other officials who succeeded at the *Farnesina* during the period under analysis (1991–2020). At the same time, however, also other actors contributing to foreign policy-making can and are to be considered in the effort to grasp the complex foreign policy-making endeavour of

the country. In the specific niche that this book analyses with regard to Italy, agents who contribute to shaping the ‘official external relations’ include the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, other ministries (with attributions on sectors such as defence, interior and health), single members of Parliament (especially within parliamentary foreign affairs committees), civil society representatives, experts and academics, who can cooperate, be auditioned or consulted by ruling authorities and parliamentary bodies in the framework of decision-making processes. From this perspective, it is worth recalling that Italy has a long tradition of effective synergy among these diverse actors when it comes to humanitarian issues and connected objectives, with a remarkable practice of ‘revolving doors’ between civil society and government (Marchetti 2018).

Another fundamental aspect of foreign policy that Hill’s definition helps reveal is the expected continuity and predictability of foreign policy as a process, an aspect that is also captured by other conceptual approaches in political science, such as ‘path dependency’, which focuses on the role of ‘critical junctures, increased returns and policy legacies that are produced and reproduced by a variety of causal mechanisms’ (Leithner and Libby 2017). Eventually, drawing on linguistic terminology, foreign policy is ‘uncountable’. It encompasses an indefinite cumulation of policy initiatives in different fields (Hill’s ‘sum of official external relations’) which independent actors define and advance toward the exterior, blurring the boundaries between them. This outcome is also the result of the fact that a certain coherence towards the outside world is both sought by foreign policy actors and expected by their peers in the international system also to avoid the risk of being perceived as an unreliable and thus irrelevant partner.

This does not mean that state leaders, especially those with key ruling positions, have no room to manoeuvre or cannot alter at all the path and direction of a country’s foreign policy. Prominent foreign policy scholars such as Hermann (1990), Carlsanaes (1993), Gustavsson (1999), and Breuning (2011), to name just a few, have conceptually and empirically elaborated on specific scenarios and internal and external constraints and opportunities that can contribute to creating ‘critical junctures’ that could shape, favour, or accelerate fundamental changes in the behaviour and orientation of foreign policy of a state (Diodato and Niglia 2017). At the same time, although the emergence and rise to power of domestic leaderships with radically different understandings of the country’s posturing in the international system and the existence of internal/international opportunities are among the factors that can contribute incepting a process of foreign policy change, even in the presence of these factors such outcome is not granted. In particular, it is unlikely that the existence

of few, even if radically different, decisions over a limited period substantially alters the fundamental pillars that shape the official sum of a country's external relations. This is particularly true for those countries that have managed to develop what scholars refer to as 'institutional memory', which can be especially accumulated from the long careers of civil servants within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hill 2003; Hardt 2018; de Perini 2021). As will be further elaborated in the next chapter, the existence of such 'institutional memory' is particularly prominent in Italy, where officials within the *Farnesina* have frequently been attributed with the fundamental agency behind key foreign policy decisions (Romano 2006; Croci and Lucarelli 2020).

These considerations, which privilege analysts' attention for a *longue durée* approach (Brighi 2006), also apply to the research design of this book. As discussed in the Introduction, this study considers the early 1990s as a turning point, where a set of radical international and domestic changes (namely the impact of the end of the Cold War on international order and the collapse of the 'First Republic') put Italy on a new and more assertive path in foreign policy (Romano 2009). It then analyses the place of human rights as part and parcel of what, despite occasional diversions – mostly in the style of succeeding policy-makers from different positions of the ideological spectrum (Croci 2008; Monteleone 2021) -, is substantially understood and approached as an overall continuous and predictable foreign policy orientation of the country. On the contrary, the dramatic events of the early 2020s (in particular the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine) are excluded from the analysis, as they could represent, in fact, another critical juncture and thus produce a substantial change in the country's international orientation compared to the past three decades.

A crucial feature of foreign policy that, different from above, does not stand out from Hill's insightful definition, but has already been partly introduced in the above discussion, is the 'shifting boundary' between domestic politics and international relations. Scholars increasingly recognise this boundary 'at the heart of foreign policy, empirically, conceptually, and theoretically' (Brighi 2013, 1; see also Alden and Aran 2012, 1, and Hill 2016), implying that domestic and international factors continually interact (rather than integrate) in shaping the foreign policy decisions and actions of a country (Isernia and Longo 2017). These considerations substantiate and further qualify the argumentation of the 'two-level game' advanced by Putnam (1988, 434) according to which 'national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimising the adverse consequences of

foreign developments' (see also, with specific reference to the two-level game in human rights matters, Forsythe 2000b, 1).

While understanding foreign policy as a 'boundary activity' or from a 'two-level game' perspective requires considering a wide range of both external and internal factors and constraints and their points of interaction as the fundamental *explanans* (explanatory variable) for related decision-making outputs, the core function (and expectation) of foreign policy to protect the national interest should not be underestimated. James Rousenau (1969, 54), among the most prolific thinkers in FPA theory-building, made this point very clear when he stressed that foreign policy actions are initiated 'with a view to either preventing the object [of an action] from hindering the satisfaction of polity needs and wants, or obtaining resources from it that will facilitate satisfaction of polity needs'.

The general structure of the system of international relations has evolved further since Rousenau's definition. Interconnected challenges and opportunities, including growing interdependences, the transnationalisation of social relationships and structures, the penetration of global capitalism, and the impressive growth of the global human rights regime itself (Mascia and Papisca 2015) – have increasingly affected states' traditional capacities to control their traditional policies (Twiss 2004; Sklair 2009) and differentiated their objectives but the inner rational of foreign policy resist these changes. As David Forsythe (2000, 1) aptly puts it:

'We live in an era in which there is much discourse about the demise of the state and the anachronism of state sovereignty. We chart the growth over time of inter-governmental organizations [...]. We note the proliferation of private human rights groups, some of which are transnational in membership and scope of action. It has become commonplace to note the power and presumed independence of multinational or transnational corporations. The independent communications media are a factor of considerable importance. But the state remains central to all such developments'.

Therefore, although the role of states has been sensibly reduced from these global processes and is increasingly challenged by other types of international actors, constraints, and opportunities, the underlying rationale of their foreign policy continues to be inward looking. On the one hand, substantial efforts to contribute addressing a number of *milieu goals* (Wolfers 1962) – such as the protection of the environment and global commons, the promotion of human-based and forms of sustainable development to reduce social and international inequalities, efforts to promote a more peaceful and stable world – are taking the lead in the presentation of foreign policy-objectives by a wide range of independent

actors playing different roles in the international system. These actors thus contribute shaping and orienting the approach of other members of the international community and provide important windows of opportunity to join processes of international socialisation and cooperation on these commonly shared concerns (Brysk 2009, 19). External constraints and opportunities thus help to guide foreign policy action in specific contingent periods.

On the other hand, the protection of the national interest, however this is understood and constructed (see sections below), set the boundary within which available foreign policy trajectories and externally-prompted diversions can be accepted and advanced by a state. Considering what foreign policy analysts present as the most common expectations of foreign policy, indeed, these remain primarily defined in terms of their 'possession' goals rather than 'milieu' goals, that is of those objectives aiming at the enhancement or preservation of one or more of the things to which a nation attaches value (Wolfers 1962). Indeed, despite policy rhetoric and a wealth of complementary cooperation initiatives, most independent actors, including 'normative power Europe' (Manners 2002), expect their foreign policies to *primarily* safeguard their independence, territorial integrity, and social peace against external aggressions, ensure and advance domestic prosperity, protect their own citizens abroad (and not the nationals of third countries or all people in the world), defend the cultural, artistic, and traditional elements that contribute making up the national identity of a country⁷, and ensuring an international order which allows countries and their citizens to experience the necessary stability to achieve such goals (Hill 2016, 51–55).

Incidentally, this latter expectation/purpose of foreign policy recalls and may well include one of the core missions of the global human rights regime as provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 – the cornerstone of the current global human rights regime and the most advanced example of *consensus omnium gentium* on a specific value system (Bobbio 1997). Article 28 of the Universal Declaration sets forth that 'everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized'. Therefore, in principle, there is some overlap between the universal ambition of the global human rights movement and the inward expectations of states' foreign policy, because the achievement of all human rights for all would guarantee international stability and peace. As the next sections

⁷ See, for instance, the debate on cultural diplomacy and soft power (Cummins 2003; Nye 2004; Topić and Rodin 2012; Goff 2013).

elaborate, however, the possibility and extent to which this overlapping is possible is primarily determined by how the national interest and self-image of the actor considered are constructed and enacted between policy-makers' moral, material and ideational considerations.

2. Why Human Rights in Foreign Policy?

In light of the above considerations, the reason for the choice of enhancing human rights in foreign policy-making is neither intuitive nor straightforward. As already stressed, a significant dimension of the 'human rights component' of a country's foreign policy is constituted by the 'dialogue' between national authorities and international human rights institutions and monitoring mechanisms. As most international undertakings, the international human rights regime is a complex 'patchwork enterprise composed of many different types and levels of monitoring, information, sanctions, adjudication, and interventions' (Brysk 2009, 221). However, this part of the puzzle is relatively unproblematic from the conceptual angle of observation adopted by this study. The human rights language periodically spoken by foreign policy-makers and connected institutionalised action is, as mentioned, part of the international obligations agreed by that country. In other words, there is no necessary autonomous initiative in this dimension, since 'all states, regardless of national history and mythology, are compelled to confront the international law and diplomacy of human rights' (Forsythe 2000b, 2).

For instance, considering the global UN human rights regime, Figure 1 shows that all countries in the world (except Bhutan, Niue, Palau, Tonga

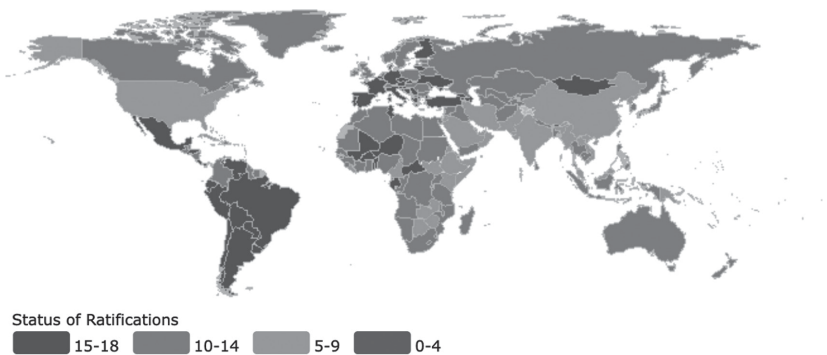


Figure 1: Ratification of 18 International Human Rights Treaties. Source: UNOHCHR interactive dashboard (<https://indicators.ohchr.org/>, accessed: 22/03/2022).

and Tuvalu) have accepted at least one-third of international human rights treaties currently in force (human rights covenants, thematic conventions, optional protocols). Their governments have therefore formally accepted an international obligation to (as a minimum) periodically report on the country's performance on human rights provisions of the treaties they have ratified and to undergo the evaluation of the international expert committees established by each of these treaties (and therefore known as 'Treaty Bodies'). Similar obligations apply regionally for most states, which have accepted the human rights legal instruments established by either the CoE, the OAS, the AU, or the AL. Moreover, since 2008 all states have been under general peer review/assessment for their overall human rights situation every 5 years in the context of the UPR mechanism (see Chapter 4) and are expected to participate actively therein. Furthermore, they may receive visits and communications from thematic Special Procedures established within the UN Human Rights Council and other experts with human rights-sensitive mandates at the international and regional levels.

There are important considerations to be made about how pro-actively and consistently this dialogue is undertaken by national authorities, and how internal commitment matches with external one. These will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 with regard to the Italian case. However, the combination of international law obligations and connected social norms explains quite plainly why in the framework of this 'institutional dialogue' references to human rights can occasionally or periodically appear and resurface in the foreign policy discourse and practice of most states, even those that politically oppose or are sceptical about human rights.

The situation becomes more intriguing when it comes to explaining the parallel presence of a distinct human rights 'initiative' in the international agency of a country. As discussed in the Introduction, this initiative may be observed both multilaterally, through the existence of a particularly entrepreneurial commitment in the above-mentioned institutional frameworks (marked by proposals of new common initiatives, standards and mechanisms) and bilaterally, by both enhancing cooperation on these matters or using conditionality tools to push third countries to reform, democratise or simply to stop violating the fundamental rights of their own citizens.

In both these dimensions, human rights initiatives may have moral and material consequences, both in positive and in negative terms. In the positive, such initiatives may contribute to ameliorating global conditions and make the world more just, inclusive and safer, but also enhancing economic gains for the country, especially if the assumption

that rights-protective regimes are, generally speaking, more peaceful or better trading partners is accepted (see Donnelly and Whelan 2020). At the same time, human rights initiatives can create new international burdens and constraints for states which, in the most optimistic scenario, already struggle to guarantee a sufficient level of fundamental rights and freedoms enjoyment within their jurisdictions. Moreover, by means of ‘excessively grand rhetoric’ (Donnelly 2000), states can create new expectations both among peers and global civil society which could eventually result in outcomes that are detrimental to their credibility (on the ‘rhetoric performance’ gap in foreign policy, see Hill 1993; Tocci 2005; Panebianco 2006; Gordon 2010). Furthermore, as Baehr and Castermans-Holleman (2004, 2) point out:

‘governments that want to promote human rights abroad do not set themselves an easy task. They have to face difficult choices of policies and priorities. Raising human rights issues may lead to intensive discussions and even tensions with other countries’.

However, Donnelly and Wheelan (2020) stress that today ‘it is largely uncontroversial, and perhaps even expected, for states to pursue human rights objectives in their bilateral and multilateral foreign policies’. Why, then, would a country raise the global stakes in a policy area which risks causing further policy difficulties and tensions? Can the achievement of moral objectives edge out possible material disadvantages? Moreover, if foreign policy is primarily about protecting the national interest, how do proactive policy initiatives directed to improve the overall recognition and monitoring of human rights and the sanctioning of their violations contribute to protecting the national interests and connected foreign policy expectations?

Diverse conceptual standpoints provide different answers to these questions. From the viewpoint of the realist camp, especially neorealist elaborations, this is not a concern at all. Indeed, from such a conceptual perspective, the answers to these questions are generally shaped by an understanding of the situation that plays down any significant weight for human rights in foreign policy. To strengthen national power, national interest, defined by these scholars in terms of power and security, should be the key concept in a country’s foreign policy (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004, 18) together with a proper emphasis on the unwillingness of states to sacrifice material interests (Donnelly 2000). However, in general terms, for realist approaches, which broadly understand states as unitary rational actors existing in a ‘self-help’ system and concerned primarily with surviving (Waltz 1979), human rights could be well introduced in the jargon of state declaratory politics and international

cooperation. However, if push comes to shove, they are treated as ‘just fiction’, with no actual weight in affecting or constraining decision-making (Forsythe 2018a). The inclusion of human rights in diplomacy might thus be understood as a merely cosmetic addition, but, eventually, as the ultra realist former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger himself made very clear, ‘human rights are not appropriate in a context of foreign policy’ (quoted in Keys 2010).

Even if, confronted by the large evidence of existing human rights considerations by the most powerful countries, these approaches accept to recognise some significant political motivation for integrating human rights, this is normally explained in an extremely instrumental fashion. In the most open realist theorisation, indeed, human rights can be a useful tool if they enhance the relative power of the state. However, since the political and conflictive nature of the policies defined to advance human rights and other ethical principles may lead to a deterioration of international relations (Hoffman 1981), in the moment in which human rights work against the state’s vital security interests, they must be abandoned (Hanson and Dunne 2016).

Although one may eventually agree on the claim that, more and more, ‘the world wants you to think like a realist’ (Walt 2018), it is important to stress that, as Donnelly (2000, 311) suggests, some states ‘simply do not define their national interests entirely in terms of power, or even material interests’ and sometimes they can ‘find it important to stand up for what they value, independent of any other pressures or expected impact, at home or abroad’. Therefore, the image of the international system that scholars belonging to the realist camp define is probably too simplified and eventually insufficient to explain the high level of institutionalisation and cooperation that the gradual establishment of global and regional human rights regimes has been producing among the members of the international community as well the many remarkable successes that these developments have achieved in spite of many failures and contradictions (Petrasek 2011; Brysk 2018; Forsythe 2018b).

On the other side of the pond, the liberal camp, besides traditionally being the main antagonist thinking to realism in IR, is also among the theoretical standpoints which provide the most straightforward argumentation in favour of human rights in international politics and foreign policy. Liberals stress the centrality of fundamental individual rights in international relations together with other cosmopolitan values such as democracy, the rule of law and good governance. Morality is important in international relations, and it is rational for states to pursue peace and stability by stimulating cooperation among states, especially using international law as a key tool (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004,

20). Despite criticism of being utopian, pragmatic liberal thinkers have increasingly highlighted the need for a politics of liberalism in a realist world, based on the consideration that ‘human dignity itself and human rights as a means to that end are contested constructs whose meaning must be established in a never-ceasing process of moral, political, and legal debate and review’ (Forsythe 2018a, 368). Liberal thinkers consider two main responses to achieve this goal: trying to extend the liberal ‘zone’, reducing the number of authoritarian states in the world and expanding that of liberal democracies; and an effort ‘to strengthen international institutions in the expectation that they can alter the incentives of member states in ways that enhance respect for human rights and human dignity’ (Hanson and Dunne 2016).

The underlying explanation these scholars provide of the advancement of human rights in foreign policy eventually revolves around the argument that it is in the national interest of liberal democracies to export their norms and values, including human rights norms (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004, 3). And indeed, as Donnelly and Whelan (2020) note, in liberal democratic countries the key question is not whether human rights form parts of foreign policy, but more specific ones, such as what should be included in a country’s human rights foreign policy, where should it be pursued, and how aggressively.

However, making human rights commitment exclusive to the agency of liberal democracies and to liberal thinking can become problematic and ultimately detrimental to the overall success of the global human rights movement and its promise of universalism. Indeed, it is precisely on that assumption that the most assertive criticism and scepticism toward global human rights development have been voiced, from either a cultural relativist or imperialist/post-colonialist perspective (Mutua 2001; ; Langlois 2007; Hopgood 2013; Posner 2014). Furthermore, one has to acknowledge that also countries which are distant from the liberal democracy model, such as Iran, India, Costa Rica or Japan have considered their own understandings of universal human rights in foreign policy (Banerjee 2000; Karabell 2000; Yokota and Aoi, 2000; Brysk 2009; Forsythe 2018a, b).

Following Baehr and Castermans-Holleman (2004, 20) in including liberals and neoliberals among idealist thinkers who argue that moral values play a role in international society, several other approaches that have been grouped under the ‘paradigm of structural transformation’ (*paradigma del mutamento strutturale* in Papisca and Mascia 2015) provide additional insights into this picture. Many scholars, indeed, have claimed the centrality of human rights in the global political and legal order which emerged following the end of the Second World War as a

determinant of ongoing developments, on which a significant part of the international community and society has embarked since then. These include both the promotion of paths towards ‘international democracy’ (Held 1995; Falk 1998; Papisca 2009) also from a multilevel governance perspective, privileging subsidiarity-based explanations and the growing international role of subnational actors (Bekemans 2007; Papisca 2011; Oomen et al. 2016), and the growth of transnational civil society and related forms of ‘cosmopolitan governance’ (Falk 1995; Cox 1999; Mascia 2012). Most of these approaches are in large part ‘prescriptive’; that is, they combine empirical observation and moral and normative assumptions to conceptualise what human rights *ought to be* in international politics and global governance. They are often focused on how non-traditional actors can complement, improve and, to a certain extent, replace the role of national governments when the present and future sustainability of international relations are considered. Therefore, these scholars do not have specific concerns – nor have any reason to show it – about the conundrum of human rights in foreign policy, because the role of a state agency is bypassed in most of their analyses. Nevertheless, some of their assumptions and prescriptions productively combine with and flow into the reasoning of those constructivist thinkers that have contributed to human rights scholarships and foreign policy specifically.

For constructivist scholars, indeed, there is no necessary tension between states’ main interests and the moral principles associated with human rights. A constructivist theory of foreign policy can help understand ‘how cosmopolitan political cultures like human rights values make sense – and how such cultures are learned by states’ (Brysk 2009, 31). Indeed, according to this standpoint, states would pursue human rights goals in foreign policy for reasons related to identity and status, while interests are understood as a product of the identity and values of a state or region (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). What an actor does externally replicates in large part what an actor is. From a constructivist viewpoint, therefore, we should expect rights protecting states at home to both promote human rights abroad (Hanson and Dunne 2016, 65) and entertain exchanges and coalitions with other actors, namely civil society organisations and social movements, to achieve such goals (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998).

The ‘spiral model’ proposed and updated by Risse et al. (2007) is a formidable application of these conceptual tenets. The model highlights the ideational bases through which some states join forces with other actors from social movements and broader civil society to activate processes of international socialisations in norm-violating countries. Also building on Keck and Sikkink’s seminal work (1998) on transnational advocacy

networks in international politics, this model identifies the successive steps through which domestic groups in a repressive state can manage to bypass (via a series of ‘boomerang throws’) their state and directly search for international allies to try to exert pressure on their states from outside. The model thus identifies a sequence of causal mechanisms through which internationally established norms can gradually affect domestic structural change and improve state international socialisation on human rights matters through the activities of ‘principled-issue networks’ (or ‘advocacy networks’), functionally linking domestic NGOs, transnationally operating INGOs, international institutions and national governments (Risse and Sikink 2007, 20). Eventually, as Brysk (2009, 4) points out, while helping to understand human rights in foreign policy as a constructive form of identity politics, constructivist approaches help explaining why, ‘even in a world of security dilemmas, some societies will come to see the linkage between their long-term interest and the common good’ and at some times and places, states can overcome ‘their bounded origins as sovereign security managers’.

As shown in the previous paragraphs, there are several relevant insights that can be drawn from the work of IR scholars to explain the general relevance of international human rights in current international affairs. Very few of these contributions (which are themselves a minority in human rights scholarship, especially if compared to the huge literature on the matter produced by international legal scholars or philosophers of law, for instance), however, have taken up the challenge of comprehensively conceptualising the complex rationale which brings human rights in foreign policy-making, namely of explaining in more detail how the fundamental but contested interplay between moral, material and ideational factors work in this specific niche of international politics. The next section explores the insights coming from this ultra-specialised strand of the human rights literature, loosely situated between the liberal and constructivist camps, also with a view to discussing what an entrepreneurial promotion of human rights in bilateral and multilateral contexts can reveal about the broader foreign policy approach and international status of these countries.

3. Global Good Samaritans or Constantly Weighing among Competing Priorities?

A core point in the reflection on the relationship between human rights promotion abroad and the pursuit of national interest is that, although it might be disturbing from the moral standpoint of a human rights advocate, national foreign policies are ‘supposed to treat the interests of nationals and foreigners differently’ (Donnelly 2000, 325). In fact, the

first dimension of the ‘human rights component’ of foreign policy, the ‘institutional dialogue’- actually hinges on the promotion of the rights and dignity of one nation’s own citizens, or of individuals under that same state’s jurisdiction. By contrast, the remaining part of such component, the two dimensions which are primarily investigated in this chapter, moves that concern beyond. Both ‘bilateral emphasis’ and ‘multilateral initiative’ in foreign policy are primarily tasked with improving the situation of third countries’ nationals, or further improving the promotion and respect for cosmopolitan values, which should apply universally, domestically and abroad. From this perspective, as Baehr and Castermans-Holleman (2004, 130) explain, the decision to make human rights a constituent element of foreign policy confronts decision-makers with several dilemmas which very often relate to the different priority that nationals and foreigners play in defining general foreign policy orientations, including the possible implications on security and economic cooperation with the countries toward which these decisions are directed.

Therefore, paraphrasing Brysk (2009, 31) in an effort to narrow down one of the core questions raised at the beginning of the previous section, why should some states decide to risk sacrificing their primary national interests to (also) help strangers? Regardless of the different conceptual approach adopted, the common answer given by scholars to this question is roughly the same: in fact, these states do not sacrifice anything because enhancing human rights is in their interest. There are some significant shades, however, in explaining what this claim implies that are worth investigating in more detail.

First, recognising explicitly the link between human rights and national interest does not mean claiming that human rights are or can be the cornerstone of a country’s existential needs, nor does it suggest that the national interest of any state may be exhausted in human rights objectives. There is a wide agreement that no government can afford to pay attention only to human rights in its foreign policy (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman, 67), and that no state places human rights at the top of its agenda and ‘in few [agendas] are international human rights even near the top’ (Donnelly 2000, 311).

However, the national interest is not monolithic. It might be understood as such if the minimalist viewpoint of realists is adopted. Otherwise, it should be conceived as the sum (or the integration) of a wide range of diverse sub-interests and priorities of different types and nature, including security concerns, economic priorities, and ‘other interests’ (Donnelly and Wheelan 2020). The latter is intended as a loose category that can range from the promotion of one country’s culture and heritage to the preservation of the environment, from health management to controlling the

outputs of technological transfer. The combination of interests and related sub-interests change from state to state and depends on a series of factors which are connected to history, strategic and contingent needs, resources, culture and identity, and the institutional order. Before being defended through foreign policy, therefore, the national interest must be defined by policy-makers (Brysk 2009, 33), who, however, are constrained by international expectations, public opinion and domestic pressures (Forsythe 2000b). The type of human rights promotion which we can observe in foreign policy depends, therefore, on the overall role and weight that, all these factors considered, human rights are eventually given in the definition of the national interest.

Two conceptually distinct but eventually converging explanations of this process of definition of the national interest are particularly helpful in discussing this assumption. Alison Brysk imaginatively coined the metaphor of ‘Global Good Samaritan’ to define states committed to the promotion of human rights that, similar to the biblical parable, ‘love their neighbours as themselves’. According to her argument, some countries identify national interests with the global one (Brysk 2009, 4). While other studies have employed the same metaphor to explore broader areas of international humanitarian agency (Lyon 2009), the picture offered by Brysk is much more specific, because it provides an original, comprehensive and empirically tested framework to address the peculiar human rights question. The author contends that these countries, these ‘global good citizens’ that promote ‘humanitarian internationalism’ (Brysk 2009, 5), see ‘the blood, treasure, and political capital they contribute to the international human rights regime as an investment, not a loss’. Supposed human rights-loving countries are therefore not masochists, sacrificed at the altar of the promotion of cosmopolitan values. They do not decide to put their own existence, integrity and the lives of their citizens in danger for the sake of simply advancing moral principles they value. On the contrary, they are pursuing their national interest, but differently from other countries which may show a less committed approach to human rights, they have a different, broader, and longer-term vision of what their national interest is about: ‘Global good citizens have reconstructed their national identity in accordance with universalist norms, roles, and expectations’ (Brysk 2009, 31–32).

Although the idea, conceptual design, and empirical analysis exposed by Brysk’s comparative analysis are solid and provide brilliant insights to approach this controversial and under-researched field of inquiry, some could be more critical of the ‘indulgent’ approach that appears to underlie her conclusions, especially if one considers that the empirical analysis

of her carefully selected case studies⁸ shows the presence of inconsistency, instrumental choice, and possible selectivity of these states while championing human rights internationally. As Brysk admits, indeed, even though they suffer serious contradictions in at least one major policy area' (idem, 20), 'many global Good Samaritans make positive contributions overall and their example can provide an incentive for other countries' (idem, 4). To what extent can these contradictions be tolerated without altering the special standing and role attributed to these countries? How instrumental and inconsistent a committed country should be to instead be understood, to keep the Biblical context but changing parable as a Global Pharisee?

Also, considering these open questions, the explanation advanced by Jack Donnelly and his colleagues of the relationship between human rights and foreign policy represents a timely complement to this analytical perspective. According to this scholar, the development of global and regional regimes for human rights has gradually brought about a general 'fundamental redefinition of national interest' (Donnelly and Wheelan 2020). Among other effects, the process has made it absolutely plausible for all states, not just liberal democracies, to consider human rights as part of their national interest, within the 'other interests' package, which can complement the existential security and economic interests that all states pursue. This implies that why, when and how consistently human rights are advanced in foreign policy depend on how human rights are valued in relation to the other priorities and objectives and balanced with these in the process of definition of the broader national interest. Therefore, a foreign policy of human rights is 'a choice among priorities', which is subject to a continuous weighing process (see also Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004, 66–67). Such choice is often problematic, because the varied interests and sub-interests considered by a state have comparatively different weights and regularly conflict against one another (Donnelly and Whelan 2020).

This process of continuous balancing and weighing, Donnelly argues, can reasonably appear disquieting when observed from a moralist perspective, such as the one which would be adopted by human rights activists. The evidence of frequent trade-offs of human rights demands with other material economic or security objectives may be difficult to accept. However, it is less so if these trade-offs are observed from the standpoint of national foreign policy. Policy-makers, indeed, are 'neither

⁸ States considered by Brysk's comparative analysis are Canada, Sweden, The Netherlands, Costa Rica, Japan and South Africa.

mechanical Machiavellians nor blind idealists; they seek to rationally maximize values and project identities' (Brysk 2009, 32). In a nutshell:

'Moralists may see the demands of human rights as categorical. Foreign policy decision-makers, though, are not independent moral actors. Their job is not to realize personal, national, or global moral values but to pursue the national interest of their country. They are officeholders, with professional and ethical responsibilities to discharge the duties of their office' (Donnelly and Whelan 2020).

'Moral perfectionism', to make it brief, 'is an inappropriate standard for foreign policy' (Donnelly 2000) since difficult choices must be made between effectiveness, credibility, and the necessity of looking for compromises between material and moral objectives which claim values (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004, 87).

The need to balance between moral and material values, objectives and interests can thus appropriately justify, from a national foreign policy perspective, both trade-offs and possible inconsistencies and double standards in the way a government advance human rights internationally. When assessing a policy decision concerning human rights, in substance, all states' interests and their relative weights for the national interest need to be considered, not only the specific human rights situation (Donnelly 2000; Donnelly and Whelan 2020).

According to this logic, it would be generally defensible for a state to show different levels of aggressiveness in advancing human rights towards two similar countries that commit comparable human rights violations if one of the two countries, for instance, hosts a large community of the sending states' nationals which could be negatively affected by such pressures as a form of retaliation. In this hypothetical scenario, there would be indeed a dramatic competition between two different priorities to which the state should appropriately assign different values (protecting its nationals abroad and promoting the rights of foreigners in a third country) and weigh among these when a decision is taken. A clear double standard in the foreign policy of the acting country could be observed neatly as far as the human rights component is concerned, but if one calculates all components and relative values that a foreign-policy maker must consider, the situation takes on a different perspective. This also contributes substantiating why a country could eventually be considered a Global Good Samaritan despite suffering serious contradictions when behaving in according to the global moral values it has committed to.

Selectivity – that is, the choice of rights on which a government focuses its human rights policy or the selection of countries on which one may want to concentrate (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004,

64) – is another connected problem, a form of inconsistency, which can visibly divert a country's commitment to human rights from the linchpin of universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated human rights. In particular, if indivisibility is understood as the idea that no right is secure unless all rights are secure, and interdependence/interrelatedness as the idea that no person's rights are secure unless all people's rights are secure (Ackerly 2016, 38), favouring some rights and beneficiaries over others (or even at the expense of others) can contribute to the establishment of practical hierarchies among diverse human rights and vulnerable people, which can eventually weaken the credibility of the entire process. Still, from the perspective of national foreign policy-making, even selectivity, which can be explained too by the interplay of moral and material interests (Brysk 2009, 33), might be a defensible choice based on the weighing among priorities.

Recognising the reasons behind what can often appear simply as an inconsistent behaviour, as, otherwise, 'appropriate' or 'justifiable' from a national foreign policy perspective does not reduce the great relevance of civil society advocacy or the commitment of individual leaders, which can greatly contribute to pushing human rights concerns to the top of the state's agenda, and thus help human rights win more frequently when priorities and interests compete with each other in foreign policy-making. While efforts in that direction can be spent and should be expected from these domestic actors and other members of the international community, only a behaviour that systematically subordinates human rights objectives that cannot reasonably be justified in terms of previously established foreign policy priorities brings to an unjustifiable sacrifice of human rights interests (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). Such behaviour allows revealing a presumed human rights-loving state, a self-proclaimed 'Global Good Samaritan', as hypocritical. Those states speak human rights language *only* instrumentally to pursue international status and reputation or to protect from international criticism, without any substantive moral consideration behind it.

4. National Role Conceptions and the 'Human Rights Role-Set'

In general, the conceptual contributions discussed above have great merit in uncovering the complex interaction between moral and material priorities in shaping national interests, thus identifying a range of possible explanations for the state's agency in support of cosmopolitan values and human rights *in primis*. In current international affairs and decision-making processes, however, the distinction between moral and material interests is less neat and occasionally blurs, which makes it

difficult to understand the specific weight actually given to each of these factors. Sometimes, excluding possible but rare systematic hypocritical behaviour, states decide to protect human rights out of a more genuine and well-rooted sense of empathy or 'for an intrinsic interest in living in a more just world' (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). However, the possibility of enacting this sense of empathy is conditional on a number of material considerations as well as international and domestic factors which constrain the margin of action for states and their leaders.

If it is accepted that the existence of principled foreign policies empirically defies the realist prediction of unimpeded pursuit of national interest as security and power only, and suggests the importance of considering the role of ideas, identities, and roles as a contribution to influence state decisions, any approach which does tackle the matter from a non-realist viewpoint will understand the national interest and its pursuit also a question of identity. From this perspective 'national identity, like personal identity, is significantly a matter of ideals and aspirations. The national interest is a matter of what a state values, which is determined in part by how that state sees itself, both nationally and internationally' (Donnelly 2000).

The construction of domestic and international identities is therefore bidirectional and significantly shaped by diverse individual and collective perceptions which eventually affect foreign policy decision-making. There are diverse perspectives to address this construction, and to consider the presence of human rights-related perceptions as part of this identity-building process. Forsythe (2000, 2), for instance, employs the concept of 'self-image', which almost all states harbour, and affects attention to human rights, both at home and abroad: 'national self-image may be part and parcel of a nation's political culture – the sum total of a people's attitudes toward political values and processes'.

At the same time, when the claim that foreign policy is largely about how a state sees itself, the world around it, and its place in that world (Donnelly and Whelan 2020) is accepted, and when one considers that human rights scholars have frequently referred to 'roles', 'aspirations' and 'national perceptions' in their accounts of foreign policy (see, for instance, Forsythe 2000b; Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004, 18; Brysk 2009, 39; Allendoerfer 2017, 429), it is surprising that explanatory frameworks based on 'role theory' have not been systematically developed or applied to investigations in this specific subject matter. Considering how national elites conceive the international orientation of their countries and how such orientations are perceived, constructed and achieved domestically and ascribed internationally, which is at the core of role theory applications to FPA (Thies 2010), constitutes a worthy complement to the

above debates. As it will be elaborated in the remaining paragraphs of this chapter, focusing on NRCs allows both exposing the sources underlying the interplay between material and moral objectives in shaping a country's policy-making, and understanding how the latter is eventually framed or contested between domestic and international expectations.

Since K. J. Holsti's (1970) seminal article, sociological role theory and FPA have been intermittent companions in IR scholarship. Their combination has been understood as a 'uniquely suited approach' to address the interaction between agent and structure in international relations (Thies and Breuning 2012) and a contribution to get 'to the bottom of how leaders' conceptions of their country's place in the world interact with both ideational and material constraints from outside of its borders' (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 4). The concept of NRC, the underlying element within this conceptual framework, encompasses both an 'actor's own consideration of its place, position and appropriate behaviour vis-à-vis others in a given social environment' (the 'ego' part of the role), and the expectations of role prescriptions of other actors (the 'alter' part of the role), 'as signalled through language and action' (Bengtsson and Elgstrom 2012, 94). It follows that, to be enacted (or performed) through a country's foreign policy, NRCs must simultaneously resonate with domestic audiences and be credible in the state's relations with other international actors, although the way in which national decision-makers try to bridge such simultaneous pressures on multiple levels is part of an ongoing debate (Breuning 2011; Isernia and Longo 2017). Depending on the extent to which these different pressures affect the identity and status of an actor, the role of a country in the international system can be achieved, ascribed or prescribed, as mentioned above, or be the result of a combination of these multiple role shaping processes (Thies 2010).

NRCs are generally expressed through themes that emerge out of political discourse. They represent policy-makers' own definitions of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules, and functions, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system (Holsti 1970, 245–246). As such, therefore, their identification and analysis allow outlining the scope of foreign policy behaviours that decision-makers can imagine and perceive as appropriate for their states to undertake (Breuning 2011, 23). Role theory is *per se* a 'niche approach' in FPA, and, as mentioned, has hardly been used to explore in depth the reasons for including human rights in foreign policy study (as exceptions to this trend, see Cofelice 2017; de Perini 2021). The approach, however, offers a number of promising interstices to explore this specific subject matter.

As Breuning (2011, 26) points out, the NRC framework 'seeks to understand how actors fashion their role in the international system,

navigating between domestic sources of identity and/or cultural heritage, taking advantage of the material resources at their disposal, circumnavigating as best as possible the obstacles imposed by their position in the international structure'. These sources match significantly with the various material and moral constraints and stimuli that have been considered essential to understand the complex relations between foreign policy and human rights in the discussion above. Accordingly, identifying specific NRCs for a country (or a 'role-set', i.e., a specific combination of NRCs that an actor possesses in its international social life – see Whener 2020) may help grasp the cultural, ideational or material considerations that are at the bottom of related choices, partly bypassing the rigid material/moral dichotomy which was prioritised to discuss the delicate and controversial inclusion of human rights in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy.

The NRC framework is complex and multidimensional. It traditionally deals with general political orientations of one or more countries in the international system. The focus has also been placed on specific aspects or patterns affecting role-sets, including role conflict between ego and alter conceptions (Harnisch et al. 2011) and role contestation within the same nation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2012, 2016). Although human rights issues have rarely been considered by these scholars, it is possible to draw on existing role-theoretical FPA literature some NRCs whose themes can be fruitfully associated to international behaviours supportive of expanding human rights.

The first reference remains Holsti's seminal article in which the author identifies and substantiates 17 different NRCs, and arranges them across a continuum 'reflecting the degree of passivity or activity in foreign policy that the role conceptions seem to imply' (Holsti 1970, 260). Over time, often focusing on specific countries' peculiarities, scholars have applied and revised this initial list, occasionally adding new roles and discarding others that had become archaic (see, for example, the work of Oppermann 2012; Caffarena and Gabusi 2017; Thies and Whener 2020; Gurol and Starkmann 2021). Consistent with this scattered development, the number of identified NRCs, some of which partly overlap, is not definite.

Although international attention was already captured by human rights issues – the two UN international Covenants were adopted in 1966 after long-standing negotiations and human rights were 'weaponised' in East-West conflictive rhetoric (Simmons 2009) – the focus of Holsti's article paid no attention to them as part of the international agenda, which was in large part shaped by postcolonial political and economic confrontation and Cold War-related security concerns. However, from the original set of role typologies, it is possible to identify two NRCs that well subsume

an international orientation supportive of human rights or values conducive to advance human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination (what Brysk (2009, 5) would capture with the umbrella term ‘international humanitarianism’). These NRCs are that of ‘developer’, which expresses a state’s ‘perceptions of special duty or obligation to assist underdeveloped countries’ and that of ‘defender of the peace’.

In fact, the first of these ‘traditional NRCs’ has acquired an increasing relevance for human rights in light of the ongoing efforts of the UN system and development professionals and organisations to advance more human-centred forms of development. These include those development programmes which go beyond the objective of mere economic growth, and consider how the benefits of economic growth are distributed among people, rural or urban populations, workers in different occupations and how the resources generated by economic growth are put to use by government (Fukuda-Parr 2016). A more specific institutional transition by the international community from an ‘economic growth-based’ approach to development to a ‘human rights-based approach’ that intends to use human rights as a tool to design and evaluate development practices (Nelson and Dorsey 2018) materialised only from the early 1990s. However, given the time frame of analysis in this book (1991–2020), this development substantiates why the presence of a ‘developer’ NRC, especially when associated with multilateral frameworks, can be intended as an indicator of a principled foreign policy that also aims at promoting human rights. In particular, this approach has been consolidated in policy discourse after the launch in 2015 of the ‘2030 Agenda for sustainable development’ which both human rights advocates and development practitioners understand as a new operational plan for human rights, endorsed by the whole international community (Danish Institute 2017; UP-HRC 2018).

The consistency with human rights of the second NRC withdrawn from Hoslti’s article, that of ‘defender of peace’, clearly depends on how peace is conceptualised. As the NRC is based on themes that indicate ‘a universal commitment to defend against any aggression or threat to peace’ (Holsti 1970), it is possible to apply such a role both to countries that prepare wars to make peace and to those that promote peace as a social and international order where, paraphrasing Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all internationally recognised rights and freedoms can be fully realised. Therefore, the presence of a conception of human rights-consistent role of ‘Defender of peace’ is more likely to be connected to the other two most recently coined NRCs, those of ‘principled actor’ and ‘responsible state/effective multilateralist’ (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017), into which also the ‘developer’ NRC - when observed

from a human rights-based approach perspective - could eventually be subsumed.

The first of these more recently discovered NRCs defines a country that consciously consults its founding principles before acting on the international stage so that whatever decision, action, or behaviour becomes an evaluation of their compatibility with its defining values (*ibidem*). Especially for liberal democratic countries, as mentioned, the founding principles on which their international agency has been built are normally connected or fully consistent with the international human rights paradigm. This is particularly evident when human rights principles or the supremacy of international law are embedded in constitutional treaties or fundamental laws (Ginsburg 2017; Palombino 2019).

The second NRC identifies a country that perceives multilateralism as a powerful tool for responsible states to make global governance work. This requires meaningful engagement and responsible commitment from every single country involved (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017). Multilateralism is here conceived in institutional terms as a 'collective action by an inclusively determined set of independent states' (Keohane 2006), which can be advanced to support both multilateral institutions and the institutions of multilateralism (Caporaso 1992, 602). Therefore, a country that plays the 'effective multilateralist' role is committed to doing its part to make international organisations work and promoting cooperation among its peers on an inclusively shared political agenda, fostering the ambition of 'peace with peaceful means' (Galtung 1996). This conception is, once again, very close to the scholarly discussion outlined in Section 3 of this chapter, with multilateralism broadly understood as 'founding, funding and joining international human rights bodies; drafting, sponsoring and supporting human rights treaties and resolutions; as well as promoting the development of international law' (Brysk 2009, 20).

This overview suggests that a principled foreign policy that actively supports the promotion and protection of the global human rights regime and the promotion of human rights in bilateral and multilateral policy initiatives represents a consistent enactment of the combination of the four conceptions of roles described above, which is here labelled the 'human rights role-set'. It is indeed within the framework of multilateral organisations – the UN *in primis* – that international consensus over human rights principles developed into a globally recognised response to injustice (Donnelly 2008). Moreover, the leaders of multilateral organisations were among the first pushing for the international recognition that human rights, development, and peace are mutually reinforcing (see, for instance, Annan 2005; Boutros-Ghali 1994). This 'human rights role-set' is primarily performed through guaranteeing and enhancing the

reliability and participation of a state in the definition, implementation and operation of the organisations and mechanisms that establish and monitor the shared principles on which the international political agenda is shaped domestically, bilaterally and multilaterally. It is questioned when this type of support and participation is discontinued or systematically contradicted in discourse and in practice.

An analysis which identifies the ideational roots of this role-set and assesses its consistency in foreign-policy discourse and international perceptions contributes to grasping the diverse moral and material considerations which bring to the construction of foreign policy priorities. In addition, investigating how these NRCs are defined in the national and international political discourse also allows understanding to what extent inconsistencies in the international promotion of human rights are either inevitable but justifiable in the broader commitment shown by the state, part of a conscious policy strategy, or just the output of a lack of real interest for this matter.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to provide a critical overview of some of the main explanations which can help assess the visible but ultimately complex and controversial interplay between foreign policy and human rights initiative in countries which claim to have a principled foreign policy. Among all international policy sectors where human rights can be discussed, foreign policy is among the most problematic to be approached from a moral perspective. Indeed, despite the system of international relations having increasingly become plural in terms of actors and their access to policy-making and values, foreign policy remains primarily a jealously guarded prerogative of states, and it primarily follows their fundamental logic of interaction, which cannot be only (or mostly) morally defined.

The chapter has begun proposing and discussing a set of foreign policy definitions, which have allowed stressing: (a) that foreign policy eventually consists of agency which, in turn, is the result of a complex combination of perspectives and inputs of different actors in addition to the – still fundamental – functions and contributions of those within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and (b) that despite the fact that foreign policy is a boundary activity which is shaped by constraints and opportunities at the domestic and international levels, to explain the general orientation of a country's foreign policy, all relevant claims should be based on the a consideration of what the country's 'national interest' is about.

The chapter has then moved into the discussion of the complicated and at times controversial relation between human rights and national interest, showing how different schools of thought within IR theory have tackled the ‘human rights challenge’ in foreign policy, from realism to liberalism, from idealism to constructivism. Moving to an ultra-specialised strand of human rights scholarship, two prominent explanations of the relationship between human rights and the national interest in foreign policy have been briefly outlined: Brysk’s ‘Global Good Samaritans’ metaphor – where the national interest of some states coincides with the promotion of cosmopolitan values – and Donnelly’s ‘competing values balance’ framework, which assesses trade-offs, inconsistencies and double standards looking at how different moral and material interests and priorities are valued and weighted by governments when defining their country’s national interest.

As many human rights scholars eventually acknowledge, the way in which the self-image of a country is defined is another relevant aspect to grasp the underlying connections between the protection of the national interest and the choice of having human rights in foreign policy. Accordingly, the last section of the chapter has introduced another conceptual element which is more or less implicitly considered in all human rights scholarships but has seldom been systematically applied as part of the overall explanatory framework by human rights scholars: role theory and the NRCs framework. In putting together internal conceptions and external expectations of how the material and ideational components of policy-makers affect a country’s foreign policy orientations, NRCs provide an important complement to existing explanations of the interplay between human rights and foreign policy. While most of the literature understands the presence of human rights in foreign policy as a moral element which complements and competes with other more material interests, the NRC framework does not make this distinction as neat, but looks at leaders’ ideational considerations, which might be affected by both. The integration of NRCs considerations to the claims from the specialised human rights literature discussed above constitutes a flexible conceptual frame to guide this analysis, which will allow providing a fresh understanding of Italy’s commitment in the world on these issues. Furthermore, from a more general perspective, this approach promises to contribute to strengthening existing conceptual efforts to explain the presence and contradictions of human rights in the foreign policy of states and other independent actors.

Chapter 2 The Place and Weight of Human Rights in Italy's Foreign Policy Initiative

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore the general orientation of Italian foreign policy with a view to capturing the position that human rights have been playing in such a framework since the end of the Cold War. During this period, Italian elites with foreign policy prerogatives have frequently stressed a strong commitment to human rights in both their domestic and international statements (see Section 3 of this chapter for selected quotes). Within the broader IR/FPA scholarship that has addressed Italy's international posture, some authors have occasionally recognised the country's distinct international contribution to these matters, often stressing the effectiveness of the channels of cooperation between the Italian government and other transnational and supranational actors (Ortali et al. 2004; Fois and Pagani 2008; Mascia and Papisca 2017; Donà 2018; Marchetti 2018, 2021). While their findings have been relevant in exposing some achievements and inconsistencies of the Italian human rights agency in external action, the niche strand in the literature to which they have contributed has not yet provided an overall assessment of the country's commitment. Therefore, this chapter aims to expand on this debate to understand if, why and under what circumstances human rights (really) matter in the broader realm of the country's foreign policy. Is human rights promotion a firm and sustained priority of Italian foreign policy as national authorities have systematically reinstated (see for a recent example, UN General Assembly 2018)? Or is it a strategic area of 'niche diplomacy' (Cooper 1997) that the country commits when it may have a competitive advantage? What are the main trends in Italy's policy-making with respect to the promotion of human rights in both multilateral and bilateral contexts? Do single policy-makers make any difference when it comes to shaping Italy's overall stance in this field?

To answer these questions, the chapter provides a concise overview of how scholars have explained the peculiar traits of Italy's foreign policy, paying particular attention to what domestic and international understandings of the country as a 'middle power' imply in terms of what Italy can do and what it cannot do internationally. These dilemmas are observed with particular reference to how material and strategic

necessities, on the one hand, and moral objectives, on the other, merge with ideational considerations in explaining Italy's choice for multilateralism and its tools, including peacekeeping. Although the bilateral dimension of the 'human rights component' is also empirically investigated in this chapter, multilateralism remains the key reference for this debate, as it constitutes the framework in which human rights efforts have found their natural ground. Framed in this broader understanding of the country's foreign policy, the third section of this chapter eventually reviews the findings of a mixed method content analysis of Italian foreign policy documents (see Section 3.1 for the specific methodology) and discusses them from the point of view of the conceptual frame of the book.

This chapter argues that, despite being constant in the foreign policy discourse of Italy over time and shared by policy-makers of all political persuasions, the commitment of Italy to human rights follows a rather fluctuating and inconsistent path in terms of both its assertiveness and the level of its elaboration. Multilaterally, it is possible to identify a generally vague language that refers to human rights as one of the general principles that shape the international system and Italy's action there, with occasional peaks of assertiveness when specific initiatives and campaigns that Italy values have been underway (for example, the moratorium on the death penalty or the support for the establishment of the International Criminal Court). Bilaterally, with rare exceptions, it is possible to detect a soft and substantially non-confrontational attitude. This is mostly based on praising the engagement and progress of third countries in the broader framework of political and economic cooperation rather than pressuring, naming and shaming, or making cooperation and aid conditional on respect for human rights. Although this approach may be appreciated by some partners and is consistent with Italy's traditional 'gentle' approach to foreign policy, it risks leaving the country's toothless when it comes to making human rights really count among other priorities. Furthermore, despite human rights being mentioned in relations with many countries around the world, Italy's 'bilateral emphasis' appears to be selectively focused only on a few of them, suggesting a careful attempt by the country to avoid unnecessary tensions with some crucial partners, such as those in the Mediterranean (see Smith 2014), risking to make its commitment eventually immaterial.

1. Italy's Foreign Policy Posture: An Overview

In her account of Global Good Samaritans, Brysk (2009, 5) provides a sort of identikit of the country which could more likely aspire to be recognised for this international behaviour: 'candidate states are usually globalised, democratic, moderately developed, and secure middle or

regional powers'. In principle, Italy has therefore many of these characteristics which make it a potentially fruitful case for analysis. However, neither in Brysk's selection, nor in other existing comparative works on foreign policy and human rights (for instance, Forsythe 2000a), Italy is among the protagonists. On the contrary, a cursory reading of these volumes reveals that the name of the country seldom appears, even when authors linger on European regimes, their developments, and contradictions.

One reason for this general absence of academic attention could be that the often paraded and self-acknowledged contribution to human rights of Italian foreign policy is simply not as globally relevant as Italian policy-makers claim or sincerely believe. At the same time, however, the actual commitment and contribution of the country to human rights, if not acclaimed, is neither fictional nor, it appears to be generally acknowledged as such by its peers. For instance, the election of Italy for a third term at the UN Human Rights Council, the main multilateral forum dealing with human rights at the global level, was achieved in 2018 with one of the largest majorities in the General Assembly since the voting procedure for the Council was established. Consequently, another explanation for Italy's absence from this specialised literature could be drawn from the combination of the comparatively mild international prestige of the country with the frequent inconsistencies and contradictions that have characterised Italian politics since the end of the Second World War. In particular, the fragmentation of the Italian system and its alleged peculiarity could make it problematic to compare, especially if other 'middle-sized' human rights-committed European countries, such as Sweden or the Netherlands are at hand. Furthermore, as already mentioned, only very few IR/FPA scholars interested in the Italian international agency have also specifically focused on human rights-related topics or initiatives, leading to, substantially, no cumulation of knowledge on this specific subject matter, which, on the assumption that lack of research may reduce visibility and heuristic desirability of a given subject, remains, therefore, little known. While none of these suggested motivations can be ascertained, this chapter tries to fill this gap in the literature, starting from a general discussion of the overall understanding of Italy as an international actor.

To start with, although the application of this label to the country has been questioned by some scholars (Santoro 1991; Croci and Lucarelli 2010; Brighi 2013), Italy is generally considered to be a 'middle power'. Therefore, in the traditional understanding of the term, the country should be understood as a 'stabilizer' or 'legitimizer' of the (current) world order

due to the 'limited military capacity and given the privileged position it has in the global economy' (Jordaan 2003).

This label has been systematically attached to Italy, especially after the end of the Cold War. With regard to the period before this 'critical juncture', by contrast, scholars have shared quite diverse assessments of the overall foreign policy performance of the country. Some contend that, provided that the immobility of Italian foreign policy eventually questioned its own existence (Graziano 1968), the country's external orientation was primarily to be understood as a process for internal consumption, that is, to protect the delicate balance of the post-war domestic system (Kogan 1963). From this perspective, it was stressed that the continuous battle between the two main Italian political parties of the 'First Republic' during the years between 1945 and 1991 – the centrist *Democrazia Cristiana* and the Italian Communist Party – eventually resulted in playing down the importance of foreign affairs for Italy, which made its foreign policy 'a sector of substantial inactivity and acquiescence of allies' demands' (Walston 2007). Other scholars have supported a less minimalistic reading, demonstrating that the international agency of the country during the period was, in fact, relevant and mostly centred on 'the main priority of achieving a status of parity with other western European powers following Italy's defeat in the Second World War' (Nuti 2002, 42).

However, what comprehensively stands out from this wider debate is that during the Cold War, Italy emerged more as an object than as an actor of foreign policy and that it was 'not absent' from international decision-making, rather than 'present' (Bentivoglio 2017). At the same time, continuous attention to multilateral cooperation frameworks allowed Italian elites to maintain a 'low profile' in international relations, which resulted in a 'low cost' foreign policy, since Italian governments of the times managed to maximise their benefits, using membership in NATO, the European Community, and the CSCE to guarantee their security and economic development while promoting participation and action in these forums (Fois and Pagani 2008).

The period which followed the end of the Cold War brought several challenges for Italian foreign policy both internally and externally. As Andreatta (2008, 173) observes, the end of the confrontation between the two super-powers changed the axes of the international system, and made the broader strategic landscape 'maybe less threatening, but also more fragmented and diffuse', raising further the fear of 'Italian isolation in front of concrete dangers in South-eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean'. This was strongly felt by the country's elites since some of Italy's long-standing partners during the Cold War, the United States *in*

primis, increasingly 'preferred ad hoc coalitions and arrangements rather than seeking institutional involvement, thus creating new security needs' for the country (Walston 2007).

The above considerations about emerging international challenges help to support the lucky 'pun' created to render the transition of Italy during this period from a 'security consumer' to a 'security provider' (Brighi 2013; Croci and Valigi 2013). Given the changed balance and the risk of being neglected, indeed, Italian government made:

'an effort to change Italy's status and began to exhibit a more active and pronounced foreign and security policy aimed at reinforcing and functionally linking the different multilateral organisations of which the country was a member in order to enhance their ability, individually and/or collectively, to meet the new types of threat to which [the country] was particularly exposed' (Croci 2008, 293).

Italy, in other words, tried to become more assertive and entrepreneurial in its international relations, without abandoning, however, multilateral cooperation as its cornerstone. Early evidence of this behaviour emerged from one of the main sources of such new challenges (and opportunities) for the country and for Europe: the Mediterranean basin. One of the first Italian initiatives after the end of the Cold War, indeed, materialised when Italian Foreign Minister De Michelis proposed in 1990, together with his French and Spanish homologues, a project aimed at fostering multidimensional stability challenges coming from the Mediterranean through a new policy initiative to be modelled (but distinguished from) the success of the CSCE: the (then aborted) project for a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (Fernandez-Ordenez 1990; Holmes 1996; Biad 1997; Calleya 2006).

From a flexible multilevel governance perspective (Marks and Hooghe 2004), it is important to stress that the early 1990s also coincided with the acceleration of the process of European political integration. The 1992 Maastricht Treaty established the EU and set the basis for a European Common Foreign and Security Policy, which provided new perspectives to ensure the needs of Italian foreign policy in perspective. Evidence of this process gradually emerged. Examples include Italy's support for the definition and adoption of the First European Security Strategy of 2003, following the US invasion of Iraq and the contextual fragmentation of the European international position (Biscop 2005, 1; Missiroli 2007, 159), the successful effort to engage France and EU institutions in mediating the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah crisis (Del Sarto and Tocci 2008), and more recently, Prime Minister Renzi's stubbornness in having a trusted Italian politician, Federica Mogherini, at the head of EU diplomacy (Bindi 2014).

The international and regional developments which followed the end of the Cold War are central to explain the new assertive path gradually taken by Italy in the foreign policy domain during this period. However, the domestic, institutional and structural changes of Italian parties and governments, which broke out with the corruption scandal of 'Tangentopoli' and the bankruptcy of Italian public finances (Romano 2009), should also be taken into account, especially if one agrees that Italy's foreign policy should be understood mainly in terms of its domestic politics (Santoro 1991).

Isernia and Longo (2017, 117–118) illustrate three main changes which followed the end of the Cold War and affected the ability of the Italian political elites to adapt to the new challenges coming from the emerging international system. The first was that Italian foreign policy interests started to be not fully and perfectly overlapping with those of its allies, as happened during the Cold War. The second was the country's inability to clearly differentiate 'foreign ideological policy' from concrete, pragmatic foreign policy. This difficulty eventually led to the consolidation of what some scholars have called 'the bipartisan consensus in Italian foreign policy' (Croci 2003) which was especially consolidated in the context of policies toward Africa and the Balkans (Diodato and Niglia 2017). The third change observed by Isernia and Longo was the impact of institutional weakness and government instability on the bargaining status of Italian decision-makers, reducing the potential credibility and, eventually, the reputation of the country in international circles.

As stated in the previous chapter, the *long-durée* implications of the domestic and international challenges and opportunities outlined above allow considering Italy's post-1990 foreign policy path under a certain continuity (Croci 2008; Croci and Valigi 2013; Felsen 2018). In fact, some analysts have observed, especially in the alternance between left-wing and right-wing coalitions during the 1990s and 2000s, significant differences in understanding and presenting the international role of Italy⁹ (Carbone 2009, Brighi 2013). This was especially evident in regard to the three traditional 'circles' – 'Atlantic', 'European' and 'Mediterranean' – of the

⁹ A good example of change and continuity in style and approach between right and left wing Italian governments in the 2000s can be drawn with regards to the Mediterranean and the Middle East with regards to the expression 'equivicinanza' (equal proximity) coined by Foreign-Minister D'Alema to define the approach of Italy vis-a-vis the Israelis and the Arabs on the basis of the older concept of 'equidistance' (equal distance) which characterised traditional Italian foreign policy in this area. While maintaining the overall equity between the parties of the conflict – a pillar of Italy's foreign policy approach in the third 'circle' –, the new expression heralded the desire of a much more pro-active role of Italy than just being equally far from the events.

Italian international agency (Holmes 1996; Missiroli 2007, 151; Carbone 2008). However, these three circles have endured periodic divergences between different Italian leaderships and so has Italy's engagement in their multilateral institutions of reference, respectively. Italy's membership in NATO and the pursuit of a privileged friendship with the United States; the role played by the country in European integration (but also in the OSCE and the Council of Europe), and the position of regional leader that Italy has tried to pursue in the Mediterranean acting in both the institutional frameworks of the UN and the EU (Carbone 2008; Del Sarto and Tocci 2008; de Perini 2019b).

For their utility in summarising and condensing a large part of Italy's international agency for many decades, these three circles have been a preferred analytical device to make sense of Italy's foreign policy as a process. Other perspectives and angles are available from the literature. Among these, Isernia and Longo (2017, 114) claim that the debate on Italian foreign policy is characterised by a series of recurring elements, regardless of the historical and theoretical approaches used: these include the 'constant features', the problems related to Italy's prestige and status in the world, and the peculiarities of the Italian political system. The continual reference to Italy as a 'middle power', however, results in a particularly advantageous point, which is adopted in this chapter to both provide a cross-cutting understanding of these recurring elements, and consolidate some key elements of policy-makers' conception of Italy's international role.

2. Being a 'Middle Power' and the Choice for Multilateralism

Broadly speaking, a 'middle power' is a country that is fully aware of its subordinate status in the international system compared to hegemonic powers. In particular, as Nuti (2002, 27) notes, the concept generally identifies a country that 'has learned to give up a large part of the ambitions which were the hallmark of its nationalist past but continues playing the old game of power politics in a more limited field and with more limited objectives'. Therefore, it is not surprising that the label has generally been applied to states that are able to identify 'niche areas' in global governance (Diodato and Niglia 2017) and compete for them. Among the various foreign policy behaviours that 'middle powers' can enact to maintain their status, Giacomello and Verbeek (2011a), indeed, also refer to the act of 'leapfrogging with their significant peers' (i.e., other, potentially competing, 'middle powers') to participate, and eventually take the lead in those international activities that 'might earn them "middle power credit points"'. These countries are, in other words, in the middle ground

between, on the one hand, pretending to be recognised as great powers, which they are not, and, on the other, risking to be internationally perceived as irrelevant. For these reasons, they cannot easily disregard the relevance of specific policy areas and tools that can help them improve their status and rank in international politics (Carati and Locatelli 2017, 94). Accordingly, it is assumed that the promotion of human rights is one of the available niche policy areas in which a 'middle power' can decide to invest.

Being (or trying to be identified by peers as) a 'middle power' implies a continuous balancing act in a never-ending commitment to count at the international level. Since these countries do not have the resources to dominate at the absolute level, that is, they cannot shape the direction of global affairs, their international action is generally linked to objectives which are more effectively pursued through either engaging in multilateralism or referring to its norms and institutions in bilateral relations. As the next paragraphs elaborate in more detail, this scenario applies well to the case of Italy: although there have been occasional diversions, as when Berlusconi's coalition in the early 2000s sought to privilege bilateral relations with some allies (Crocì 2008; Romano 2009), the overall foreign policy of this 'middle power' has developed significantly around forms of support and exploitation of the main multilateral political organisations.

As mentioned in the previous section, multilateralism was a fundamental reference for Italy well before the end of the Cold War. However, after the end of this confrontation, Italy's use of it became more assertive and autonomous. In the early 1990s, the then Foreign Minister Beniamino Andreatta conceptualised this renewed commitment with the expression of 'active multilateralism' (Cladi and Webber 2011). This concept identified an approach based on two pillars. The first revolved around the need to improve Italy's role in all multilateral frameworks by raising both the political profile of the country within them and increasing its level of contribution to their activities also through the assumption of politically demanding responsibilities, for example, through Italy's participation in multinational missions (Bonvicini and Colombo 2010, 41). The second pillar consisted of acknowledging that 'integration is a value in itself and that its promotion is fundamental to achieving Italy's true national interests' (Brighi 2013, 133).

The specialised literature provides two distinct but increasingly converging sets of explanations which link Italy's status of 'middle power' with the choice of active multilateralism. One of these explanations focuses on the instrumental function that multilateralism plays in allowing Italy to survive and then prosper in the international system. This view eventually considers multilateralism as the best tool to satisfy the material

interests of a 'middle power'. Some even argue that the active engagement of Italy in multilateralism and, specifically, its active participation in multilateral military operations is part of a struggle that was meant to avoid a subordinated role for the country, which would have implied a further downgrade from the group of those that count. In other words, Italy would be prone to multilateralism because its foreign policy, which significantly lacks diplomatic and military resources, as well as a proper strategic culture, appears to have no alternatives (Carati and Locatelli 2017). From this perspective, multilateralism is a 'forced choice' for Italy as a 'middle power' (Santoro 1991).

For other scholars, the choice for multilateralism is based on material considerations, but it is more 'rational' than 'existential'. According to Andreatta (2008, 170), for example, especially after the end of the Cold War, Italy has actively supported the reform of multilateral forums and tried to increase its role therein in an effort to update its position in its traditional three 'circles'. Italy also used the privileged positions eventually acquired in each of these circles to enhance its role, prestige and reputation in others. Examples include the mid-1990s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, in which Italy frequently tried to use EU political and economic weight to promote a number of policies of interests in the Mediterranean, including in niche policy areas such as that of intercultural dialogue (de Perini 2018), and the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict in 2006, in which, as already mentioned, the Italian government took advantage of its achieved credibility among each warring party to eventually engage and lead EU political role in solving the crisis within the UN Security Council, and managed to do it without isolating the US (Croci 2008; Del Sarto and Tocci 2008; de Perini 2019b).

Italian elites also resorted to multilateralism to delegate the adoption of international decisions which they tried to affect from within (Fois and Pagani 2008). After all, Italy's participation therein has also often brought the crucial advantage of providing an 'international cover' to specific national decisions (Brighi 2013, 134), consistent with the well-known strategy of the 'external constraint' (*vincolo esterno*), that is, presenting domestically a choice for which the government's hands are tied by internationally agreed decisions (Diodato and Niglia 2017; Isernia and Longo 2017).

The second recurring set of explanations of Italy's choice for 'active multilateralism' revolves primarily around the considerations of the country's self-image promoted by policy-makers and the peers' evaluation of it. According to this perspective, multilateralism represents a sounding board that a 'middle power' can use to spread further the shared principles and policy areas that it particularly values among the international

community. In fact, Italy's commitment to multilateral organisations was not only viewed by scholars as the main instrument to advance its material national interests and gain a certain degree of autonomy from 'intrusive' allies like the US. It also meant viewing foreign policy through the lens of international law and collective security through the UN (Miranda 2011). After all, as Croci and Valigi (2013) underline, Italian post-war governments have been guided by the belief that the international order 'rests more on the active promotion of international rules and institutions than on deterrence and compulsion'. This is also consistent with Aliboni's claim (quoted in Holmes 1996, 189) that Italian foreign policy should not be defined in terms of the defence of the national interest, but rather in terms of its ability to contribute to a more cooperative world in which Italian interests could normally be reconciled with those of others.

This second set of explanations can as well be complemented by a domestic motivation for the multilateralist choice of Italy which, similarly to the above, relies more on ideational and moral considerations rather than on material objectives. Indeed, scholars highlight the existence of a consensus among Italian civil society in support of multilateral values that are generally seen as a superior source of legitimacy and order (Marchetti 2018). Therefore, beyond Santoro's (1991) 'forced multilateralism', there would also be a form of 'genetic multilateralism' that lies in Italian (civil) society and a form of 'institutional multilateralism', based on art. 11 of the Italian Constitution, which allows interventions abroad only if sanctioned by the UN collective security mechanisms, namely the Security Council (Fois and Pagani 2008).

The presence of these additional sources of multilateral engagement supports and complements the more value-based explanation of Italy's international behaviour. 'Institutional multilateralism' is an objective and firm source of legitimacy of the country's international politics and, indeed, references to the Italian Constitution have frequently been used to justify policy choices, as confirmed in the documents analysed in Section 3, below. In contrast, the essence of 'genetic multilateralism' seems more evanescent. For example, a series of studies surveying Italians' perceptions of the country's overall foreign policy show that respect for international law – which is the legal arm of multilateralism – is never near the top of the priorities that respondents believe make up the national interest; this perception, in addition, is significantly fluctuating (between 12 and 19 % of respondents between 2013 and 2020, see CIRCAP/LAPS and IAI 2013; DISPOC/LAPS and IAI 2019; 2020). Therefore, it seems more appropriate to search for the sources of the alleged 'genetic multilateralism' of Italy in organised civil society (NGOs, networks, civil society

campaigns) rather than in unstable public opinion, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The two sets of explanations for active multilateralism outlined above, one based on more material considerations, and the other on more moral and ideational factors, can ambiguously converge in shaping Italian foreign policy and its perception. Especially when the precarious international position of 'middle powers' is considered, it is difficult to distinguish between resting on deep-rooted values and traditions when acting abroad because there is a genuine conviction this that is the path ahead, or because of the narrower political advantage that may result from advancing them internationally. As Marchetti (2018, 202) notes, for example, being a 'middle power' can also help perceptions in third countries about the intention of the country's foreign policy 'attenuating the ever-present suspicion in the southern hemisphere towards the "neo colonialist" west, incentivising the use of soft power and the search for collaboration with international organisations in pursuit of its own objectives'. Achieving these perceptions can thus be pursued to get material advantage. Depending on the country and the situation, therefore claiming values in foreign policy as a 'middle power' can be a reason to insist on a stronger moral dimension of international relations or a condition to be exploited to pursue material interests with more ease.

This ambiguity in Italian foreign policy can also be approached with the concept of 'minimal structural commitment'. With this expression, Bonvicini et al. (2011) stress that Italian elites have accepted responsibilities that have helped the country to present a 'good image' of itself in front of others, in particular in front of its allies, without, however, accompanying this commitment with a corresponding growth in military or diplomatic resources. Accordingly, this may be an apparently costless strategy which, however, is not also riskless. In the long run, the strategy of minimal structural commitment could reveal the precariousness and emptiness of this image pursued and displayed by Italy, thus exposing the weakness of the country's international agency. This is demonstrated also by the assessment of those who understand Italian foreign policy as an 'uninterrupted series of attempts (most often failed ones) to address the frustration originating from role inconsistency' (Isernia and Longo 2017, 114; see also Santoro 1991, 73).

From a role-theoretical perspective, Italian policy-makers do envision and present the country as an 'effective multilateralist' and a 'responsible state' (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017). However, this role conception is not necessarily supported by consistent role performance. Therefore, it is not surprising that international perceptions do not always match Italy's self-image, which despite the efforts outlined above remains stained by

internal contradictions and perceived unreliability in the opinion of its international partners (Walston 2007, 93). For example, it was reported that, despite long-standing efforts to establish a good reputation with the United States, American foreign policy elites have little expectation of Italy's diplomatic and military contributions in different areas of the world, based on Italy's limited role in global politics (Croci and Lucarelli 2010, 254).

Eventually, these diverse explanations about Italy's participation in multilateralism are united by a common denominator, which is consistent with the status of the country's 'middle power' and is ambiguously shaped by a combination of material goals and ideas (both culturally and morally-based) considerations. Such common denominator is the pursuit of international reputation, which is exemplified by Italy's obsession with the need for recognition (Fois and Pagani 2008; Bonvicini et al. 2011). Reputation, in fact, can be an important outcome of the international recognition of the values and commitment of the country that feeds its international prestige, especially when multilateral action is played through involvement in regional crises (Ignazi et al. 2012). However, reputation is not only a matter of visibility nor prestige, when achieved, is permanent. Moreover, achieving international prestige does not necessarily correspond to achieving international power (Bonvicini and Colombo 2010). Reputation causally relates also to compliance with previously agreed arrangements and is practically defined in terms of credibility, because in order to pursue effective foreign policies in the long run, as it was discussed in Chapter 1, states must ensure through their behaviour that other actors in the international system are convinced of their predictability and consistence (Giacomello and Verbeek 2011a, 16).

Although the pursuit of a certain reputation may be consistent with the country's role conceptions, to be solid and sustainable these roles must also resonate internationally. The lack of consistency and credibility in enacting these roles may reduce this possibility before peers and multilateral institutions. In other words, if reputation results from a coherent and sustained attempt at pursuing stated goals, it creates solid international prestige and, arguably, a supply of power. If reputation is an end in itself, not matched by solid and consistent decision and action, it is ephemeral and its pursuit risks blurring the country's pronouncements and actions with hypocrisy. Generally speaking, Italian foreign policy is constantly caught in this fragile equilibrium.

Before looking at the specific human rights discourse, a sector that can give a taste of both the relationship between Italy's obsession for international reputation and prestige and its commitment to promote the common values of multilateralism, is the country's involvement in international

peace missions and specifically in peacekeeping. Italy has been devoting a large amount of financial and human resources to this international activity, which is recognised as one of the main achievements of Italy's multilateral foreign policy. According to the current Ministry of Foreign Affairs website¹⁰, Italy is the first supplier, in terms of highly qualified military and police personnel, between Western countries and the EU, to UN peacekeeping operations and the seventh contributor to the specific UN peacekeeping budget (which is separated from the UN regular budget). At the time of writing, Italy provides 990 troops in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) and few units in the three other active missions¹¹. As mentioned, peacekeeping is a very good example of how moral considerations and material interests contribute shaping Italy's foreign policy decisions and provides a well-researched perspective on the interplay between the two in national policy-making. Indeed, it is common wisdom that the country's active and long-standing participation in international peacekeeping (in the UN context, but also with respect to EU missions) has been accompanied by a strong normative stance (Ignazi et al. 2012).

Especially the new generation of missions launched after the end of the Cold War are required to perform a number of diverse tasks. Depending on the mandate, these range from monitoring the cessation of hostilities, to support capacity building, from the protection of civilians to humanitarian and development assistance (Gledhill et al. 2021). Accordingly, these missions have increasingly been criticised by analysts for both the widening gaps between overambition and underachievement – the problem of so-called 'Christmas Tree Mandates' (Security Council Report 2019) – and the gap between the unyielding principles (especially impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate) and operational change on the ground, which has risked pushing a peacekeeping operation towards proper war fighting (Rudolf 2017). Despite this raising concern, the promotion of democratic governance, human rights protection and more generally the preservation of peace have constantly been the fixed points in the debate on Italy's participation to these missions, domestically and externally (Fois and Pagani 2008; Carati and Locatelli 2017). It was noted, for instance, that the Italian Government's justification for Italy's participation in UNIFIL II following the 2006 Lebanese crisis in terms of restoring peace in the

¹⁰ These data have been retrieved from: https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazi-one-allo-sviluppo/organizzazioni_internazionali/onu/onu_ruolo_italia_nel_peacekeeping/ (accessed: 13/05/2022).

¹¹ These data have been retrieved from: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed: 13/05/2022).

area and reviving the principle of multilateralism, was among the reasons that ensured a substantially bipartisan support by the Italian Parliament (Brighi 2007, 134) and the endorsement by civil society (see Atto Camera 2006). Based on this widespread support, Italy could take the spotlight internationally and claim the success of the initiative (de Perini 2019b). The analysis of Italian foreign policy documents discussed in the next section confirms this co-occurrence of values in discourse also beyond the Lebanese case, showing a significant overlap between segments of texts retrieved and categorised as 'human rights' and those classified as 'peacekeeping'.

Such 'human rights framing' of international missions appears to be used by Italian leaders either to 'exorcise' the idea of using armed forces abroad (Diodato and Niglia 2017), or to avoid domestic, parliamentary and civil society-based, criticism and, eventually, opposition to these missions which could be otherwise perceived as risky and controversial (Ignazi et al 2012; Coticchia 2014¹²) and thus affect the country's good reputation and reliability in this sector. Still, the already referred surveys into Italian public opinion show that the operation by Italian elites may have not been so effective. For instance, a 2013 survey shows quite neatly that Italians do not believe in the use of military force in international relations, regardless of how this is framed: 86 % of those interviewed declare themselves opposed to the use of force to ensure peace in the world, against 10 % of those who see potential advantages in military interventions. Similarly, 83 % of the sample believe that the use of force only makes the problems worse. The same survey also stresses that Italians reveal an attitude opposed to sending contingents to international missions abroad (CIRCAP/LAPS and IAI 2013). There seems to be, in other words, a 'role contestation' between public opinion and elite (Cantir and Karboo 2012) as far as this part of the 'effective multilateralist' and 'principled actor' role competitions of Italy are concerned. Although public opinion might be affected by specific contextual factors, in this case the NATO-led operation in Libya and the possibility to intervene in the civil war in Syria, this inherent 'role constation' could represent an obstacle to Italian consistency affecting the reputation and prestige that Italy has built in this niche of multilateral cooperation.

¹² The subtitle of the volume by Ignazi et al (2012) – 'Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don't Call It War – is particularly effective in rendering the normative use of peacekeeping in Italian foreign policy discourse.

3. Human Rights in the Italian Foreign Policy Discourse

During a 1993 ministerial meeting of the CSCE, Foreign Minister Andreatta stressed that ‘the centrality of human rights is still today, even in the new conditions that characterise our time, the fundamental fact of our joint action’ (MAE 1993a, 319). In the context of a 1994 general hearing before the foreign affairs committees of the Italian Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, Foreign Minister Martino, after having listed human rights among the inspiring principles of Italian foreign policy, reminded members of Parliament that ‘the pursuit of peace and human rights represents the natural development of a civilisation process that has its origin in the culture of our humanism. But the enunciation of principles is only the starting point for a dynamic foreign policy’ (MAE 1994, 134). In 2000, the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi stressed, during the celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, that:

‘Italy has been a protagonist, from the very beginning, in the construction and consolidation of the human rights protection system in Europe. It is with unchanged enthusiasm and conviction, with the support of a popular sentiment that has manifested itself several times in the national Parliament, that Italy participates in the promotion of advanced forms of protection of the dignity and freedom of the individual (MAE 2000, 304).

In a 2002 Declaration, Foreign Minister Frattini recognised that Italy plays a leading role in global human rights promotion (MAE 2002, 82). His successor, Massimo D’Alema, maintained this position as well. And in 2006, he claimed before Parliament to believe:

‘that the protection of human rights must play an essential role in a foreign policy that wants to give itself, as I believe is right, a strong ethical connotation. This is valid in the relationship with all countries, with those with which we want to develop more intense economic and political relations, from China to other Asian countries, and is valid in the relationship with our allies (MAE 2006, 230).

In 2011, addressing the UN Human Rights Council, President of the Republic Napolitano stressed that it ‘is no coincidence that, after the tragedy of World War Two, Italy’s democratic Constitution entered into force in very same year as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Same time, same principles, same spirit’ (quoted in Cofelice 2017, 228). When applying to be elected for the third time to sit among the 47 members of the Human Rights Council, the candidacy letter to the General Assembly, prepared under Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano,

stressed that 'human rights are a firm and sustained priority of the foreign policy of Italy (UN General Assembly 2018).

There are two main considerations about what the above excerpts, selected among the dozens available, say about the 'human rights component' of Italian foreign policy from a *longue durée* perspective. The first is that, domestically and internationally, Italy convincingly perceives and presents itself as a long-standing and entrenched champion of human rights, often motivating this commitment on its identity and tradition. The second is that this commitment is shared across institutions and ideologic differences. In other words, these excerpts further confirm the shared and deep-rooted national role conception of Italy's position in its international relations as a 'principal actor', an 'effective multilateralist', and a 'defender of peace'. That is, the 'human rights role-set' presented in Chapter 1 is well integrated and widespread in the national conception of Italian foreign policy orientation.

The remaining part of this book aims at questioning, contextualising, and discussing the consistency of these NRCs, looking in more detail at how this role-set is conceived and performed by Italian leaders. While the human rights performance of the country, including the contribution and task of the main domestic actors and peer assessment, is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 – this section seeks to provide an empirical assessment of where the promotion of human rights stands in the context of Italy's broader foreign policy discourse. Furthermore, it tries to explore whether specific recurring elements can be identified to define the attitude of Italy on this subject and how these trends relate to the broader discussion of Italy and foreign policy outlined in the sections above.

3.1 Methodological Notes

Before presenting and discussing the main findings of this part of the investigation, a methodological explanation of how data have been collected and investigated is necessary. The analysis has been based on a mixed-method content analysis, something that in the IR literature has also been defined as 'fully-integrated' (Pashakhanlou 2017). It has been conducted on official documents (statements, hearings, debates) regarding the foreign policy of Italy as they have been made available by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs in its annual collections (series entitled: *Testi e Documenti della Politica Estera dell'Italia*). Insights emerging from other research reports by analysts, civil society organisations and think tanks as well as surveys on Italian perceptions of foreign policy are also considered to further elaborate on some observations made and triangulate findings. The approach to content analysis adopted in this chapter distances itself from the positivistic, systematic, and strongly quantitative

characteristics traditionally associated with this method especially when compared with the more interpretative and qualitative ‘discourse analysis’ (Fairclough 1992; Neuendorf 2004) and implies working in a broader perspective of ‘discourse analytic methodology’, where all textual analysis eventually is an exercise in interpretation (Hardy et al. 2004; Pashakhanlou 2017).

The bulk of this analysis covers the period from 1993 (the first issue of this collection published following the end of the Cold War) to 2008, the year of the latest collection made available by the Ministry. Therefore, this analysis is not conducted over the entire time frame in reference for this overall study¹³. It is made on 17 volumes¹⁴, each providing an average of 160 documents related to the activity of key authorities in Italy’s international relations, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, its deputies and under-secretaries, the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and other ministers, when relevant. Documents include statements in international venues and vis-à-vis Parliamentary committees, speeches at national and international conferences, interviews, declarations, messages, press conferences transcripts and official notes following bilateral meetings. All volumes are divided into sections, preceded by a few pages dedicated to illustrating both the composition of governments and the Ministry’s administration, and by a detailed chronological summary of the main international events to which Italy participated during the year in review (some items include brief excerpts from statements or press releases). In all volumes considered, the common ‘document’ sections include general foreign policy statements (domestic), texts related to bilateral relations with a wealth of countries, and texts connected to Italy in multilateralism, generally divided by organisation (UN, EU, CoE, OSCE, etc). From the mid-1990s, sub-sections have been added to aggregate documents also according to critical geographic areas (for instance, a section on the Mediterranean and the Middle East was added following the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in 1995), and priority themes. As far as the subject of this book is concerned, since the 1997 edition there has been a specific sub-section under the multilateral heading devoted to ‘human rights’ documents. The subsection contains statements and declarations by Italian elites on events related to relevant occurrences for the global (UN) and regional (CoE) human rights regimes, including institutional celebrations of the anniversaries

¹³ Chapters 3 and 4 complement this sub-time frame focusing primarily on developments during the 2010–2020 decade.

¹⁴ For the year 1993 only this collection of documents was published in two distinct volumes.

of legal instruments. However, these documents do not exhaust human rights references by themselves in the Italian foreign policy discourse.

The early editions of the collection in review also provide the conclusions of periodic multilateral institutions' summits or meetings, especially the European Council, the Council of the EU and the North Atlantic Council (NATO). Although the latter are intergovernmental institutions to which Italy belongs, and the choice of the Ministry to include these final documents in the series implicitly demonstrates support for their content and priorities, references to human rights in these documents are not considered in the analysis, which only focuses on the identifiable agency of Italy in these gathering (i.e., when the volumes provide the Italian representative's speech in such frameworks).

As mentioned, the selection of these primary sources does not cover the whole foreign policy produced during the large time frame in reference for this book. However, considering that the whole period 1991–2020 is being approached by this study as, substantially, a phase of continuity as far as the underlying pillars of Italian foreign policy are concerned, the data collected from the about 2,500 documents covering 16 years – spanning 11 governments of different colours within 5 legislatures – are considered appropriate and sufficiently representative of the main trends concerning the position of human rights in country's foreign policy discourse during this period. In particular, these documents are believed to both help to draw a reliable assessment of the overall position and weight of claims, references and initiatives to advance human rights in Italian foreign policy over adequately defined long duration, and substantiate some more general observations about the overall characteristics of and reasons for human rights in Italy's foreign policy.

The first step in the analysis has been assisted by computer software in order to perform a simple textual search on all documents to identify how frequently and in what documents the expressions 'human rights' (either in the two Italian 'equivalent' expressions '*diritti umani*', and the more archaic but recurring '*diritti dell'uomo*', in English, or in French – '*droits de l'homme*' – for the few speeches reported in a foreign language) have been included in the Italian foreign policy-makers' discourse. Given the large number of documents considered, this first automated step was pursued to condense the analysis of foreign policy-making to more relevant and manageable segments where bits of texts making reference to human rights could have been explored more thoroughly through qualitative analysis, making more inferences to context and enhance interpretation (van Dijk 1997; Wesley 2014; Green Saraisky 2015; Wehner 2020). In principle, this first automated step may have risked leaving out important elements from the field of inquiry, for example, excluding references

to specific women's rights or children's rights initiatives. However, an analysis of co-occurrence among segments classified as 'human rights' and segments related to the other well-known 'human' priorities of Italy's international action has shown substantial overlap and proximity among these terms in the policy discourse.

This early phase of textual analysis resulted in a total of 1,113 segments which contained either one of the alternative human rights expressions. These segments have been then read in context one by one to check for relevance and redundancy. Those results that referred to titles of sections, speeches, formal attributions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other officials (for instance, references to the General Director for Multilateral Political Affairs and Human Rights (*Direttore per gli affari politici multilaterali e i diritti umani*), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, or the Human Rights Commission/Council), or collective outcome documents of multilateral gatherings were excluded.

The remaining segments (N: 547) have been retrieved and categorised according to four dimensions, which are summarised in Table 1:

1. The 'institutional context' in which the document has been presented. This dimension aims to point out whether the segments retrieved were withdrawn from documents (a) related to an event devoted to a national audience (domestic), for example hearings of governments' members before Parliamentary committees, or speeches by Italian elites on the occasion of national conferences, celebrations; (b) produced in the context of an international multilateral event (multilateral), such as statements or declarations at UN, CSCE/OSCE, CoE, EU summits, high-level segments, intergovernmental events; (c) produced in the context of bilateral events, for example, Italian elites' speeches or notes following official visits in other countries or when foreign leaders are hosted in Italy, messages to foreign leaders following specific events. Where segments were classified as 'bilateral', the country involved was also noted. When segments were identified as 'domestic' or 'multilateral', additional qualitative information about the geographical area or theme in relation to which human rights were mentioned was added. 'Institutional context' has been introduced to assess whether international human rights issues are handled differently between the international and national levels. In terms of international context, the difference between multilateral and bilateral has been kept to differentiate between the second and third dimensions of the 'human rights component'.
2. The level of elaboration of the reference to human rights. This dimension, defined as dichotomous between 'generic' and 'specific', is meant

to explore whether mentions of human rights in foreign policy discourse are expressed with a concrete area of application in mind (i.e. related to a specific situation, objective, initiative, campaign), or just as a general principle, alone or in a list including other overarching principles of multilateralism and international cooperation (democracy, rule of law, the promotion of international law, peace, cultural dialogue, sustainable development etc). Therefore, this dimension has been introduced to assess the accuracy and awareness of the use of human rights language made by Italian elites. Elaborating on this term in relation to specific concerns or campaigns is assumed to identify a clearer understanding and a more committed use of this component of foreign policy. On the contrary, a generic reference is interpreted as an indicator of a lack of particular awareness and, thus, commitment. Indeed, when used generically, the expression 'human rights' appears more like an empty catchphrase, rather than a specific and carefully considered objective of international action. To recall Wolfers' (1962), the existence of a large percentage of segments classified as 'generic' (i.e. >60 %) is therefore interpreted as indicating a more instrumental use of human rights language in political discourse, in a perspective of other 'possession goals'. A similar or higher percentage of 'specific' segments, in contrast, is an indication of a more pragmatic and aware commitment to advance human rights as a 'milieu goal'.

3. Authorship of texts/statements. Each segment retrieved was also categorised with respect to both the institutional position of the author of the text / statement that mentions 'human rights' (President of the Republic, Foreign Minister, MFA official, etc) and specific individuals, especially with respect to top institutional positions with foreign policy attributions. The first category of this dimension is meant to determine if there is a significant difference in the type and intensity of the commitment of Italy to human rights that can be linked to a specific position or responsibility in the governing machine of the country; for example: is there an institutional position for which generic references to human rights exceed significantly specific ones or vice versa? The second aspect is meant to identify if any individual policy-maker has played a distinct role in shaping or advancing Italy's overall human rights agenda, which also allows considering if the ideologic connotations have a role in it.
4. The approach to the promotion of human rights ('attitude'). Only with regard to the group of segments classified as 'bilateral' according to the 'institutional context' dimension, an additional classification was introduced with respect to the approach used to promote human rights issues.

Table 1: Summary of dimensions and categories used to analyse retrieved segments.

Dimension	Scope of the Dimension	Categories
Institutional context	Assessing the distribution of references to human rights in different policy-making milieus	Multilateral Bilateral Domestic
Elaboration	Understanding the general level of elaboration/specification of references to human rights	Generic Specific
Authorship	Assessing who advances human rights in foreign policy discourse	Institutional position Individual policymaker
Attitude (only for ‘bilateral’ segments)	Identifying the main approach to human rights promotion	Confrontational/Conditional Propositional/ Commemorative Concern-related

Three general categories have been identified: (a) confrontational/conditional, when human rights are mentioned to blame partners for violations, or where changes with regard to the situation of human rights are requested with determination, also stressing conditionality mechanisms; (b) propositional/commemorative, when authorities praise the partner for progress, encourage it to improve (with norm-violating countries), discuss areas of common cooperation or stress common values (with ‘like-minded’ countries or allies); (c) ‘concern-related’ when national authorities talk with partner countries about concerning human rights situations in a third country/area. Considering the type of cooperation with the countries with which references to human rights emerge, this last dimension is important to understand how Italy balances human rights in relation to other priorities. The first part of this chapter has claimed that, also due to its status as ‘middle power’, the country has recognised that current international relations rest more on active promotion of cooperation and institutions than on deterrence, and that, in its ambiguous pursuit of reputation, Italy seeks to promote its self-image as a friend and a model in different international contexts. Consequently, the analysis does not expect a systematic resort to a confrontational approach to promote human rights in bilateral relations. Still an overly low threshold of segments (i.e. less than 20 %) taking a tougher stance with partners would suggest the possibility of some hypocritical behaviour by national authorities. Indeed, a nearly complete lack of assertiveness or firmness in advancing human rights with third

countries (and all countries have human rights problems) would relegate human rights to an ancillary position among the issues at stake, in contradiction with the choice to refer them in bilateral talks, which is not require from any international norms or standards.

As partly anticipated, a simple computer-assisted textual search has been carried out on other expressions and keywords that, according to the relevant literature, represent Italy's foreign policy priorities and interests related to the promotion of human rights. This step was introduced to triangulate the findings obtained from the content analysis of 'human rights' segments, applying a co-occurrence analysis (intersection) of all retrieved segments. The expressions searched for this validation step are related to the following key issues: peacekeeping/peacebuilding, freedom of religion, development cooperation, death penalty, children's rights, women's rights and criminal justice.

It is important to recognise, also as a general limitation of this study, that the data collected and analysed through this methodology do not allow measuring either the absolute relevance of human rights, or their weight in relation to other priorities of Italy's foreign policy (for instance, regional stability, European integration, increased economic cooperation, cultural promotion). Any claim based on a comparative count of frequency or recurrence of the retrieved segments risks being misleading, because the number of analysed references also depends on the specific events, priorities, and contexts against which foreign policy is shaped year after year. In addition, collected documents and texts are the result of a pre-selection operated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, it is assumed that they are representative of the orientation pursued by the country, but not comprehensive. Accordingly, while the absolute numbers of retrieved segments are provided in the tables and figures discussed in the following section, the values are expressed and considered primarily in percentage terms. Combining the different dimensions through which segments have been categorised, the analysis provides a general understanding of the scope, content, and trend of a significant part of the 'human rights component' of Italy's foreign policy, as well as of its ideational and material determinants. Some of the findings presented, integrated by data related to more recent developments, will be further elaborated in the next two chapters, also considering the role of other 'non-official' foreign policy agents, namely civil society organisations and independent institutions.

3.2 Main Findings and Discussion

The data collected do not provide *per se* any clear-cut understanding of the place and role of human rights in Italian foreign policy. For the whole

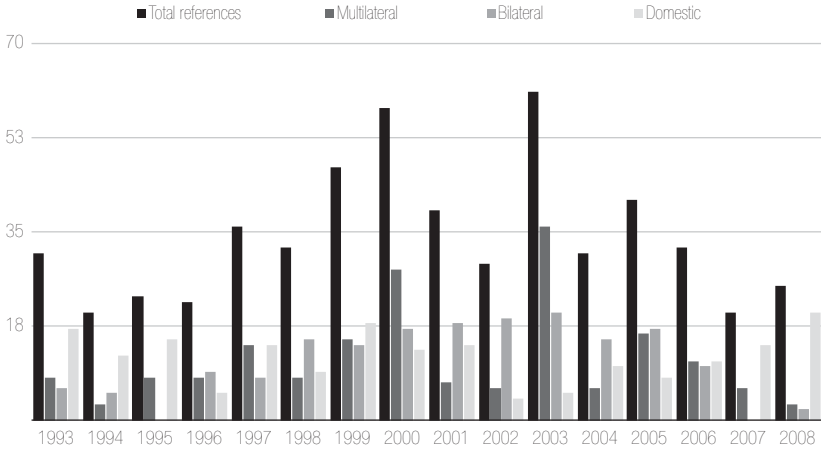


Figure 2: Retrieved segments per year according to ‘institutional context’ (total: N: 547).

period considered, human rights are referred to in the Italian discourse. This suggests that human rights are, indeed, a relevant and long-standing concern in the country’s foreign policy-making, although the number of retrieved segments per year shows important fluctuations between 20 (in 1994, and 2007) and 61 in 2003 (Figure 2).

However, this wavering progression is likely to have a contingent explanation. As mentioned just above, absolute values (i.e. the numbers of retrieved segments mentioning human rights overall or per specific dimension) do not allow making relevant inferences or comparisons across the years. Looking at the segments retrieved, in the year 2003 (the year with the highest number of segments, N: 61), many references are linked to speeches by undersecretaries of state in annual parliamentary gatherings at the EU and CoE levels, events that are not covered in other editions of the Ministry collection. The *una tantum* appointments of Italy to a sit in intergovernmental human rights-related bodies, or the commemoration of anniversaries for the human rights regime are as well occasional events that may motivate a larger attention for the topic across different years. For instance, the other peak with regard to the overall number of references to human rights is the year 2000 (N: 58), during which the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the CoE (signed in Rome on 4 November 1950) took place and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights was adopted. In these situations, several Italian representatives took the opportunity to

reiterate further the importance of human rights for Italy in their (often commemorative) statements and messages.

Regarding the 'institutional context', a first preliminary observation is that human rights are almost equally split into all identified milieus where foreign policy choice is presented and discussed (see Figure 3) which, incidentally, replicate the division between the three main sections into which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs document collection is structured: domestic context (N: 189, 35 % of all segments); bilateral context (N: 175, 32 %); and multilateral context (N. 189, 33 %). When aggregated, 65 % of total coded segments over the time frame relate to the international milieu (bilateral + multilateral = N: 358). Although this result is expected, since most of the collected texts and documents refer to the external interactions of the country's elites, the fact that approximately one third of the retrieved segments refers to the domestic context constitutes a relevant finding, because it shows that the presence of human rights in foreign policy is not simply a 'mere narrative for the domestic audience' (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017; Cofelice 2017), but contributes significantly to the internal political debate, especially parliamentary, concerning the country's foreign affairs.

Segments related to the international dimension, as mentioned, are almost equally split between the multilateral (where Italy participates in the work of international institutions specialised in human rights, and it is therefore expected and even required to speak the language of human

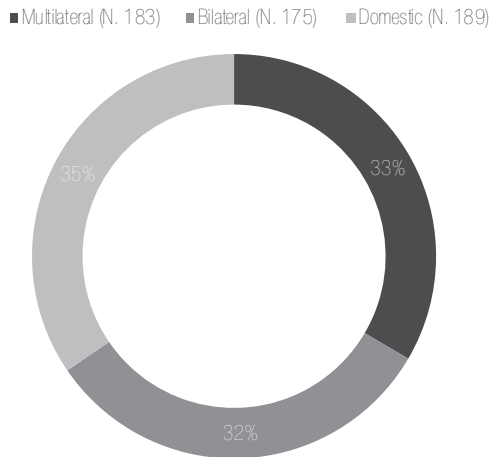


Figure 3: Retrieved segments according to 'institutional context' (N : 547).

rights), and bilateral (where the inclusion of the issue is not mandatory) categories. This suggests that there is a commitment to human rights that goes beyond the due cooperation expected by the participation of the country in the global and regional human rights regime. The analysis indeed shows that during the time frame covered by the Ministry's collection of texts and documents analysed in this chapter, Italy has mentioned human rights issues in its relations with 63 countries, among them partners, competitors, and allies. In other words, there is a 'bilateral emphasis' on the country's foreign policy on human rights, which should not be taken for granted, and it seems noteworthy in numerical terms.

From this perspective, it is also interesting to look at how human rights are approached in specific bilateral relations. Figure 4 reports the percentage of segments classified as 'bilateral' as they are distributed according to the three categories identified above for the fourth dimension of the analytical framework (attitude): confrontational/conditional, propositional/commemorative or concern-related.

Only 10 % of the retrieved segments highlight some type of confrontational attitude where, in other words, references to human rights are included as a form of criticism to the partner country or raised under the threat of conditionality measures (that is, a threat of suspending cooperation if human rights are not respected). The largest part of retrieved segments identifies a propositional attitude, with segments ranging from just being generic about the importance of human rights, praising

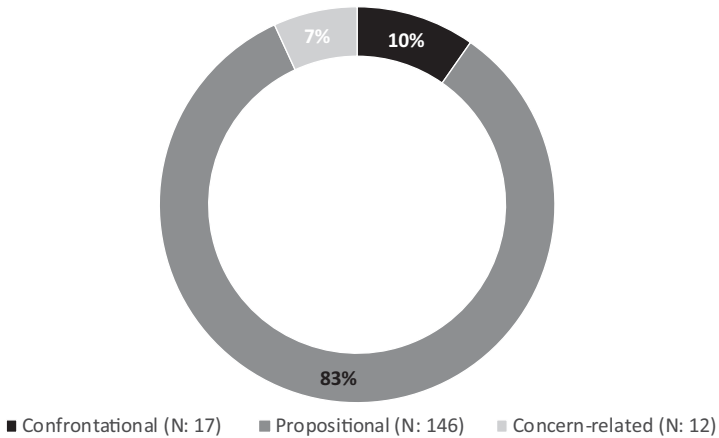


Figure 4: 'Bilateral emphasis': retrieved segments classified as 'bilateral' according to 'attitude' (N: 175).

limited progress or being commemorative of some public event. In the 'bilateral emphasis' of Italy's foreign policy discourse, in other words, there is almost no trace of naming and shaming human rights violations or sanctioning partner countries for their norm-repressive action. Thus, there is a limited intention to criticise the human rights situation in third countries. Mariomassimo Santoro's (2017, 8) overview of human rights in the MFA's agency confirms this view. In particular, as this scholar reports, excluding specific situations which require a different approach, the Italian human rights action is generally characterised by inclusive and dialogic modalities to ensure the best possible margin of success, especially in sensitising local authorities in third countries, on the assumption that the attention that Italian authorities place on the history and culture of their interlocutors is generally appreciated by both authorities and civil society of a third country. The picture which emerges from these data is thus consistent with the overall positive and friendly image of the country that Italian elites have traditionally been seeking to promote internationally in their pursuit of recognition. However, while it may have its competitive advantages to enhance the benefits of cooperation in other sectors, this approach carries with it the risk of irrelevancy, since Italy's action eventually does not have teeth and can only rely on forms of 'soft power' and 'cultural diplomacy' (see also Marchetti 2016, 2018). Moreover, for many scholars confrontational language remains the most effective tool through which countries seek to advance human rights in their bilateral foreign policy (Brysk 2009; Forsythe 2018a; Donnelly and Whelan 2020). Therefore, this 'gentle' approach leaves Italy with almost no tools to advance human rights in third countries when their authorities are not persuaded or co-opted by kind words and praises.

Providing a snapshot of Italy's approach to the top 10 countries with which references to human rights have been included, Figure 5 helps to make further inferences on the nature of the 'bilateral emphasis' of the 'human rights component'. It is with China (the country with the largest number of bilateral segments) that Italy used the harshest tones during the period analysed (5 references, equating to 30 % of the total confrontational references); Cuba and Serbia follow with 2 references each (12 %); while a few countries have 1 reference. These are certainly countries that have, or have experienced, serious human rights issues. However, several other countries with whom Italy's bilateral relations include human rights language have known serious human rights problems for long. With them the attitude held by Italian authorities is either propositional (encouraging governments to make more steps), or commemorative for instance when the country has ratified an important human rights treaty or has considered domestic reforms. And these data do not include all the

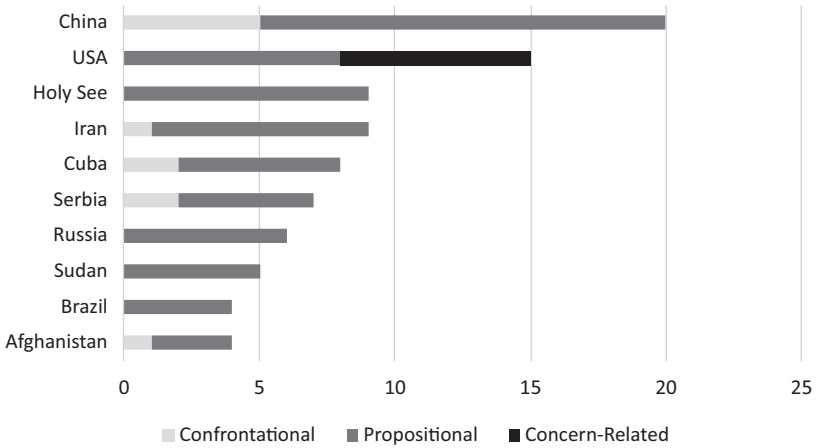


Figure 5: ‘Bilateral emphasis’: 10 top countries with which Italy mentions human rights according to ‘attitude’ (N:175) (1993–2008).

other countries with which Italy has bilateral relations but human rights are not even mentioned in the provided texts. While this approach may be appreciated by some countries violating these norms, which generally see external human rights criticism as an inopportune intrusion into their domestic affairs (Hafner-Burton 2009; Forsythe 2018a), its inherent selectivity eventually questions whether mentioning human rights has any consistent place among Italian priorities. Indeed, most of the time human rights are advanced with no potential costs and the almost complete lack of an assertive attitude indicates that they are never weighed with competing interests at stake during bilateral meetings.

The other relevant consideration that can be drawn from this specific set of data is the third category of the ‘attitude’ dimension, which was labelled ‘concern-related’. Only a small percentage of the total bilateral segments are related to the inclusion of human rights in talks with like-minded countries to share concerns about events in third countries. Speaking about the human rights situation of the others is the rule in the domestic context, where policy-makers discuss Italy’s priorities and concerns with members of Parliament or other domestic actors (NGOs, academics). This praxis is frequent also in the multilateral milieu, for instance in the UN Commission for Human Rights/Human Rights Council, or in the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, where concerns for the human rights situation in some areas are often systematically raised by member states considering the possible consequences for the whole

international community. The situation in the Balkans, Rwanda, and Sudan in the 1990s, and in Afghanistan and Iraq in early 2000s, the difficult situation in China and Russia and in Mediterranean Arab countries in both periods are cases in point for Italy's multilateral discourse.

On the contrary, in bilateral meetings, this attitude is less common and is expected to be connected to relations with 'like-minded' partners. For Italy, indeed, this behaviour is not a consolidated practice and is observed only with regard to relations with the US which is the second-ranked country for the number of retrieved bilateral segments, and where these bits count for almost two-thirds of all (very few overall) 'concern-related' segments.

The observation of the ratio between confrontational and propositional segments returns the image of a country which is shy in asserting human rights with third countries. Data about 'concern-related' segments, suggest that this attitude towards human rights promotion may eventually be subsumed in the long-standing and well-documented attempt of the country to raise its status with the US (see Andreatta 2008; Bonvicini and Colombo 2010; Croci and Lucarelli 2010), which would also be pursued showing to have common concerns and voicing availability to play a part, especially in the situations of Bosnia, Iran, Russia and Serbia (with regards to the human rights of those belonging to ethnic and religious minorities in Kosovo). Indeed, even the Holy See can be seen as a 'like-minded' partner with which Italy shares considerations related to human rights (N: 8). These references, however, have been categorised as propositional because they stress the idea of a world order based on the same values shared by both actors and do not mention specific human rights concerns in third countries. The same could be observed with regard to Italy's bilateral relations with other allies, including Israel. In this case, for example, bilateral messages sent by the Italian authorities after terrorist attacks focus on common values and civilisations, but do not refer to the human rights situation of millions of Palestinians, who have been living under the political and military occupation of Israel for 55 years.

An additional set of considerations can be drawn by looking at the ratio between generic and specific segments, both in general (Figure 6) and per year (Figure 7). Overall, the percentage of generic references to human rights exceeds that of specific ones. On average, therefore, human rights are more frequently listed as an abstract value in the texts and statements of Italian policy-makers. The total of generic references is moderately below 60 %, which in the previous section was set as the threshold to mark a primarily instrumental approach to human rights. Therefore, these data substantially confirm that the statements of many Italian foreign policy representatives about human rights (and democracy) are very prescriptive

and stand alone as mere ‘fluctuating narratives’, without any concrete policy suggestions’ (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017, 141). When addressed individually, indeed, a large part of the retrieved segments classified as ‘generic’ reveal either efforts to ensure that Italy can demonstrate some moral weight in its foreign policy or claims related to the international prestige or reputation which is expected to derive from the country’s long-standing commitment in this peculiar niche of international politics.

At the same time, the still significant percentage of references which have been classified as ‘specific’ shows the existence of a committed and aware understanding of human rights among the country’s policy objectives which complements and eventually balances the more abstract and instrumental resort to human rights language. In particular, when human rights segments marked as ‘specific’ are analysed in relation to the segments of text classified according to the specific principled priorities that the specialised literature attaches to Italian foreign policy – ‘peacekeeping’, ‘death penalty’, ‘international criminal justice’, ‘freedom of religions’, ‘children’s rights’ and ‘women’s rights’, the co-occurrence (intersection) is remarkable. The set of ‘specific’ human rights references (N. 241) co-occurs with ‘death penalty’ in 57 segments, with ‘international criminal justice’ in 41, with ‘women’s rights’ in 45, with children’s rights in 38, with ‘peacekeeping’ in 31. The co-occurrence with freedom of religion emerges only in 5 segments, although this relatively small number should be complemented with part of the 74 co-occurrences between ‘human rights’ segments and ‘protection of minorities’ segments.

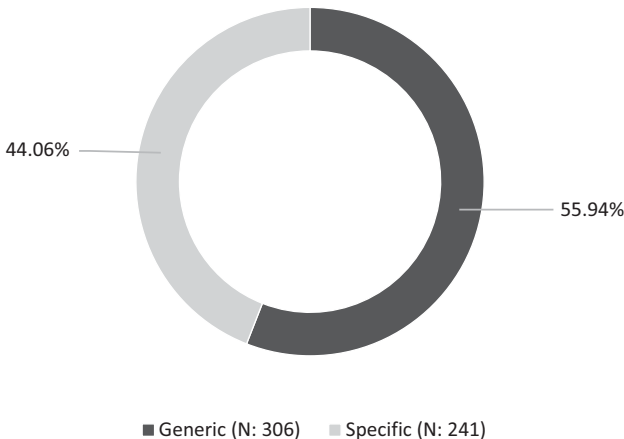


Figure 6: Generic/specific segments (1993–2008) (N: 547).

Indeed, while it does not stand out from the literature a priority attention on minorities is frequent in the Italian foreign policy discourse. It was initially related to national minorities in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, and in the 2000s began to be considered in the perspective of protecting Christian minorities abroad following the rise of Islamist extremism after 2001 terror attacks in the USA (Ferrara and Petito 2016).

Some of these additional themes overlap in the same segment because these priorities are, in fact, thematically close and interdependent. For example, the commitment to protect children's rights often emerges in relation to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, consistent with the reported impulse of Italian authorities to adopt the 'Guidelines of the EU on children's rights and armed conflicts' and the support offered by the country to the possibility of training UN peacekeepers to respect children's rights (Santoro 2017, 9). Nevertheless, the relevant aspect of this analysis of co-occurrences is that most of specific human rights-oriented discourse of Italian elites, at least during the period in review, develops around well-established themes and endures well beyond the period in which related campaigns and initiatives were enhanced. A large part of Italy's international human rights activism is, therefore, subsumed by these well-identified priorities, which, incidentally, are also those referred to in the current webpage of the Ministry devoted to providing an explanation of the current human rights priorities of the country. Thus, these do not appear just as specific priorities that operationalise a full-fledged and inclusive commitment to promote the international human rights agenda. These priorities *are* the agenda on which Italy has worked over time to build its reputation as a champion of human rights. While this is an important element of consistency in Italian human rights foreign policy, one has also to recognize that the actual international human rights agenda is much more complex, diversified and dynamic than what these crucial priorities may cover.

If attention is paid to data disaggregated per year (Figure 7) there is again a significant fluctuation. In 12 out of the 16 years monitored, generic references are more than specific ones. Moreover, in 8 of these, the overall percentage exceeds the threshold that demarcates the distinction between a more focused and a more instrumental approach to human rights promotion. Excluding 1999, a year where Italian elites evidently tried to capitalise on the recent extraordinary activism on human rights themes, due to the success of the country's commitment to a moratorium on death penalty and the adoption of the statute for the International Criminal Court, signed in Rome in 1998 (see Marchetti 2016; Pividori 2016), the only years where specific references exceed generic ones are the last four in the time frame considered. However, these data do not

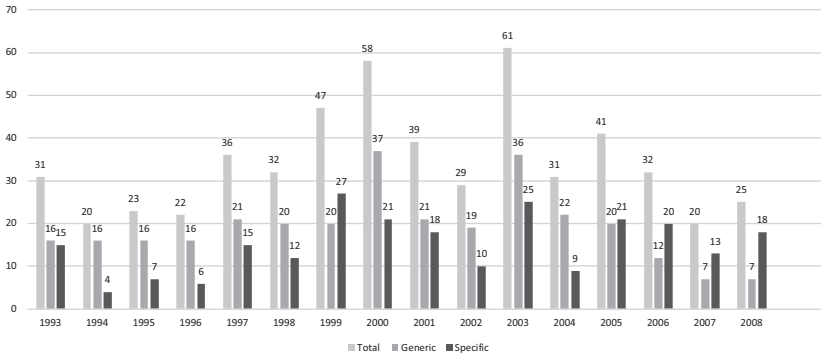


Figure 7: Number of generic/specific segments per year (1993–2008) (N : 547).

identify the emergence of a renewed path towards a more focused full-fledged human rights policy. This development is excluded by evidence collected in several editions of *the Italian Yearbook of Human Rights* that stress the lack of any significant change in the contour of the Italian international agency on these matters (see, for instance, the introductions in UP-HRC 2011, 2014, 2018, 2020). The observed switch may be thus understood in light of the broader trend toward upgrading the relevance and functioning of the international human rights machinery within the UN, which culminated with the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006 and the launch of the UPR mechanism two years later.

The above considerations acquire further significance when applied to the different contexts in which human rights are referred. Figure 8 shows the distribution of generic/specific segments across the three institutional contexts considered. Here, both the multilateral and domestic contexts show a substantial balance, although with a slight majority of specific references over generic. When the bilateral context is considered, the gap between the two types of references to human rights is more evident: 73 % of these segments have been classified as generic, showing that 3 out of 4 times in which human rights are mentioned in bilateral meetings, they are just referred to, without any specific link to a concrete situation or policy action. Combined with the findings related to the dimension of ‘attitude’ in Figures 4 and 5, these data confirm that, despite the fact that human rights are expressed in relations with many countries, these references are abstract and immaterial. In this specific institutional context, including human rights actually seems an expedient to satisfy or mitigate domestic audiences, especially within Parliament.

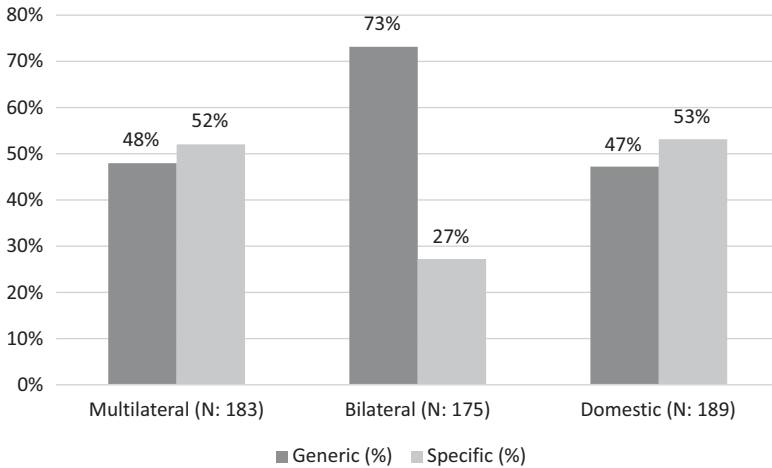


Figure 8: Generic/specific segments according to 'institutional context' (N:547).

The last set of inferences that can be made from the data collected with regards to the authorship behind human rights references in the Italian foreign policy discourse. The next two tables correlate the generic/specific dichotomy with respect to both the institutional position (Table 2) and the individual policy-maker (Table 3), to explore whether the data show any significant correlation between the Italian agency and a specific individual. The latter is particularly relevant from a role theoretical perspective, since, as discussed in Chapter 1, NRCs mostly derive from the leaders' understanding of the international orientation of the country.

Table 2 considers seven institutional positions that regularly emerge from the analysis of the documents presented in the Ministry series: (1) the Foreign Minister; (2) officials within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (especially undersecretaries or deputy foreign ministries); (3) the Prime Minister (includes also Deputy-Prime Minister); (4) the President of the Republic; (5) Other Ministers (in particular Defence, Interior, Health), (6) members of Parliament (whose positions on these matters generally stand out during the debates that follow the Minister of Foreign Affairs 'hearings' before the foreign affairs commissions of the Parliament); (7) the collective institution (either the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Government).

The table shows, as expected also due to the origin and nature of the collection addressed, that the 'human rights component' is firmly in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (60 % of segments). Still, there

is significant room for other institutional roles, in particular the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. This tripartition is helped by the progressive developments in the Italian political system, which, especially during the 2000s, have accentuated the role in the foreign policy of these two institutional representatives, with respect to individual ministers, in the context of technical governments and large and politically heterogeneous coalitions (CIRCAP/LAPS and IAI 2013). Therefore, while the above can be considered as the actual official ‘troika’ of Italian foreign policy, when the total references are disaggregated according to the generic/specific dichotomy, it becomes clear that the foreign ministry staff discourse is much more specific about the content of their human rights references than the prime ministers, other ministers, and presidents of the Republic. The explanation for this could be found in the data concerning the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, which show the most specific approach and, consistent with claims on the relevance of institutional memory in Italian foreign policy-making, are also expected to support their chief in being more aware and qualified when talking about human rights, in all contexts. However, the most striking figure concerns the President of the Republic, with 75 % of references being classified as generic. This seems to be due to the mostly institutional and ultimately representative role of Head of State that the President plays internationally, although as shown in the Table 3, President Napolitano has represented a notable exception to this trend, when compared to his precursors Scalfaro and Ciampi.

Individual policy-makers have been considered regardless of their role in the reference period (for example, D’Alema, Dini and Berlusconi have been both Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers; Ciampi has been both Prime Minister and President of the Republic). These data have been aggregated with a view to see if there is any individual or ideologic push behind the inclusion and promotion of human rights in Italy’s foreign policy. The generic/specific dichotomy was once again employed and complemented by qualitative analysis of single segments. Table 3 shows that, with minor differences, the inclusion of human rights in foreign policy is a bipartisan element of foreign-policy-making, being the theme referred to by policy-makers belonging to different parties and coalitions in diverse legislatures. The table also suggests that the level of specificity of human rights references change from individual to individual also in similar historical periods (see, for instance, Andreatta –58 % of specific references – and Agnelli –21 %).

The qualitative analysis of single segments identifies in texts by D’Alema and Frattini the most aware and qualified explanations for developing a strong ‘human rights component’ in Italian foreign policy.

Table 2: Generic/specific segments according to institutional actor (1993–2008; N: 547).

Institutional Position	No. of segments	Generic (N)	Specific (N)	Generic (%)	Specific (%)
MFA	262	139	123	53 %	47 %
MFA official	74	30	44	41 %	59 %
PM	52	31	21	60 %	40 %
PR	111	84	27	75 %	25 %
Other Minister	9	2	7	78 %	22 %
M. of Parliament	14	6	8	42 %	58 %
Collective (MFA/GOV)	25	14	11	56 %	44 %
Total	547	306	241	55 %	45 %

Besides being, on average, very specific in their human rights references, as also Andreatta, Fini and Dini have been, these two ministers also try to politically justify the need to commit more to human rights in foreign policy, in addition to claiming that Italy is naturally inclined to human rights because of its civilisation and history. For instance, D'Alema stressed the essential role of human rights protection in an academic article that he wrote while being Foreign Minister and was intended to present what he defined his 'realism-tempered idealist approach' for Italy's contribution to effective multilateralism (D'Alema 2006a, 641). Among other speeches, Frattini stressed the need for Italy to play both a political and a moral role in the 2011 Libyan crisis diverting from the past attitude, when Italy 'thought that it was in its strategic interest to favour political stability over democracy, equality and the respect of human and civil rights' (quoted in Croci and Valigi 2013, 46). Of course, while this latest excerpt shows a genuine push for a foreign policy (also) based on international moral principles, it confirms, from an insider perspective, the contention that human rights cannot be truly considered a firm and sustained priority, as frequently stressed in policy discourse.

More generally, the qualitative analysis of retrieved segments points out that all leaders share a genuine conception of Italy either as a 'Global Good Samaritan' (promoting global values for all) expressed via a range of interpretations of the 'human rights role-set', and expecting, therefore, a positive international reputation in this area. Not all leaders, however, show a proper awareness of what this role conception implies in terms of

Table 3: General/specific segments according to individual policy-maker (1993–2008; N: 547).

Name, last name (role; main party; orientation)	N.ofretrieved segments	Generic (N)	Specific (N)	Generic (%)	Specific (%)
Agnelli, Susanna (MFA, Republican Party, centre-left)	19	15	4	79 %	21 %
Andreatta, Beniamino (FM, Popular, centre)	23	11	12	48 %	52 %
Berlusconi, Silvio (PM, FM, Forza Italia, centre-right)	19	10	19	53 %	47 %
Ciampi, Carlo Azeglio (PM, PR, independent)	94	73	21	78 %	32 %
D'Alema, Massimo (PM, FM, Democratic Party, centre-left)	28	12	16	42 %	58 %
Dini, Lamberto (PM, FM, Rinnovamento Italiano, centre-right)	106	61	45	58 %	42 %
Fini, Gianfranco (V-PM, FM, Alleanza Nazionale, right)	18	6	12	34 %	66 %

(Continued)

Table 3: Continued

Name, last name (role; main party; orientation)	N.ofretrieved	Generic (N)	Specific (N)	Generic (%)	Specific (%)
Frattini, Franco (FM, Popolo delle libertà, centre-right)	47	26	21	55 %	45 %
Martino, Antonio (FM, Forza Italia, centre-right)	15	13	2	87 %	13 %
Napolitano, Giorgio (MI, PR, Left Democratic Party, centre-left)	9	4	5	44 %	56 %
Prodi, Romano (PM, Democratic Party, centre-left)	13	8	5	62 %	38 %
Ruggiero, Renato (FM, Italian Socialist Party, centre-right)	16	9	5	56 %	44 %
Scalfaro, Oscar Luigi (PR, democratic party, centre-left)	14	11	3	79 %	21 %

shaping a consistent and full-fledged foreign policy with a moral inflection. Some, in addition, do not demonstrate any specific command of the complexity and interconnectedness of this niche of international politics. In the majority of the cases addressed, therefore, their efforts to include human rights in foreign policy discourse sound as a music box, which continues to be blissfully played with the same score: reminding partners,

allies, multilateral institutions and domestic audience of Italy's commitment in this niche.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed some key characteristics of Italian foreign policy after the end of the Cold War and has particularly stressed the motivations at the basis of the country's choice for multilateralism in light of its status as 'middle power'. The chapter has shown that there are both material and ideational motivations for the Italian orientation toward multilateralism that are ultimately merged by an obsessive search for better international reputation and prestige. Once the key features of foreign policy have been introduced, the chapter has provided and discussed the data resulting from a mixed-method content analysis which was performed on collections of texts and documents of Italian foreign policy made publicly available by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Combining the different dimensions which were employed to classify retrieved segments, it has been possible to make some general inferences concerning how Italy has actually considered and employed human rights in its foreign policy discourse during the period in reference. The results are mixed.

On the one hand, there is a balanced, although fluctuating, distribution of references to human rights over the years in all of the institutional contexts considered. In particular, while the presence of human rights themes in a multilateral context is expected, what appears relevant is the presence of an internal debate on human rights issues in foreign policy and the existence of a numerically relevant bilateral dimension. On the other, the level of elaboration of the majority of retrieved segments is generic, meaning that in more than half of the times they are mentioned, human rights are just listed as an abstract priority without any grounding on specific situations or actions. A grand rhetoric for little concrete and fresh initiative.

When attention is centered on 'bilateral emphasis', the vagueness of most retrieved segments (generic/specific) combined with the general non-confrontational tones (attitude) adopted by the country's leaders shows that Italy is coherent in advancing human rights themes also in the context of bilateral relations. However, this is done selectively and, more importantly, in a way that does not risk ruining both its (allegedly) positive international reputation among peers and the quality of cooperation and benefits with countries that may be responsible for gross and systematic human rights violations. This behaviour is consistent with the general foreign policy approach of Italy outlined in the first sections of the chapter and is reasonable, if seen from the perspective of the national interest of the whole country. However, since Italian leaders

continuously stress and reiterate the centrality of human rights in Italy's foreign policy, the fact that human rights issues are rarely sorted in any actual calculation or weighed with other priorities shows certain hypocrisy with regard to the 'bilateral emphasis' of Italy's 'human rights component'.

The analysis also shows that, although human rights are not exclusive to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most important work to advance a specific and articulated human rights agenda comes from officials within the *Farnesina*, who appear much more aware of what promoting human rights entails. In practice, all leaders speak the language of human rights and all claim that human rights are important for Italy. The analysis does not allow isolating any specific individual input or push to explain Italy's commitment to human rights. The 'human rights role-set' is widely shared among the elites of the country and rooted in culture and traditions. The commitment is bipartisan and some policy-makers seem more personally aware and confident than others on human rights. Eventually, this commitment becomes specific mostly when it is linked to some selected priorities where Italy has managed to demonstrate to be capable and reliable. Therefore, the general international reputation of Italy on human rights is built on fundamental but isolated achievements on a set of selected and reiterated themes.

In general, the combination between general vagueness and propositional and selective approach in bilateral human rights discourse which emerges from this part of the study makes it difficult for Italy's commitment to these matters to be captured in one of the explanations discussed in the previous chapter. Italy appears to be a country that, on the one hand, values and contributes advancing human rights and cosmopolitan values, but on the other, seems to fall outside the scope of Alison Brysk's 'Global Good Samaritan' metaphor, mostly because the country's commitment to human rights appears to also be significantly determined by narrowly defined material considerations. The country's foreign policy discourse is overall consistent with the 'human rights role-set'. However, the choice to promote human rights in a non-confrontational way and continuously referring to multilateral organisations in areas where Italy's performance is already acknowledged and valued suggests that when it comes to performing these roles, genuine value-based considerations are often overlooked by an attempt to formally guarantee some good reputation without running the risk of trading human rights off with other competing, or rather more important, policy priorities. Since, as discussed in Chapter 1, a serious commitment to human rights promotion in foreign policy should at times be even costly when other competing priorities are at stake (Donnelly and

Whelan 2020), the vagueness, softness and selectivity of human rights discourse in Italian foreign policy open the door to inconsistency and, sometimes, hypocrisy.

Chapter 3 The Institutional Dialogue between Italy and International Human Rights Mechanisms

Introduction

On the basis of what was discussed in the previous chapter, it is difficult to contend that, in general, human rights are a strong and sustained objective of Italian foreign policy or that their promotion represents a fundamental building block of the national interest of the country. Some Italian officials, policy-makers, members of Parliament, and civil society organisations are genuinely convinced that Italy can and should play a role in advancing human rights worldwide either because it is ‘the right thing to do’ or because the country’s history and heritage invite it to act accordingly. However, when it comes to observing the second and third dimensions of the ‘human rights component’, those related to autonomous policy initiative, human rights are used more frequently as a policy instrument to achieve other material goals, namely to achieve a better reputation and prestige and play a recognised role in international politics.

That given by Chapter 2, however, is not the full picture. As briefly explained in the Introduction to this book, Italian authorities and non-state actors also continuously interact with several international political institutions and technical mechanisms of independent experts which have been established both regionally (CoE, CSCE/OSCE, EU) and globally (UN): the so-called ‘international human rights machinery’. Although very much institutionalised and ritualised (Charlesworth and Larkin 2014a), observing a country’s behaviour in this framework provides a very illustrative angle from which to observe foreign policy in the human rights sector. As a consequence, while the previous chapter has identified and discussed the general role and position of human rights in the Italian foreign policy discourse, this chapter aims to assess Italy’s performance in the first dimension of ‘the human rights component’ of its international agency, that is how the ‘institutional dialogue’ is conducted with these international organisations and mechanisms.

Previous pages have stressed that a significant determinant of foreign policy is how a state sees itself, the world around it, and its place in that world (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). However, to give a complete picture

of Italy's foreign policy in this sector and assess its consistence and substance, it is also necessary to critically assess both how Italy relates to these international organisms and related standards, norms and rituals, and how the latter evaluate the domestic approach of Italy to human rights. Two core aspects should be recalled while performing this task. The first is that respecting international norms and standards and cooperating with this machinery is an obligation that countries have voluntarily accepted. The point is not the existence of participation in these mechanisms *per se*, but the quality and engagement of this participation and the domestic support for it. Second, human rights shortcomings are common to all countries, and all countries, even the most enlightened, have domestic issues which are regularly exposed during international monitoring. Providing recommendations with a view to continuously improving the internal situation is how global and regional human rights regimes work, in a constructive perspective. Therefore, receiving criticism is 'part of the game' and not necessarily evidence of a generally poor human rights record. Consequently, what this chapter tries to unearth looking at how this 'dialogue' is conducted, is the existence of positive trends, contradictions and divergences between the self-image displayed by Italy in this framework, the actual commitment that the country places on specific human rights issues in foreign policy, and the external assessment of the situation on the ground.

After briefly re-calling the 'human rights role-set' that Italy has been parading in multilateral institutional frameworks, the chapter will present and discuss the actual division of work in the Italian system, with a view to understand what mechanisms are attributed responsibilities to allow the country to sustain its international presence on human rights issues, that is, who makes the institutional dialogue between Italy and the human rights mechanisms work. The second section will then consider some indicators of Italy's actual contribution to the functioning of multilateral human rights mechanisms (including funding and diplomatic sponsorship). Finally, it will present and discuss some strengths and shortcomings emerging from human rights monitoring (excluding the UPR, which will be the subject of a specific case study in the next chapter). This analysis will be done in part by drawing from previously collected and analysed texts (see Section 3 of the previous chapter) as complemented by more recent documents retrieved via desk-research, and in part by drawing from data and findings from the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights* series (2011–2020) edited by the University of Padova Human Rights Centre.

1. The Actual Performers of Italy's 'Human Rights Role-set'

This book has partly explained the different motivations behind the commitment of Italy in the human rights realm in terms of NRCs, that is, of what the country's elites consider the international orientation of their country should be about. The previous chapter, in particular, has provided an overview of excerpts from statements by leaders from different ideologic perspectives and institutional positions (Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Prime Ministers and Presidents of the Republic). These have confirmed that, in the words of foreign policy-makers, Italy's commitment to human rights is based on its constitutional principles and on the 'traditional' support of multilateralism, its institutions and norms, which, eventually, represents a combination of what scholars labelled as 'forced', 'institutional' and 'genetic' multilateralism (Santoro 1991; Fois and Pagani 2008). In the 'human rights role-set' the NRCs of effective multilateralist and principled actor (based on constitutional principles) are glued together and deeply rooted in some Italian elites and often causally connected to a certain idea of 'positive peace' (Galtung 1996) in foreign policy discourse. 42 statements expressing this orientation were found through the qualitative analysis of the documents retrieved from the texts published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the period 1993–2008. Additional claims can be found looking at other documents published in the remaining part of the time frame (see, for instance, Frattini 2008, quoted in de Perini 2021; Terzi 2012; Letta 2013; Mogherini 2014; Alfano 2017; Conte 2018; Di Maio 2019).

This overall role conception is also largely confirmed in the niche scholarship which addresses Italy's foreign policy with respect to human rights-related priorities in international organisations. This strand of the literature often stresses the multilevel game that Italy plays in this regard at the global and regional level. In particular, on the one hand, Italy's initiative with respect to human rights in multilateralism was certainly stimulated and consolidated by its membership in the CoE, a human rights organisation *per se*, the OSCE, where human rights are a fundamental pillar within the 'human dimension' of security, and the EU, which has gradually attributed to human rights a key promotion among its foreign policy objectives¹⁵. On the other hand, the country's single initiatives that pushed for the inclusion of human rights in the CSCE framework (Nuti

¹⁵ See, in particular, besides article 21 of the Treaty on European Union as emended by the Lisbon Treaty, the annual report on human rights and democracy in the world, the EU human rights guidelines adopted by the Council since 2008, the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy in 2014 and the EU Global Sanction Regime since 2020.

2002), prompted EU support for a UN moratorium on the death penalty (Fois and Pagani 2008; Marchetti 2016), led to the promotion of the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Religion and Belief (Annichino 2013; Ferrara and Petito 2016) and to the 2006 deployment of the globally supported European-led peacekeeping force in Lebanon (de Perini 2019) shows that assertiveness related to human rights has also been an autonomous feature of the country's international agency and a significant part of its contribution to the development of multilateralism.

Cantir and Karboo (2012, 2016), however, reminds that, when NRCs are concerned, efforts should be made to open the 'black-box' of policy-making. Although the foreign policy is expected to, substantially, follow a certain and predictable path, there can be differences (even conflicts) between rival elites or even with public opinion perceptions of what their country should prioritise internationally and how. This can also have a significant impact in affecting both the construction of international roles and related reputation, because sudden changes of direction in foreign policy affect international credibility, and peers' acceptance of these. For instance, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the strong opposition manifested by Italian civil society – which, as the idea of 'genetic multilateralism' suggests, has traditionally been supportive of 'just peace' in the Middle East to be obtained within a framework of international law, through multilateral negotiations – contributed substantially to force PM Berlusconi to withdraw the promise he originally made to Bush about joining the US-led coalition (Missiroli 2007, 153; Del Sarto and Tocci 2008, 138). Another episode of role contestation was observed during the fully populist parentheses of the Italian government during 2018–2019, when contradictions among leaders from different leading parties further weakened Italy's international credibility (De Perini 2021). However, despite occasional diversions, the main characteristics of the 'human rights role-set' hold strongly at both the political and societal levels, between actual perceptions, desires, and prescriptions. This is particularly evident when looking at who actually does the human rights job in the country behind the smokescreen of official foreign policy discourse.

1.1. Institutional Organisms

A very substantial contribution to advance human rights in the Italian international agenda, although certainly less flamboyant than the rhetoric referred to above by ministers, lies in the work of officials within the *Farnesina*, namely those undersecretaries of state who have been attributed specific human rights responsibilities (for instance, among the most outspoken on human rights issues, undersecretaries Patrizia Toia during the Prodi and D'Alema cabinets in the late 1990s, and Manlio Di Stefano,

under the Conte II cabinet of 2019–2021), and those officials attributed with formal responsibilities on these matters, such as the Director General for Political Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, a position of which there is intermittent trace after 2000.

However, the most substantive contribution is provided by a small but steadfast mechanism established within the *Farnesina*: the Interministerial Committee on Human Rights (CIDU, *Comitato interministeriale per i diritti umani*), which was established by decree of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on 15 February 1978 and is chaired by a functionary of the diplomatic service appointed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. CIDU covers several fundamental tasks and responsibilities related to the subject of the investigation of this book, and to ‘institutional dialogue’ specifically. These range from promoting measures necessary for ensuring full compliance with international obligations assumed by Italy on human rights issues, to facilitating the implementation of international conventions in Italy; from punctually drafting the reports that Italy is required to submit to the pertinent international mechanisms (for instance to the UN Treaty bodies, or in the UPR context), to maintaining and developing appropriate relations with civil society organisations engaged in promoting and protecting human rights. In a nutshell, CIDU is the engine which allows Italy to show diligent commitment to international human rights objectives and norms in multilateral forums. CIDU is among a wealth of organisms or committees with similar functions that exist in other countries and that the UNOHCHR (2016) has only recently started recognising under the broad label of ‘national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up’, recommending the creation of analogous mechanisms in all countries.

The age-long existence and entrepreneurial spirit of CIDU is *per se* an indicator of the fact that Italy’s interest in human rights, regardless of how this book evaluates it overall, is long-lasting. At the same time, while nominally ‘interministerial’, the importance of this organism outside the specific niche of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not always recognised. In particular, in 2012–2013 CIDU was initially phased out as a result of the ‘spending review’ by the Monti Cabinet (2011–2013), and only later, after some civil society lobbying and the appointment of a human rights-sensitive new Foreign Minister, Ms Emma Bonino, it was re-established on 5 September 2013. Among the motivations for its reinstatement, the indispensable role of CIDU for providing advice and strategic guidance on the promotion and protection of human rights and the correct compliance with the obligations assumed by Italy after the signature and ratification of conventions and international agreements in this field was mentioned (UP-HRC 2014).

With the exclusion of the phantom existence of a Committee of Ministers for Orientation and Strategic Guidance for the Protection of Human Rights since 2007, established to ensure effective policy and coordination between ministries on this matter, the CIDU has been the only organism within the Government dealing with the promotion and protection of human rights at the international level and on a continual basis. Therefore, it represents a fundamental supply of ‘institutional memory’ when it comes to this policy sector, which has made it functional in reminding domestically and internationally what Italy’s DNA is about (or is perceived to be by its leaders), and supporting the general institutional resistance when contestations of Italy’s widespread role conceptions emerged around the corner. This also happened when the all-populist Conte I cabinet, especially through the agency of Matteo Salvini, the leader of xenophobic and right-wing *Legha* heralded a radical change in perspective on Italy’s relations with international human rights institutions and norms between 2018 and 2019 (Monteleone 2021).

Additional human rights organisms have been created in the Italian Parliament. In particular, during the 10th legislature (1987–1992), the third Commission of the Chamber of Deputies (the one competent on Foreign and European Union Affairs) established its own Permanent Committee on Human Rights, which, especially through parliamentary hearings, has tried to ensure that Parliament is kept continually informed and up-to-date with regard to the status of international human rights and the course of individual human rights measures, performing preliminary tasks pertinent to the activities of the Commission. This is another evidence of the diffused interest for human rights in Italian policy and law-making, with little effect, however, on shaping foreign policy. As it was pointed out by Zanon (2007, 567) with regard to Parliamentary approach to Iran and China, Italian parties show a particular interest in voicing their concerns over human rights violations, but prefer to water down or renounce their bold proposals when it comes to implement concrete initiatives, especially if the latter might put member of Parliament in collision course with the Government or coalition to which they belong. In other words, even from Parliament, paraded human rights objectives are generally sacrificed when push comes to the shove.

Another relevant human rights mechanism within the Parliament is the Senate’s Extraordinary Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights – which is ‘extraordinary’ in the sense that it is not permanent and must be established at the beginning of each legislature. This is a consultative body for the higher chamber of Parliament, with the main task of studying, observing and taking initiatives on issues concerning the protection and promotion of internationally recognised human rights.

This organism, first established in 2001, was built on the experience of the antecedent Committee against Death Penalty established in 1996 in the framework of the initiative supported by the Italian Government to promote, both individually and through the EU support, the proposal for a moratorium on death penalty at the UN (see Marchetti 2016). Beyond representing a mere modification of the Committee's name, this procedural change appears to confirm the general approach of Italy to understanding human rights promotion in foreign policy, which was discussed in Chapter 2. This name change is in fact consistent with the observation that rather than representing specific sectors on which a full-fledged and inclusive commitment to promote the complex and wide-ranging international human rights agenda is operationalised, core priorities such as the moratorium on death penalty or the promotion of criminal justice infrastructure constitute the actual human rights agenda on which Italy has then tried to build a wider commitment and reputation as a 'human rights champion'. Despite for long time very active (see UP-HRC 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017) even the Extraordinary Commission has achieved little visibility and effects on the country's human rights policy. On the contrary, occasional national media coverage was presented to expose the Italian law-makers contradictions, when, for example, the Commission decided to flatten its possible contribution to the wider human rights debate by focusing on 'least divisive and ideological issues' on the request of its newly appointed Chair, a Senator from the *Legge* well known for her harsh anti-Roma stance (La Repubblica 2019).

It is a widely known limit that Italy has not established yet an independent national human rights institution (NHRI) (either the National Commission for human rights or the National Ombudsman) as recommended by the so-called 'Paris Principles' adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993. This gap places Italy, which aims to stand out in international politics for its positive human rights record, among the very few countries in Europe and in the world that lack what human rights experts define as the fundamental cornerstone of national human rights protection systems and relay mechanisms between international human rights norms and the state (Hafner-Burton 2013, Chapter 10)¹⁶. The lack of this independent institution is therefore a major structural problem, which deeply questions the foundation and credibility of Italy's

¹⁶ At the moment of writing (April 2022), GANHRI, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, affiliated with the UN Human Rights Council, counts 120 members: 90 'A' status accredited NHRIs (fully compliant with Paris Principles) and 30 'B' status accredited NHRIs (partially compliant with the Paris Principles); see: <https://ganhri.org/membership/>.

alleged human rights policy, both domestically and internationally. It should be stressed, as this is a unique feature of the Italian case, that similar functions have for long been performed by a myriad of territorial and regional ombudsman and human rights offices within Italian municipalities, provinces and regions (see UP-HRC 2011, for an overview). These have even gathered into loose national networks or coordinating bodies which also occasionally represent Italy abroad in European and international human rights institutions platforms¹⁷, without, however, the strong legitimisation given by having their role recognised in a national law or in the Constitution, as it is for the majority of NHRIs accredited in Europe and internationally.

There is also abundant evidence of international agency by local and regional governments committed to human rights, which, although scattered, compensate in part for the lack of centralised coordination of human rights policy and evaluation in the country. Among these, it is worth highlighting the 1990s campaign of thousands of Italian municipalities that included in their statutes the ‘Peace Human Rights Norm’, a provision that legally grounds local authorities’ strong commitment to promote the values of peace and universal human rights in their local and international cooperation (Mazzuchelli 2011). A more recent example is the stubborn action of ‘city diplomacy’ prompted by hundreds of Italian local authorities, in joint venture with a transnational civil society campaign to support the adoption of a Declaration of the United Nations on the right to peace as a fundamental human and a people’s right by an inter-governmental working group at the Human Rights Council in Geneva (Papisca 2015).

On the one hand, the existence of these organisms and entities shows creative pragmatism, diffuse commitment and a general support for human rights initiative from a multilevel perspective. On the other, the need for this autonomous and diverse response highlights major structural limitations, which further feed the weak coordination at the central level and, thus, the overall policy inconsistency of the country in respect to human rights. Since the implementation of a full-fledged human rights foreign policy entails a strong domestic grounding (Caffarena and Gabusi 2017, 144), as well as dedicated mechanisms and resources, this fragmented national infrastructure is original, variegated and well anchored to international human rights standards and procedures, but also inadequately developed and coordinated to allow the country to be credible internationally.

¹⁷ In addition, some independent authorities with a nation-wide scope have been created in most recent years to protect at the groups of rights on which the international community has reached wide consensus, namely children and detainees.

As Annichino (2013, 165) notes, 'good intentions are not a substitute for carefully planned, politically intelligent, and inclusive policy action'; similarly, the work of many committed actors, individually or loosely connected entities cannot replace a properly coordinated national governance of the phenomenon, especially if ambitions are claimed to be high.

1.2. The Contribution of Civil Society

Given such fragile institutional infrastructure, a good part of the merits for allowing Italy's international credibility on human rights to substantially endure is the contribution of civil society organisations (in particular, NGOs, associations, academic and religious associations) that have affected policy-making in this sector in a variety of ways. First, it is the Ministry that decides to place human rights issues among foreign policy priorities but, as it was reported, it is due to the coordination it develops with NGOs and other non-governmental stakeholders if it manages to develop a much broader and more effective activity than what the internal organisation of the Ministry would be able to achieve on its own (Santoro 2017, 3).

Second, many Italian NGOs and networks initiatives have used the channels (or 'interstices' – see Papisca 1986; 2009) provided by the global human rights regime to push their own agendas engaging the government and thus allowing Italy to develop effective forms of 'hybrid diplomacy'. On this matter, Marchetti (2018, 2021) has demonstrated the crucial role of civil society organisations in cooperating with the government and lobbying it to act in all the most important achievements on which the government has set the foundations of its alleged international reputation on human rights issues, including death penalty, female genital mutilation, international criminal justice, peacekeeping, and the creation of legal pathways for migrants. Other scholars have confirmed that where Italy hit the nail on the head internationally on human rights issues, national civil society put the paw into it. Pividori (2016) demonstrates how the drivers that have contributed to the formulation of the Italian foreign policy with regard to the issue of international criminal justice institutions besides contextual factors can be explained by the presence of eminent and influential personalities individually committed to such an endeavour within and outside the institutions. Mascia and Papisca (2017) have argued that the establishment of Civilian Peace Corps in Italy fosters an improved role for civil society organisations because of their direct involvement in international operations which were traditionally the exclusive reserve of the 'high' politics and military, and offers them new scope to intervene in conflict transformation processes. These opportunities steer the country towards more 'pacifist' and 'multilateralist' roles,

somewhat identifiable with the concept of ‘active neutrality’, very much consistent with the ‘human rights role set’.

Third, and related to the second point, civil society activism on human rights is also claimed to have contributed to socialising a part of Italian political and diplomatic personnel (Marchetti 2021). As mentioned, this is favoured by strong synergies between governments and civil society organisations (Pividori 2016; Marchetti 2018, 204; de Perini 2019b), which may represent a strong contribution to Italian foreign policy but can also include risks for the effectiveness and reputation of these organisations and representatives, such as that of ‘being overwhelmed by institutional rules and ties when directly involved in politics and institutions’ and thus weakened in their voice (Cugliandro 2009, 195).

This transversal bottom-up support for the human rights agenda represents the most genuine expression of the ‘genetic multilateralism’ of Italian society, which is often, but not always, complemented by the support by public opinion. As partly discussed with regard to international missions in Chapter 2, this support is widespread, but also shifting, depending on contextual factors. An elite survey on Italian foreign policy carried out by the University of Siena in 2016¹⁸ mirrors the prevalent agreement about the relevance of protecting peace and human rights abroad in shaping Italy’s way to its external action. For example, the aggregated data from the survey show that gross human rights violations in third countries represent a major or a sufficiently large threat to Italy for 60 % of the interviewees. As far as engagement in multilateralism is specifically concerned, only 14 % of the interviewees agree (2 % of them strongly) when they are asked whether they believe that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs neglects relations with international human rights monitoring organisations. According to another survey conducted in early 2018 in the context of a grassroots initiative to establish a ‘Ministry of Peace’ in Italy, 94 % of the interviewees said to believe that they are very or sufficiently sensitive to peace and non-violence issues¹⁹.

At the same time, other surveys show that, such vocal commitment may not be particularly consistent when some specific sensitive issues are

¹⁸ Elite survey conducted by the Laboratory for Political and Social Analysis (LAPS) of the University of Siena, from 20 January to 16 August 2016; the dataset consists of 360 interviews with governmental, political, military, socio-economic, religious, non-governmental, and cultural actors.

¹⁹ Survey designed by the University of Padova Human Rights Centre and conducted by Demetra Ltd between 30 January and 5 February 2018; the dataset consists of a sample of 1,024 adult people resident in Italy with a telephone line number registered to the online panel: opinion.net.

at stake. The already referred series by IAI and the University of Siena on Italians and foreign policy (*Gli Italiani e la politica estera*) is particularly revealing, as it shows between the lines a number of convictions that go in the opposite direction of what is set forth in the international law of human rights. For instance, 38 % of the respondents to the 2017 edition of this survey said to be in favour of adopting a push-back policy towards migrants, even if these, as specified by the proposed answer option, resulted in inhumane treatments for migrants once deported to countries of transit or origin (DISPOC/LAPS and IAI 2017). The percentage increased further in the 2020 edition of the survey, which was conducted after the populist turn of the Italian Government (DISPOC/LAPS and IAI 2020). 33 % of the respondents in the 2020 survey also said to be in favour of using torture against terrorist suspects to thwart attacks against the country (*ibidem*). In both cases, respondents still represent a minority, albeit a remarkable one given the absolute and mandatory prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatments is at the core of multilateral norms. In terms of trade-offs between human rights and other foreign policy priorities, a core issue discussed in Chapter 1, it is interesting to note half of the sample of respondents reached in 2019 said to agree with the decision of the Italian Government to send the Italian Ambassador back to Egypt to safeguard the bilateral relations between the two countries, despite the Egyptian government showing reticence to cooperate in the investigation of the case of Giulio Regeni, the Italian researcher tortured and murdered in that country. However, at the same time, the majority of respondents agreed with the EU's efforts to counter the attempts of Hungary to undermine the rule of law in the country (DISPOC/LAPS and IAI 2019), although this may amount to backlash and obstacles for effective European political integration, which may well be among Italian priorities.

Consistent with the stubbornness and determination of organised civil society, and the ambitious pronouncements of politicians, a large part of Italian public opinion shows to be interested in what happens outside the borders of Italy, also with regard to human rights. However, many Italians shape their opinions often considering the contextual consequences these events have for other 'national interests' (DISPOC/LAPS and IAI 2017). These data, at least with respect to the specific human rights niche, make the presumed 'genetic multilateralism' of Italian society increasingly appear as wishful thinking rather than a firm and widespread adhesion to the 'human rights role-set' by wider Italian society.

An important ally in the long term would be the steady growth of human rights education both in schools and universities, consistent with international standards adopted in the early 2010s at the UN and Council

of Europe levels²⁰, and in line with the pledges made by the government in its candidacy letters to the Human Rights Council in 2010, 2014 and 2018. Italy has also promoted the intergovernmental platform to support the adoption of these international standards (UP-HRC 2012). However, while the annual mapping by the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights* reveals that the number of courses on human rights in Italian universities is blooming (in 2019, a total of 153 human rights modules were taught in 43 universities in the Country – see UP-HRC 2020), the situation in the much more strategic sector of school education, where human rights education is generally advanced under the frame of civic or citizenship education (*educazione civica*), might be less promising. As Tracchi (2020, 257–258) demonstrates, indeed, due to the chaotic policy framework in the country, citizenship education has still an unclear and undefined status within the formal education system in the country, and ‘the burden of its implementation is basically left to teachers without explicit and comprehensive guidelines’.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses of Italy’s Institutional Dialogue

Italy has ratified all core human rights treaties at the UN level and related optional protocols, relating to civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, non-discrimination on racial basis, the prohibition of torture and forced disappearances, elimination of discrimination against women, the protection of the rights of children and of the rights of persons with disabilities. The only missing check concerns the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the Members of their families adopted in 1990, which Italy has neither ratified, nor signed (the latter action would have implied at least a political commitment on the matter, without being legally compelled by the treaty provisions).

It is helpful to remind, for those who are not familiar with the UN human rights system and its procedures, that each of these treaties establishes a committee (or treaty-body) composed of a group of independent experts (ranging from 10 to 23 depending on the organism), who undertakes a number of tasks related to monitoring the compliance with respective treaty provisions by the State-parties to it. The core of this set of tasks is the periodic assessment of the performance of the states in respect to the rights set forth in the respective treaty, which is based on

²⁰ Respectively the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training of 2011, and the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education of 2010.

the analysis of a national report periodically prepared by the state; in the case of Italy, the report is prepared by CIDU's experts.

The content of this national report is normally complemented by several additional submissions (at times called 'alternative' or 'shadow' reports) submitted to the treaty body by competent civil society organisations and networks. In addition to this reporting procedure, all treaties contain optional obligations that enhance the ability of the international community to scrutinize implementation and compliance, from accepting individual complaints to performing country visits. For instance, the first Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) gives states an opportunity to express their acceptance of the competence of the relative treaty body, the UN Human Rights Committee, to review and make recommendations on individual complaints alleging state violations of the treaty. The International Convention against Torture (CAT) provides that states may optionally declare that they recognize the competence of the Committee against Torture (CAT) to hear individual complaints arising from allegations of violations under the Treaty. Also the Conventions against racial discrimination (ICERD), against discrimination against women (CEDAW) and on children's rights (CRC) have similar optional provisions either in the text of the Convention (an article) or in a separate instrument. A few optional protocols such as the first two protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (one against child pornography and the other against the use of children in armed conflict) and the second protocol to the ICCPR (prohibiting death penalty) add new rights or themes which are also covered by the monitoring work of treaty bodies with regard to state-parties. The optional protocol to the Convention against Torture (OP-CAT) establishes its own specific mechanism in addition to the Committee against Torture. This is a Sub-committee with a preventive mandate focused on a proactive approach to preventing torture and ill treatment, and a right to visit places of detention and examine the treatment of people held there. In addition, some treaty bodies may, under given conditions, initiate Country inquiries if they receive reliable information containing well-founded indications of serious, grave or systematic violations of the Conventions in a State-party²¹.

Despite the few reservations advanced regarding the specific provisions of some treaties, it is possible to claim that Italy's approach to the international

²¹ All treaty-bodies can also provide authoritative interpretations of a specific article/provision of the Convention: known as 'General Comments'. Although these are a fundamental contribution to the development of the human rights regime, this task does not normally involve forms of 'institutional dialogue' and is therefore not included in this overview.

legal system and its monitoring tasks is formally remarkable, as summarised in Table 4.

A similar conclusion can be essentially advanced for Italy's commitment to the Council of Europe's human rights system, which is as wide in scope, although more specific (technical), as that established at the UN level. Among the 56 CoE legal instruments which can be understood as having a direct bearing on human rights issues (for this selection, see UP-HRC 2013), the few (long-standing) lacunae for Italy concern the lack of ratification of Protocol XII to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which set forth a complete prohibition of discrimination, the European Convention on Nationality, the Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In addition, the country has faced some obstacles in finalising the acceptance of the CoE Convention on Bioethics and Human Rights (also known as the 'Oviedo Convention'), a treaty which was accepted by Italian law in 2001, but whose instrument of ratification was never submitted to the CoE Secretariat, and of some important provisions in other treaties which are optional²² or were left out when ratifying the instrument through ad hoc declarations / reservations²³.

Among these optional steps is the possibility of submitting a declaration which expressly recognises representative non-governmental organisations within national jurisdiction the right to present collective complaints pursuant to the 1995 Protocol to the European Social Charter, in addition to recognised collective social actors and international NGO. Italy has not considered this opportunity, which is noteworthy given the relevance of NGOs to the functioning of the country's international human rights performance and credibility in the international system. In fact, since only Finland has made this declaration so far, this gap does not particularly affect the generally positive picture that Italy has developed of its institutional cooperation as a human rights law-abiding state. Still, the absence of considerations for this option suggests a little proclivity to lead regionally on these issues. Indeed, submitting this optional declaration could both make Italy's credibility as a human rights role model stronger domestically and internationally, and persuade other countries to adopt similar actions thus improving the regional protection of social rights.

This overview of the status of ratifications symbolises a fundamental but eventually passive acceptance of the international human rights regime. Beyond this, important indicators to assess whether Italy's legal

²² For instance, accepting article 25 of the European Social Charter (revised), on the right of workers to protection of their claims in the event of insolvency of their employer.

²³ The declaration that excludes the application for Italy of Chapter C of the European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level.

Table 4: Italy's status of acceptance regarding UN Human Rights provisions.

Convention	Ratification law	Declarations/ reservations	Recognition of specific competences of the committee
ICERD	l. 13 October 1975, No. 654	Yes (article 4)	Individual Communications (article 14): Yes
ICESCR	l. 25 October 1977, No. 881	No	-
<i>OP</i>	l. 3 October 2014, No. 52	No	-
ICCPR	l. 25 October 1977, No. 881	Yes (article 15.1 and 19.3)	Individual Communications (article 41): Yes
<i>OP – 1</i>	l. 25 October 1977, No. 881	Yes (article 5.2)	-
<i>OP – 2</i>	l. 9 December 1994, No. 734	No	-
CEDAW	l. 14 March 1985, No. 132	Yes (general)	-
<i>OP</i>	Deposit of ratification: 22/09/2000	No	Enquiry Procedure (articles 8 and 9): Yes
CAT	l. 3 November 1988, No. 498	No	Individual Communications (article 22): Yes Interstate Communications (article 21): Yes Enquiry Procedure (article 20): Yes
<i>OP</i>	l. 9 November 2012, No. 195	No	Visits of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (article 11) Yes
CRC	l. 27 May 1991, No. 176	No	-

(Continued)

Table 4: Continued

Convention	Ratification law	Declarations/ reservations	Recognition of specific competences of the committee
<i>OP – AC</i>	1. 11 March 2002, No. 46	Declaration binding pursuant to article 3: 17 years	-
<i>OP – SC</i>	1. 11 March 2002, No. 46	No	-
<i>OP – IC</i>	1. 16 November 2015, No. 199	No	Individual Communications: Yes Enquiry Procedure (article 13): Yes
CRPD	1. 3 March 2009, No. 18	No	-
<i>OP</i>	1. 3 March 2009, No. 18	No	Enquiry Procedure (articles 6 and 7): Yes
CPED	1. 29 July 2015, No. 131	No	Enquiry Procedure (article 33): Yes

Source: Italian Yearbook of Human Rights 2020 (UP-HRC 2020).

commitment to the human rights system is consistently enacted in policy action include respecting deadlines for submitting periodic reports, where, especially during the 2000s, some occasional but minor delays were registered (see UP-HRC 2012; and 2013, Part III), and concrete cooperation of Italian authorities with independent human rights machinery, especially during country visits. On this second aspect, while cooperation is generally lauded by experts, there were also cases where due cooperation was dissatisfied. For instance, when the CoE Committee for the prevention of torture visited Italy in 2009 to assess the government’s controversial policy of push-back migrants at risk of torture in the receiving countries, experts concluded that, while very good at the local level

‘regrettably, the co-operation received at the central level was, in certain respects, unsatisfactory. The delegation was denied access to some documents and information it had requested, which did not facilitate its task. Other information requested by the delegation prior to and in the course of the visit was not provided in a timely manner and when eventually furnished was, moreover, incomplete’ (CoE 2010, 6).

Rather than an oversight, this is a significant breach of one of the core principles on which this preventive mechanism grounds the efficacy of its actual 'preventive' functioning: cooperation (the other being 'confidentiality').

Another indicator that can be considered is the funding of human rights mechanisms. Talking about her methodology to assess prospective 'Global Good Samaritans', Brysk (2009, 20) notes that 'one snapshot measure of institutional multilateralism is financial support for the United Nations' High Commissioner on Human Rights'. Looking at voluntary findings is, indeed, a particularly telling indicator if one considers that the slice of the UN regular budget allocated to the functioning of this Office – which was even formally described as the 'world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity' (UN Permanent Mission 2018) – has been around a mere 4 %. Indeed, the UNOHCHR, which oversees all the UN human rights machinery based in Geneva and a quite rich and diversified network of country and stand-alone offices, human rights components in UN peace missions, regional centres and human rights advisers in UN country team, is funded one-third by the regular budget of the United Nations, approved by the General Assembly every two years. The remaining two-thirds of the budget are voluntary contributions, mostly from States and additionally from international organisations, foundations, commercial enterprises, and private citizens. Without consistent voluntary funding, in other words, the UNOHCHR initiative is swamped.

The available data for Italy covers the period 2006–2021. In 2021 Italy contributed to the High Commissioner's Office budget providing a voluntary contribution of \$536,000, ranking 28th among donors (with countries with a very questionable human rights record, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, exceeding \$ 2,000,000 each!). However, as the graph below shows, the contribution of the country is very fluctuating, with a negative peak of 0 (!) in 2010, a four-year period where contributions were around 100,000\$ per year, the cost of an SUV, and a top donation of 2,537,000 in 2017.

The curve in Figure 9 certainly does not contribute in supporting the government's claim which identifies human rights as a firm and sustained priority of Italian foreign policy, especially if these data are compared to the country's support to other similar institutions. For instance, as far as the protection of cultural heritage and art is concerned, the situation is quite different. As the website of the Permanent Delegation of Italy to UNESCO in Paris²⁴ proudly highlights, while Italy's contribution to the regular budget of the Agency is approximately \$12,000,000 per year

²⁴ Retrieved from: <https://delegazioneunesco.esteri.it/rappunesco/en/l-italia-all-unesco/> (accessed: 15/04/2022).

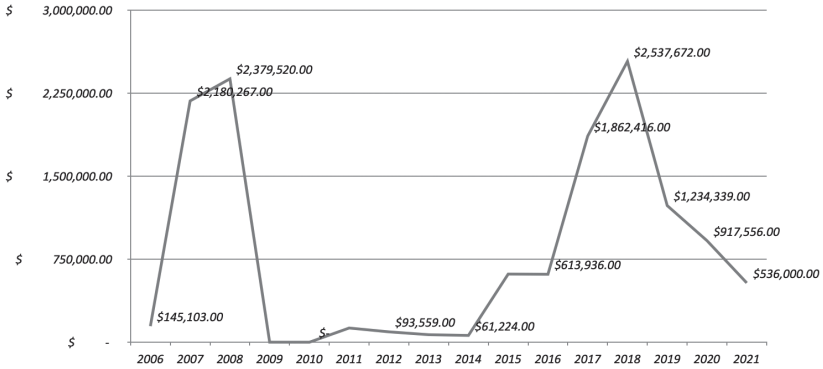


Figure 9: Italy’s voluntary contributions to the budget of the UNOHCHR (2006–2021). Source: UNOHCHR and UP-HRC 2020.

(3.7 % of the total budget) the country is also the first contributor to voluntary funds, with 30,000,000 dollars per year.

This huge difference is, in fact, much more revealing about Italy’s commitment to advance human rights than what it may appear. It is not just about different priorities, but also about diverse approaches to promote human rights. Indeed, UNESCO is one of the specialised agencies of the UN that can be easily ascribed to the broader human rights system and responds to the deep-rooted NRCs of Italy, especially due to the Agency’s contribution to advance the right to education, the right to cultural participation, the development of a culture of peace, the protection of cultural heritage and intercultural and interreligious cooperation (for an overview of these themes, see Donders 2015; de Perini and Campagna 2022). Due to Italy’s enormous cultural heritage, material and immaterial, the broad mandate of UNESCO is a non-conflictual policy area where Italy has a direct strategic interest in terms of its own preservation and protection and can play a key role internationally. In other words, this is another multi-lateral niche for ‘middle power Italy’ to build its international reputation and prestige.

Moreover, the promotion and protection of human rights by UNESCO is mostly developed in terms of soft law (declarations) and declaratory politics, which allows more flexible ways to demonstrate commitment than being continually scrutinised for the level or respect to the legal obligations envisaged by the *ad hoc* human rights regime and tripped for rhetoric-performance gaps. From this perspective, the approach of UNOHCHR is much different from that pursued

by UNESCO. The former, in fact, personifies the information advocacy approach based on acquiring and disseminating authoritative information on violations 'to encourage (and, if necessary, shame) governments to improve their practices' (Donnelly and Whelan 2020). The impressive and constant financial support Italy provides to UNESCO, therefore, does not only mean that cultural promotion is more important and strategic than human rights among national priorities, which is completely acceptable from a national foreign policy perspective. It also confirms Italy's preference for more propositional and less controversial approaches and tones in the promotion of human rights, as also discussed in the previous chapter, especially with respect to 'bilateral emphasis'. When observed from a specific human rights perspective, supporting UNESCO allows Italy to enact its principled 'role-set' while using multilateralism to protect its interests with little or no political costs.

Another way to look at Italy's consistency in its multilateral human rights performance is to look at the country's behaviour in terms of proposing and supporting resolutions on human rights. This may be observed with regard to the voting record on UN resolutions 'against a geographically diverse set of pariah states' (Brysk 2009, 21) both in the Human Rights Council and in the General Assembly of the UN, which is a valuable point of view 'to explore the support or repudiation of fundamental norms' (Monteleone 2021). Some have stressed Italy's continuous supportive behaviour in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, which is the committee where states' representatives discuss resolutions on human rights and social themes. These discussions highlight Italy's relevant initiative in a number of well-known policy fields, including death penalty, female genital mutilation, promotion and protection of children's rights, elimination of forced marriages, promotion of freedom of religion and belief (Santoro 2017). Dynamism, support, and cooperation can also be inferred from Italy's voting behaviour at the Human Rights Council. For instance, since the creation of this institution in 2006, when Italy was a member, it has directly participated (sponsored) or diplomatically supported (co-sponsored), on average, 60 % of annual resolutions (see tables in UPHRC 2011–2020, part III, 1).

Co-sponsorship of resolutions presented by Italy can be understood as an indicator of both how Italian diplomacy works in the UN institutional framework and how it is perceived by others. Therefore, one could note as a sign of recognition of Italy's respectable role on human rights issues the often-unanimous diplomatic support with which resolutions on human rights topics presented by Italy in both the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have been met (*ibidem*). Clearly, this could also

be seen as another evidence of Italy pushing less confrontational issues such as, in the context the General Assembly, strengthening the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme; freedom of religion and belief; the human rights situation in Myanmar (UP-HRC 2012, 137; UP-HRC 2016, 145);

Another indicator of Italy's role expectation can be drawn by the large and growing support, enacted in states' voting behaviour, for the country's three times successful applications to sit on the Human Rights Council (in 2006, 2010 and 2018). In particular, the election for the period 2019–2022, was based, according to regulations, on a letter of voluntary pledges that the Italian Government sent to the UN General Assembly in February 2018 (A/73/72) to support the country's candidacy. In this document, prepared just days before the March 2018 political elections which eventually resulted in the establishment of the first all-populist government in western Europe, Italy highlighted once more the utmost importance that the country attributes to human rights, in an unselective and firm perspective. The letter also underlined the primary commitment of the Italian government to make the UN and other regional systems for the protection of human rights work effectively over time by providing resources, taking and supporting multilateral initiatives and engaging other members. Despite the success of elections in the Human Rights Council is (almost) always ensured by the so-called 'clean slate' policy, that is, the practice that every regional group at the UN presents only as many states as vacant seats are available in order to avoid that elections are contested (see also Missiroli 2005; Mallory 2013), Italy received one of the largest ever majority in the General Assembly for this organism. This support, together with the fact that the US, consistent with the logic of the clean slate, reportedly asked Italy to withdraw from running for a fourth term at the Human Rights Council in the 2021 elections to avoid possible competition between the two countries for one of the sits available for the Western Group (dos Santos 2021), eventually suggests, that, at least formally, the reputation of Italy in multilateral human rights institutions, despite limits and contradictions, is nonetheless valued and respected among its peers.

3. Italy's Domestic Performance from an External Perspective

Although, the conception of Italy's role seems to broadly endure the test of external perceptions in the 'institutional dialogue', reputation is not permanent or necessarily sustainable if it has no strong and credible foundations. Alison Brysk (2009, 19) notes that:

‘in a diffusion argument, a country with stronger internal respect for rights will tend to promote human rights internationally, because it is highly socialized with human rights values, linked to multilateral mechanisms, and fosters an empowered civil society for transnational advocacy. On the other hand, human rights promotion abroad might be adopted to compensate for a lagging record at home—a cheap diplomatic defense against internal scrutiny’.

Therefore, the presence of a strong and consolidated human rights foundation at home is the litmus test to assess whether a country can have a full and solid sustainable foreign policy on these issues, including in the context of ‘institutional dialogue’ with multilateral organisations. In particular, looking at how international actors assess one country’s domestic commitment in detail is also a matter of understanding what type of reputation has been achieved in between the two extremes illustrated by Brysk. As recalled in Chapter 2, reputation is in part associated with credibility and in part related to the state’s compliance with arrangements it has previously agreed to (Giacomello and Verbeek 2011a, 16). Human rights obligations and the cooperation with international human rights institutions plant their roots in the international law custom that agreements have to be kept (*pacta sunt servanda*). From this perspective, domestic implementation of international conventions represents both an important point of observation of Italy’s overall consistency in respecting these agreements, and an indicator of the country’s specific credibility in the eyes of others. Since 2008, the UPR, which will be addressed in depth in the next chapter, has shed light on peers’ assessment and allows for a wider but still institutionalised understanding of how states both consider and are considered by other states when human rights obligations and objectives are concerned. This section limits itself to an overview of how independent international mechanisms (especially the Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures within the UN) have assessed Italy’s performance, keeping in mind what are the stated priorities and commitments promised internationally by the country’s authorities.

For this reason, the point of departure of this section is the latest voluntary pledges of the Italian government to the international community, which were contained in the already-mentioned 2018 letter of candidacy already mentioned to the Human Rights Council (for the period 2019–2022) which cumulates traditional and emerging priorities: strengthening the UN system for human rights; fighting racism, xenophobia, discrimination; combating violence against women and empowering them in all fields; supporting the rights of children at all levels, especially through education; promote the universal moratorium on death penalty; foster religious tolerance and prevention of atrocities through dialogue; contrast trafficking in human beings, protect people with disabilities; promote

cultural rights and defend cultural heritage at risk; protect human rights defenders worldwide (UN General Assembly 2018).

These are all relevant areas of action for the international human rights agenda. However, a closer look at the letter reveals that pledges were articulated in a rather generic and broad form: the degree of their actual implementation is thus difficult to be assessed because the country's action cannot be properly operationalised and measured. In addition, current commitments do not seem to deviate much from the well-traced track of previously made pledges. With moderate variations, therefore, the letter of 2018 reiterates the country's traditional lines of action on human rights, which, incidentally, had also been stressed as pledges in the candidacy letters of 2006 and 2010 and in many other declarations and documents of the past (UP-HRC 2019, 2020).

On the one hand, reiterating similar pledges and priorities can be seen as a resource for predictability, reliability and commitment to keep hanging on a number of fundamental aspects of the broader human rights agenda, which is a positive nurture for international credibility, although the global human rights agenda is much more wide-ranging than these priorities. On the other hand, continuous reiteration suggests at least two main limits about what Italy can do in this context. First, they could demonstrate that over the years the country's promised efforts have not achieved any significant result to stepping up to different goals or new priorities. Second, they show that Italy simply lags behind when it comes to understand the fast-changing multilevel reality of human rights concerns. In other words, from this more critical perspective, the country's commitments formally match the core priorities and needs of the current global human rights agenda, but, apart from a recent interest in the business and human rights sector and in the protection of human rights defenders, pushed by the work of CIDU, the country's participation in the development of such a dynamic agenda appears quite passive, almost motionless. Italy, in other words, seems unable to seize the urgency of the times and the need to face in an active and innovative way the multiple challenges that affect international human rights promotion and protection, such as, for instance, the risks brought by new technologies, LGBTI rights, the growing scepticism towards human rights law and its institutions, etc (UP-HRC 2018).

The above remarks are implicitly connected to a general flaw characterising Italy's nexus between international action on these matters and its domestic commitment. There is a visible incongruence between the country's actual way to promote human rights and the 'non-selective approach' to their protection and promotion that Italy proudly boasts when it defines and presents its foreign policy priorities. Both in the

'institutional dialogue' and, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the 'multilateral initiative' the country tends to make systematic promises on issues on which it can easily avoid international criticism due to either its recognised and long-standing commitment on the matter, or the absence of notable problems at home. On the contrary, other crucial international human rights areas of concern where Italy's domestic record is generally negative or where a vocal international commitment by the country could interfere or hamper other national priorities are often eluded, as will be shown in the next chapter, which will specifically look at the relationship between Italy's recommending behaviour and received recommendations in the UPR. Rather than being a cheap diplomatic defence against internal scrutiny, this behaviour is better understood if seen from the reputation-building perspective, under the mantra 'display lights, hide shadows'.

Looking at the independent mechanisms created at the UN level, supporting data can be extracted from the 'Universal Human Rights Index'²⁵, a comprehensive database of all the outputs of the UN human rights machinery, disaggregated per country concerned, human rights theme and concerned persons/groups. A look at the data from this tool with regard to Italy (a summary is shown in Table 5) could help shed light on why some topics are more highlighted in the country's international human rights agenda and others are less.

The assessment in this analytical exercise is very approximative. The issue to be grasped is not the number of overall recommendations/observations received per mechanism/theme, which may be affected by a number of contingent factors, including how specific human rights issues are dealt with by the various experts. The point is rather to capture what issues are addressed transversally across diverse mechanisms.

When excluding the output of the UPR, which follows slightly different logics as will be discussed in the next chapter, and combining the available filters, almost no specialised UN human rights mechanisms have addressed recommendations or raised concerns on the majority of issues listed among Italy's pledges, such as death penalty (no recommendations at all), freedom of religion (3 recommendations in 2 documents), persons with disabilities (7 recommendations in 3 documents, in addition to the group of observations raised by the ad hoc treaty body – the Committee on persons with disabilities), human rights defenders (no recommendations).

By contrast, 322 recommendations (i.e., about 30 % of the total recommendations stored in the database and directed to Italy), from 20 documents by 16 mechanisms have concerned the whole topic of

²⁵ Data retrieved from: <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/> (accessed: 15/05/2022).

Table 5 : Human Rights recommendations to Italy per mechanism, excluding UPR (N: 1,046).

Mechanism	No. of documents	No. of recommendations
Special Rapporteur on the right to food	1 document	77 recommendations
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences	1 document	36 recommendations
Committee on Enforced Disappearances	1 document	36 recommendations
Committee on the Rights of the Child	2 documents	124 recommendations
Committee against Torture	2 documents	91 recommendations
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	2 documents	110 recommendations
Human Rights Committee	1 document	39 recommendations
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	3 documents	122 recommendations
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	1 document	84 recommendations
Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture	1 document	110 recommendations
Working Group of Experts on People of African descent	1 document	28 recommendations
Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1 document	56 recommendations
Working Group on Arbitrary Detention	2 documents	48 recommendations
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants	1 document	49 recommendations
Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance	1 document	28 recommendations

Table 5 Continued

Mechanism	No. of documents	No. of recommendations
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	1 document	18 recommendations

Source: Universal Human Rights Index.

migration and refugee protection, something which does not permeate in all Italy's foreign policy discourse in the global and regional regime for human rights. Italy has also received 216 recommendations on the protection of minorities of all kinds. Here, by contrast, the topic is present among Italy's pledges. However, actual recommendations received by the country mostly concern the human rights situation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers and the cultural and political rights of those belonging to linguistic minorities in the country. By contrast, when Italian policy-makers mention minorities in their foreign policy discourse, especially in the period after the rise of the threat of Islamist terrorism world-wide since 2001, they primarily intend the protection of Christian minorities abroad. Their pledges should be thus seen in line with efforts for promoting freedom of religion and belief (Ferrara and Petito 2016). There is, in other words, a domestic/international gap in how the broader minority issue is understood and approached.

Another interesting set of data on how independent human rights mechanisms see Italy's domestic performance emerges from the agency of the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council in the context of the 'communication procedure'. This procedure is based on letters sent by special rapporteurs, independent experts, and working groups to country officials that report on allegations of human rights violations they have received regarding past and ongoing human rights violations or concerns relating to bills, legislation, policies, or practices that do not comply with international human rights law and standards. This procedure is not periodical, such as the treaty bodies' reporting procedure or the UPR, but is activated when serious concerns arise. In the decade between 2010 and 2020, for which data are available in the Special Procedures' communication database²⁶, Italy's law and policies have raised this concern 30 times.

²⁶ Retrieved from: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments> (accessed: 15/04/2022).

In this case, the concerns of these special procedures refer to themes and groups which both stand among Italy's pledges (human rights advocates, women's rights and violence against women) or are not particularly mentioned there (treatment of migrants, refugees, Roma minorities, torture, racism), showing that accurate professional human rights scrutiny transcends country's possible showcases aimed at peers and domestic audiences, but also has less resonance in the political and public debates.

Returning to the data from the Universal Human Rights Index, it is not surprising that 23 recommendations in 10 documents by 10 mechanisms mention a concern for the lack of the NRIs in the country, which as shown in Figure 10 is a regional and global shortcoming. Most of the treaty bodies, each with different competences, plus a number of special procedures essentially took the opportunity of monitoring to stress this lacuna and urge the creation of such an institution. Establishing an NHRI, consistent with the *Paris Principles*, however, is far from being just a mere formality for Italy to appear more socialised in the international community and committed to the goals of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development where having such institutions is among the targets of goal 16 (Peace and Strong Institutions). Due to their formalised roles in public debate and the national policy process, and due to their autonomous research, education and information functions, adequately supported NHRIs can make a difference in the effectiveness and consistency of a country's human rights policy (Hafner-Burton 2013, 164–174). Therefore, the creation of an NHRI in Italy represents one of the most concrete moves that national authorities could take to begin to reduce the gap between international and national commitment, and help the country's action in the whole 'human rights component' become truly non-selective, objective and universal as presented.

While the unique institutionally-embedded but autonomous contribution to promote a consistent and coordinated human rights policy is substantially precluded to the country due to the lack of a NHRI, different actors have tried to support policy-makers providing a compass to guide the improvement of the domestic agenda and brought it in line with the international one. In 2013, for instance, Amnesty International launched a '10-Point Agenda for Human Rights' in Italy together with the 'Remember you must respond' campaign. In view of political elections, the aim of the campaign was asking coalition and political leaders, as well as all candidates from electoral districts, a specific commitment on 10 requests: ensuring the transparency of the police force and introduce the crime of torture, stop femicide and violence against women; protect refugees, stop the exploitation and criminalisation of migrants and suspend immigration control agreements with Libya; to ensure dignified

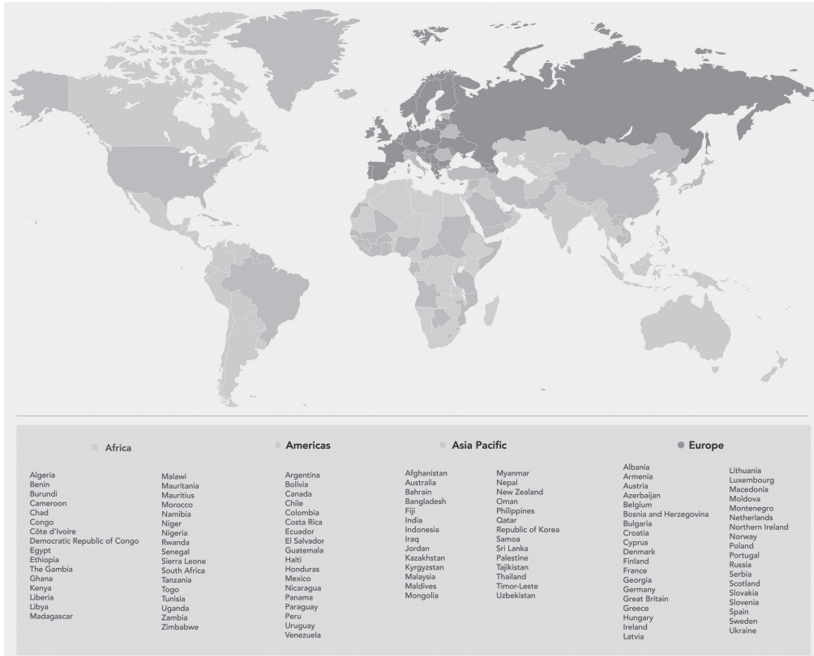


Figure 10: Existing National Human Rights Institutions, April 2022.
 Source: Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

and respectful conditions for human rights in prisons; fight homophobia and transphobia and guarantee all human rights to LGBTI people; stop discrimination, forced evictions and ethnic segregation of Roma; create an independent national institution for the protection of human rights; impose respect for human rights on Italian multinationals; fight against the death penalty in the world and promote human rights in relations with other states; ensure control over the arms trade by promoting the adoption of an international treaty. This agenda received formal adhesion from a number of politicians of all colours, including Forza Italia's leader and tycoon Silvio Berlusconi and the Secretary of the Democratic Party at the time, Pierluigi Bersani²⁷. However, excluding the commitment to the fight against the death penalty, only the torture-focused recommendation was

²⁷ Communiqué retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.it/amnesty-international-rende-note-le-adesioni-alla-sua-agenda-in-10-punti-per-i-diritti-umani-in-italia/> (accessed 12/05/2022).

fully achieved with the long-awaited inclusion of this crime, although not without criticism (UP-HRC 2017), in the Italian Penal Code.

An additional form of institutional guidance is that provided by the editors of the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights*, which since 2012 has proposed its own 'Italian Agenda of Human Rights', based on a cross-sectional analysis of the main recommendations advanced year after year by international monitoring mechanisms and promoted in Italian political and diplomatic offices and through public events held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Parliament. Updated year after year, this Agenda which was initially developed over 33 items and 30 sub-items help monitoring the dynamism of Italy or lack of it. A diachronic look at all editions, indeed, shows that there has been some limited progress over the years, but also that such progress is slow and some obstacles are deep-rooted and difficult to be tackled even by the most human rights committed politicians and even in presence of rhetoric support for the steps recommended.

There is widespread knowledge among specialists, activists and practitioners of the limits in the country's domestic commitment to human rights. It is the duty of both advocacy and research to expose these limits and, if necessary, criticise the government in order to push it to improve its laws and policies. However, despite the many long-lasting limits and contradictions discussed in this chapter, especially in the official institutional framework, the resulting situation does not allow to conclude that there is no culture of human rights and peace or any deep-rooted political idea on which the country has shaped this part of its international role conception. Especially when human rights are concerned, the Italian agency should not only be understood as its institutional choices. Civil society is also part of the picture and has significantly helped socialise the country, its officials and politicians on human rights matters. When institutions show synergy or attention to civil society advocacy, Italy is a stronger and more credible actor in the human rights regime and the result of its 'hybrid diplomacy' is clear, long-standing and recognised internationally. However, the dogmatic principle accepted by the international community, at least in declaratory policy, is that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. When this synergy does not exist, Italy lags behind in international circles and its credibility falters because looking at the gap between strongly paraded international commitment and insufficient performance (kept low by governments and merely discussed in Parliament but raised domestically and internationally by civil society), gives a schizophrenic image for the country, not the best to build standing reputation despite some solid and well-ascribed prestigious achievements.

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on Italy's participation in the dialogue between the country's authorities and human rights institutions and monitoring mechanisms at the international level, that is, the 'institutional dialogue' dimension of the 'human rights component' of Italian foreign policy. The chapter has not provided a detailed account of this dialogue, which incidentally is meticulously reported and assessed, mechanism by mechanism, by the successive editions of the *Italian Yearbook of Human Rights*. On the contrary, the chapter has tried to expose some specific trends and contradictions of this dialogue and its domestic implications in order to complement the comprehension of Italy's multidimensional commitment to human rights in foreign policy. The first finding has been that, in fact, despite the great proclamations in foreign policy statements, there is very limited infrastructure within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs central administration to advance a consistent and well-coordinated foreign policy on human rights topics and no National human rights institutions to ground this effort within society and institutions. The most substantive contribution comes from a small but very active committee, the CIDU. The other mechanisms established by Parliament or the Government are known at the micro-level among those in the field, but not visible enough and influential to contribute to raising the political debate in human rights terms and contribute to a full-fledged, inclusive and dynamic human rights debate in the country, which would serve stronger policies.

In addition to these institutional considerations, the most relevant domestic actor to advance Italy's human rights policy works outside its official institutions. Over the years, civil society contributions have been crucial both to allow Italy to speak out on some important human rights topics and to raise attention on what is the situation of human rights domestically across the social fabric. A potential but still limited and inconsistent role in supporting civil society endeavour has been discussed for human rights education, especially within the university system. The chapter has then focused on highlighting the gap between institutional commitment abroad and domestic commitment to implement international human rights obligations, which despite being primarily related to internal issues was considered a privileged angle to understand the foundation of Italy's commitment to human rights and its underlying pursuit of reputation.

However, even in the context of 'institutional dialogue', Italy is split. This time the crack is between a commitment to do as more as possible, demonstrating commitment, and a scattered performance with some strengths and weaknesses. The two-level game of Italy tends to show lights and, as much as possible, hide shadows. However, this is not understood

here as evidence of the empty commitment to protect the country from external criticism and cheaply gain reputation, as in Alison Brysk's worst-case scenario. Human rights policy does not stand as a top priority in both foreign policy (Chapter 2) and in internal policy (Chapter 3), but still there are committed actors within the country with a deep culture of human rights and peace that help Italy be overall compliant and sufficiently credible with its ever-present role conceptions. And international experts note both these aspects. Therefore, the contradictions raised in this chapter do not circumscribe human rights to the realm of hypocrisy in the broader picture of Italian foreign policy. There is either no apparent 'role conflict' (Harnisch et al. 2011) between national conceptions and international perceptions and expectations, that is between achieved (or desired) roles and ascribed ones. The lack of a significant domestic grounding and the way in which the country deals with the structural limits of the domestic human rights situation suggest, however, that the reputation achieved is mostly formal, precarious, and based on fragile grounds. The analysis of Italy's performance in the UPR conducted in the next chapter will further discuss and problematise these findings.

Chapter 4 Assessing the ‘Human Rights Component’ of Italy’s Foreign Policy Through Its UPR Performance

Introduction

After having addressed the ‘multilateral initiative’ and ‘bilateral emphasis’ of Italy’s foreign policy discourse in Chapter 2, and the approach and commitment to ‘institutional dialogue’ with multilateral human rights institutions in Chapter 3, this final chapter addresses a case study that promises to observe the three dimensions of ‘the human rights component’ of foreign policy at once: the Universal Peer Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council²⁸. First, the UPR is acquiring increasing relevance in the broader framework of the UN human rights monitoring machinery. Therefore, the participation of countries in it represents the most recent addition in the framework of the ‘institutional dialogue’. Second, as it is based on state review among peers, the UPR allows observing a country’s attitude towards the human rights situation in all countries of the world, including like-minded partners and pariah states. Therefore, it provides an additional original angle to address the dimension of ‘bilateral emphasis’. Third, as will be further elaborated below, the scope of the review is not restricted to the conventions and protocols whose monitoring procedures expect state-parties to participate in reporting on progress and receiving recommendations. On the contrary, the process is left open to themes and policy priorities that may be relevant in human rights terms, but have not yet been codified in international human rights law. This allows a certain margin for a ‘multilateral initiative’, as the UPR can also constitute a terrain for raising attention and creating international consensus on emerging human rights norms.

The UPR also allows for further investigation into both the two-level game of Italian foreign policy-makers on these matters and the possible gaps between achieved and ascribed role conceptions. In particular, on

²⁸ This chapter is partly built on the article ‘The Third Universal Periodic Review of Italy between Recurring Trends and New Challenges’, which was written in cooperation with Dr. Andrea Cofelice and published open access in *Peace Human Rights Governance* (volume 5, issue 2 – July 2020). In particular, sections 4 and 5 of this Chapter are drawn from materials authored by Dr Cofelice in the original article.

the one hand, looking at the content, type and origin of the received recommendations gives some interesting insights into the peers' detailed assessment of Italy's human rights policy – as opposed to the general understanding discussed in the previous chapter. On the other hand, looking at how and why the Italian government accepts and rejects received recommendations helps grasping how the country manages the contradictions of its human rights commitment in a multilateral framework, between self-conceptions and the pursuit of reputation.

Italy's underwent its latest cycle of the UPR (the third one) in 2019 following two previous review cycles, which took place in 2010 and 2014. These three reviews offer a sufficiently long time frame to assess the change and continuity of the Italian agency in this sector, and complement the period analysed with the content analysis discussed in Chapter 2. Although this chapter considers the entire decade 2010–2020, the primary analytical focus is placed on the latest cycle of review, also considering the fact that this was carried out in the context of a delicate phase for the country's commitment to human rights. In fact, the last few years have gradually exposed a trend of 'stagnation' in relation to Italy's generative capacity of policies and norms on these fundamental aspects (UP-HRC 2018, 15–19) which has then favoured, especially after the 'populist turn' between 2018 and 2019, the generation and legitimization of forms of human rights compressions 'by omission' (UP-HCR 2019, 20; Monteleone 2021). This increasingly contested phase provoked a compact wave of international concern for Italy's detour from its traditional commitment on these matters that has also questioned the external image and credibility which it had pursued and built over the last decades (de Perini 2021).

After briefly explaining why the UPR represents, within the wide range of international human rights monitoring mechanisms, a particularly helpful resource to address a country's overall international behaviour on human rights matters, the chapter compares and discusses the recommendations made and received by Italy during the third cycle with those emerging in the first two UPRs also trying to assess whether the challenges and priorities emerged through this exercise consolidate or challenge the findings of previous chapters. Then, the chapter draws on the discourse and action of Italian policy-makers around the reception and response to the recommendations of the last cycle to assess both the possible overlap between national and international human rights agendas, and the strategy adopted by the government to respond to non-accepted recommendations without risking ruining the reputation of the country in this framework.

1. The Promises of the UPR: Exposing Domestic Implementation, Commitment, and International Perceptions

The UPR is a complex, multidimensional mechanism and this chapter is not the proper setting to extensively present its phases and rituals, strengths and weaknesses (an overview is offered in Smith 2003; Charlesworth and Larking eds. 2014; Parra 2016; Alvarez 2019). Nonetheless some of its key features are now briefly outlined to provide the necessary basis for discussion of the Italian performance therein.

In a nutshell, the UPR is a political human rights monitoring mechanism created by the UN in the context of the institutional reform process which eventually led to the establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006, in place of the then widely delegitimised Human Rights Commission. The first session of the Human Rights Council UPR Working Group (composed of all the 47 members of the Council) was held in 2008.

According to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 (A/HRC/RES/5/1), the UPR aims to improve the situation of human rights on the ground in all 193 member states of the UN by fulfilling the human rights obligations and commitments of each state, evaluating, in consultation with and with the consent of each state concerned, the positive developments and challenges to be faced, and improving its capacities to promote and protect human rights (UNHRC 2007). Therefore, all UN member states have to periodically undergo this review every five years on an equal footing. In substance, the UPR is carried out through a member state-driven peer-review process based on cooperation and objective and reliable information. Resolution 5/1 also states that the review must be conducted in an objective, transparent, non-selective, constructive, non-confrontational and non-politicised manner. This approach is supposed to meet the linchpin of diplomatic style, while at the same time allowing states to ‘speak out’ about what they understand as human rights problems. Therefore, participating as a ‘recommending state’ in the reviews of other states allow Italy (and, in fact, all states) to be more vocal in its ‘bilateral emphasis’ on human rights, creating a frame which reduces the risks of potential unwanted side-effects that a more aggressive and confrontational attitude in proper bilateral relations could cause.

The crux of the process (Smith 2013) is the ‘interactive dialogue’, a discussion held in Geneva to which every UN member state and observer can register to make oral comments and recommendations to the state under review concerning its human rights situation. The three key documents on which each review and the ‘interactive dialogue’ are based

are: (a) a report prepared by the government of the state under review; (b) a report compiled by the UNOHCHR summarising the information contained in the monitoring outputs of human rights expert mechanisms and other agencies, which were in part mentioned when looking at the results of the Universal Human Rights Index, and (c) a stakeholder's document that collects and summarises the reliable information presented by NGOs, NHRIs and research centres. This is one of the ways through which civil society organisations can try influencing the process, although they are not allowed to participate in the proper 'interactive dialogue'.

The content of each interactive discussion between the state under review and recommending states is compiled into a final report by a group of three states selected through a drawing of lots among the members of the UPR Working Group, which is also tasked with helping the review process for that state (the so-called 'troika'). Later, the state under review communicates in writing what recommendations it intends to 'support' (accept) or 'note' (non-support, in fact, not accept) among those it received in an 'addendum', which is eventually adopted by the Human Rights Council plenary together with the final report. This central stage of the UPR, the interactive dialogue and the adoption of the report, is, in fact, framed within a larger three-stage cyclical process. Before the interactive dialogue, the state prepares for the review and report on human rights implementation; following it, there is the stage of implementation of the recommendations received and the reporting at mid-term. Following the conclusion of the first cycle, when all member states underwent their first UPR, the Human Rights Council Secretariat decided that the subsequent cycles were tasked with also assessing the implementation of the accepted recommendations by the states under review.

As mentioned, the UPR is one – the latest in chronological order – of the several mechanisms established since 1945 in the framework of the gradual development of the international human rights regime to monitor states' compliance with their human rights commitments and obligations and provide support to them. The majority of these mechanisms are composed of independent experts who do not respond to any government. From this perspective, the primarily political nature of the UPR has both positive and negative implications to consider to evaluate what its results can actually tell about a country's human rights behaviour and performance.

Many of the limits that have been observed in the literature derive from the formality of its structure and procedures, caught between the possible regulatory character of its rituals and the ever-present trap of ritualism (Charlesworth and Larking 2014; Parra 2016). Some even claimed that the outcome of the review is a 'formulistic, bland statement virtually

identical for each state' (Smith 2013, 10). Recommendations and their actual content should in fact be approached carefully and contextualised in the broader international politics milieu into which the review is actually taking place. Terman and Voeten (2018) have demonstrated that rather than being the result of an objective and impartial analysis of the situation of human rights in the country, the number, severity and responses to recommendations are often motivated by political interactions, namely the level of friendship and alliances among states. That is, strategic relations provide the actual mechanism linking rhetorical pressure to behavioural outcomes in the UPR. According to a recent study by Burger et al. (2021), the geographic distance between the state under review and the recommending states represents 'the best predictor for state issuing and to a somewhat lesser degree accepting a recommendation'.

Other shortcomings of the UPR are identified with reference to the inherent limits of the actual participation of delegations in the dialogue and the types and depth of recommendations addressed. The documents on which the review is based have to respect page limits indications and there are strict time-constraints for each interactive dialogue, which lasts 3 hours and half, 140 minutes of which are allocated to recommending states for commenting, and 70 minutes to the state under review to present its human rights situation and respond to questions. Especially in the first sessions, it happened, and this was also the case of Italy's first UPR in 2010, that not all states wishing to comment or ask questions could eventually take the floor during the interactive dialogue. That is to say, the review is rarely thorough and comprehensive in analysing compliance with all salient human rights obligations, and the result is, inevitably, an indicative snapshot of human rights performance as it is perceived by peers and other stakeholders (Smith 2013, 10).

Updated statistics provided by UPR-Info, a Geneva-based NGO which was established to monitor and inform about this mechanism, show that across the three cycles there has been an incremental trend in making specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound recommendations (currently about 33 % of the total recommendations addressed propose a specific action according to the NGOs taxonomy). However, the majority of recommendations made during interactive dialogues remain broad and vague – ranging between suggesting general commitments on specific human rights matters or asking to continue on the same path.

Such breadth and vagueness, combined with the political nature of the UPR which deprived it of any formal mechanism or procedure for assessment and enforcement (Chauville 2014), allows states to claim compliance before their peers and multilateral institutions without, in fact, producing any substantial change in the situation on the ground

(Charlesworth and Larking 2014, 15; Alvarez 2019). Therefore, as it happens with other international and regional human rights mechanisms as well, many states often engage with the UPR to advance their national interests while preserving the narrative of co-responsibility. However, this approach paves the way for ritualism in the UPR (Parra 2016, 67; see also Cofelice 2017) and for the increase or consolidation of rhetoric-performance gaps in their overall human rights commitment. As shown in the previous chapter, the latter, a common aspect for many states, is also a long-standing feature of Italy's overall human rights policy (de Perini 2019a).

Despite the indication from the founding resolution to act in a non-confrontational manner, part of the potential effectiveness of the UPR relies on its opportunity to name and shame states' negative attitudes vis-a-vis human rights among peers. However, since states do not like to be publicly criticised for their human rights records (Forsythe 2018a), delegations on average 'mute their criticism so as to avoid this negative reaction' (Terman and Voeten 2018, 7, see also Donnelly and Whelan 2020). Alternatively, many countries tend to implement a series of strategies to alleviate the possible scope of the received criticisms (Schokman and Lynch 2014). For instance, similarly to what was discussed in the previous chapter with regard to voluntary pledges, it was demonstrated that, in formulating its recommendations in the first and second UPR cycles, Italy itself has carefully avoided to emphasise those human rights issues on which the country is deficient (Cofelice 2017). The result of these strategies is an overall tendency to focus on rather non-controversial issues, making politically neutral recommendations (Kälin 2014). Unsurprisingly, after three full cycles, 20 % of recommendations request ratifications of human rights legal instruments, which is probably the easier and more reasonable and acceptable recommendation that a state can receive in this multilateral framework, which has developed over the years around the development of a specialised branch of international human rights law.

The strong ritualistic and formulistic procedure surrounding the UPR together with the inevitable implications of having conceived this review exercise as a primarily political state-driven process, suggests that the overall picture of a country's human rights performance which emerges from the various stages of this process are likely to be not thorough, complete and fully objective. At the same time, however, the features that characterise this mechanism in the negative can also produce a series of unique advantages that match particularly well with the objectives that this chapter seeks to address. For some analysts, indeed, if the UPR

matters, it is precisely due to its political nature, not in spite of it (Terman and Voeten 2018; Alvarez 2019).

First, it was noted that, as all highly ritualistic events, the UPR embodies and expresses the will of states to rally around the case of human rights (Kälin 2014, 29). If a country shows a dedicated commitment to the process, in other words, this means a commitment to human rights as an international priority. In addition, the fact that periodic monitoring takes place through a mutual cooperative – and non-confrontational – evaluation between delegations of all national governments has eventually resulted in a significant commitment by most countries to increase their participation and show commitment to this process. This helps keep the global interest high on the main human rights issues in all countries of the world that are increasingly taking the mechanism and its procedures seriously (see Chauville 2014, 89), also because this augmented visibility increases the desirability, especially for ‘middle powers’, to lead or be appreciated in this context. The process of international socialisation among peers, but also between governmental delegations and civil society organisations, which is favoured during the various stages and rituals of the UPR, also helps shape the international consensus of what are the actual priorities of the global human rights agenda. Parra claims that the UPR now bears most of the expectations regarding the human rights performance of the United Nations (Parra 2016, 7). Given the high visibility and importance that the process has progressively achieved among delegations, it is possible to transpose those expectations into the evaluation of state behaviour and performance in light of internationally agreed priorities.

Second, as mentioned, the UPR is the most inclusive and comprehensive of all international human rights monitoring mechanisms. The previous chapter showed that, in large part, UN human rights machinery is based on the crucial work of expert-based mechanisms: Special procedures and Treaty Bodies. These experts provide, in fact, much more thorough and reliable analysis and specific recommendations to countries which are periodically placed under their scrutiny. However, their comments and concerns normally refer either to a specific theme (special procedures), or to a well-defined set of rights, namely those set forth in international legal instruments (treaty bodies). In the latter case, moreover, only states that ratified a specific treaty can be periodically monitored by the related body of independent experts, and not all possible monitoring functions of the latter are necessarily accepted (country visits, individual complaints) when the states formally manifest their will to be bound by the treaty in question.

On the contrary, in the UPR, which is incidentally expected to complement and mutually reinforce the work of this machinery and is based also on a report summarising information by UN expert bodies, the review is carried out with regard to a larger set of obligations. This goes much beyond ratified treaties and includes the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, voluntary pledges and commitments made by the state, and applicable international humanitarian law. Despite being generally neglected in the analysis, therefore, voluntary pledges are also important to observe the human rights foreign policy of a given country and will be discussed in the following pages with regard to Italy.

Although the level of depth, severity and objectivity of UPR recommendations can be unsatisfactory overall, the review can allegedly stretch the whole range of internationally accepted human rights, and beyond. States can indeed discuss and promote issues that are relevant to human rights but have not yet found universal recognition (Kälin 2014), such as LGBTI rights (Alvarez 2019). From its inception, indeed, the interactive dialogue has provided a 'holistic approach' and states' delegations have discussed the situation of social, economic, cultural, civil, and political rights, development, with reference to both the Millennium and the Sustainable Development Goals (The Danish Institute for Human Rights 2017) – vulnerable groups, human rights defenders, and gender issues, including the question of sexual orientation (Dominguez-Redondo 2012, 695).

The cyclical nature of the process is a third aspect which motivates the choice of UPR as a privileged data source for this analysis. In line with the cooperative character of this mechanism, any commitments made by the state in response to recommendations is considered to be voluntary and not legally binding (Charlesworth and Larking 2014). However, it is also true that the goal of the UPR is not only to reaffirm human rights, but to ensure implementation (Kälin 2014, 37). From this perspective, when a state accepts a recommendation it is implicitly agreeing to be evaluated as the implementation of such recommendations during subsequent cycles (Alvarez 2019). As seen, given the breadth and vagueness of many recommendations, states can easily claim implementation between one cycle and the other even if the situation has not been satisfactory improved. This does not prevent peer delegations from reiterating similar and even more specific comments and requests in the ensuing cycles. Addressing the similarities and differences in both recommendations received and responses given during the ad hoc diplomatic exchanges by a state across the three cycles, including the motivations for supporting or not recommendations, has a dual advantage. It allows an assessment of what are, in a longer perspective, achieved improvements, recurring

problems and new challenges, and helps understand the seriousness of the government's behaviour in the UPR framework and, broadly speaking, in human rights promotion at the international level.

Moreover, the UPR is at the same time a national process and an international mechanism. The analysis of domestic problems should thus not be separated by considerations of the foreign policy dimension it entails, as is the case for broader foreign policy analysis, which is shaped by its boundary nature. In particular, the process surrounding the 'interactive dialogue' proper represents a significant exercise of public diplomacy for a country, since each state under review has to simultaneously manage pressures from international organisms and agencies, delegations of peers with an often very different understanding of human rights, and civil society organisations and networks, and to try to protect accordingly its international reputation.

From this perspective, the UPR represents a continuous process of interaction that, in the same framework, provides a long-term perspective on change and continuity in states' credibility and compliance at the domestic and international levels. Although the actual content of the UPR may be subjective, broad, selective and at times approximate, the longitudinal analysis of Italy's recommendations (made and received) and given responses from 2010 to nowadays exposes the actual political commitment and the reasons for full or partial achievements in human rights. Furthermore, it can explain the persistence of rhetoric-performance gaps, the reasons for inconsistent multilevel games, and, eventually, for double standards.

2. The UPR of Italy in Context

Speaking before the Parliament's reunited foreign affairs committees a few days after Italy's interactive dialogue in Geneva related to the third session of the UPR, Foreign Affairs Minister Di Maio (2019) lauded the process at the UN and Italy's overall performance in it. In particular, the Minister stressed that the 121 delegations that took the floor 'expressed their appreciation and recognised [Italy's] high standards of protection, with further confirmation of the role that our country plays at the multi-lateral level for the promotion of human rights and the implementation of the obligations related to their full realisation'.

These words are certainly part of a rhetoric exercise and confirm once more the established national conception of the role of Italy, the orientation that the country pursues in this specific niche area of its international relations and the fundamental importance of reputation. However, they only partially represent the entire picture that emerged from the

UPR and its many implications on Italy's perceptions abroad as a human rights model. In the delegations' inputs, there were certainly positive acknowledgements of some recent developments in human rights in the country (including the adoption of national action plans and efforts to eradicate violence against women). These were presented in the traditional frame of praises and concerns that characterises the UPR rituals as well as a large part of human rights monitoring.

Di Maio's words also provide a hook to link the specific analysis of Italy's behaviour in the UPR with the discussion that permeates this book on both the general attitude of the country towards human rights and the external perceptions of it. Indeed, these words represent the victory of continuity over diversion in the country's approach to human rights. As mentioned, indeed some of the measures adopted by the Conte I cabinet – namely Interior Minister Salvini's 'security decrees' – were met with deep and compact concern about the ways in which they primarily affected migrants' and refugees' rights, and raised issues about hate speech and the spread of racism and xenophobia (Council of Europe 2018; Mandates of the Special Rapporteur et al. 2018; UNOHCHR 2018). Furthermore, as promptly signalled by a large portion of the Human Rights Council (thematic) Special Procedures – who sent, often in joint venture, 11 urgent communications to Italy between the summers of 2018 and 2019 (one third of those sent since 2010) – the choices made by that cabinet also had negative implications on a number of other human rights related issues, from the rights of Roma minorities, to the regression on women's rights, up to the criminalisation of solidarity which affected the work of NGOs and human rights defenders. All of this was flavoured by an unprecedented isolationist, uncooperative and delegitimising conception of both multilateralism and its human rights priorities by the country's leadership (Aska News 2018; Dipartimento per le politiche antidroga 2018; RaiNews 2018). Therefore, the fact that Di Maio decided to utter those words in Parliament also means that, with the end of the all-populist experience, Italy's approach to human rights could return back to tradition and try wiping out this brief parenthesis.

The large international attraction that Italy's third review produced among its peers somehow questions whether this outcome was achieved. Indeed, Italy's third UPR was, in some ways, a record-breaking review. The number of delegations who signed up for the 'interactive dialogue' to present the Italian authorities with comments and recommendations – 121, as correctly reported by Di Maio in his statement – marked one of the highest overall participations since the activation of this monitoring mechanism in 2008. The number was exceeded by countries such as China, whose third UPR attracted 150 delegations, and Turkey, which

received inputs from 122 delegations. 121 also represents a visible increase country-wise, although consistent with a larger trend in overall participation that exposes the growing appreciation for UPR procedures by member states. 51 delegations (plus 13 that could not be heard during the time allocated) participated in the first UPR of Italy in 2010, and 92 in 2014.

This large participation can, in fact, be assessed in two opposing ways. One is that voiced by the Foreign Minister. During the ‘interactive dialogue’ the Italian delegation, led by Manlio Di Stefano, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation²⁹, welcomed with satisfaction the great participation of peers. Di Stefano considered this an indicator of the effectiveness of the dialogue and cooperation mechanism set up by the UPR, underlining, moreover, the fluid and constructive modality with which the review of Italy took place (UN Webcast 2019). If these words reiterate the highly cooperative renovated behaviour of Italy following the detour under the Conte I cabinet, one also has to acknowledge that Italy’s delegation did not include the Foreign Minister, as is happening in several delegations. While allowing the country to be represented by the most prepared ones (i.e. officials from Italy’s dedicated human rights bodies, in particular from CIDU), as stressed in the previous chapters, this choice also marked an inherent decision to give a lesser political relevance for the event, compared to what was stated in Parliament and during the review (Di Maio 2019; UN Webcast 2019).

In the literature, it was observed that wide participation of delegations in a specific UPR occur only occasionally, when the state under review ‘has particularly poor human rights records, is an international outcast, or finds itself at the centre of political controversy’ (Kälin 2014, 31). Although a causal nexus between the high participation in the third UPR of Italy and the country’s recent performance in human rights cannot be established, this growth can allegedly be framed within the third group of motivations, as empirical evidence of greater concern from the international community in relation to the path that the country recently took, especially in the context of migration, hate speech, and racism. Wide participation also casts a shadow on the overly positive outputs that the Minister of Foreign Affairs provided of this third cycle. In particular, the fact that, just after five years, an additional group of 29 states felt the need to comment and discuss human rights in Italy gives, therefore a first

²⁹ The delegation was composed by Mr Di Stefano and, among others, Fabrizio Petri, Stefania Pucciarelli and Iolanda di Stasio, Chairs, respectively, of CIDU, the Extraordinary Commission of the Senate and the Permanent Committee of the Chamber of Deputies.

(tentative), insight into the consequences of the recent phase of regression which had characterised the country's agency on human rights matters. It also arguably gives an idea of the fragile credibility on which the country has constructed its reputation in this field, although one could also consider these developments as proof of the international concern for the diversion of a respected human rights loving partner..

3. Italy as a Recommending State: What, towards Whom and How?

Before addressing Italy's international perceptions and its reaction, this section tries to highlight the behaviour of Italy as a recommending state between the expected participation in 'institutional dialogue', on the one hand, and 'multilateral initiative' and 'bilateral emphasis' on the other. Methodologically, a large amount of data on the UPR process is provided by the UNOHCHR website and the UPR-Info NGO. The latter, in particular, offers a rich database of recommendations made and received by each country, which can be interrogated via several geographical and thematic filters. Using this database supports a discussion of Italy's recommendations and the concerns of peers about Italy both singularly and compared to other countries.

During the period 2008–2020³⁰ Italian delegations submitted 1,421 recommendations to their peers (1,5 % of the total). This figure does not position the country among the top 3 entrepreneurial countries (France with 2,475, Spain with 2,245 and Canada with 2,053), but still among the very active ones. Looking at the themes on which recommendations have been made, Italy's agency has been considering 60 of the 70 issues that have been identified by UPR-Info researchers to code recommendations (85 %), which show a very open perspective of the country on human rights matters, in line with that of other active countries. More interestingly, by looking at specific issues and their recurrence, it is possible to highlight both continuity with the 'traditional commitment' to human rights and some divergence that deserves consideration. The five issues most frequently addressed by Italy are in good part consistent with those most frequently addressed by all countries. Such issues are generally characterised by less controversial topics: children's rights (387 recommendations made),

³⁰ As a methodological note, recommendations are added to the database (<https://upr-info-database.uwazi.io/>) after they have been coded, which takes time also in consideration of the large amount of recommendations processed by the NGOs researchers and specialists at the end of every UPR cycle. At the moment of writing, the time-frame covered by collected recommendations range between the very first session (2008) and November 2020.

women's rights (361, although they could be complemented by specific recommendations coded by UPR-Info as 'gender-based violence', N: 59), ratification of international instruments (280). The fourth most frequent issue is death penalty with 214 recommendations that raise the country's position into the top 3 of recommending states (following, again, France with 240 and Spain with 231). The fifth relates to torture, which does not really emerge from Italy's foreign policy discourse and pledges, but is a very frequent (and maybe unavoidable) subject of recommendations in the overall UPR exercise (the fourth theme overall). Freedom of religion, another pillar of Italy's human rights discourse, is another recurring topic among the recommendations made by the country, although in significantly lower numbers (71). The other two big topics which emerge out of the literature on Italian foreign policy and human rights-related issues, the promotion of international criminal justice and the participation to international peace missions, are substantially unrepresented in the UPR exercise overall, probably because they deal with more confrontational issues, and, as seen, states refrain from even considering these types of recommendations. The criminal justice chapter is, in fact, covered by a total of 188 recommendations asking for the ratification of the Rome Statute and falls within the very broad category of 'legal instruments', of which only 2 were presented by Italy. A general search of 'peacekeeping' or similar expressions in the whole database provides only 6 results, none of which relates to Italy.

In terms of the country's initiative, no particular original concerns arise from the collection of voluntary pledges. Only one pledge, expressed in the context of the second cycle (2014), mentioned Italy's intention to lead an effort aimed at promoting a debate at the EU level concerning the problem of migrant workers. However, this does not seem to represent a change of perspective among human rights priorities of the Italian government, but rather an attempt of appeasing those many peers that, as will be discussed below, raise the issue during the interactive dialogues. Some emerging priorities can be drawn from the focus that Italy's recommendations play on more 'niche' topics. These include: the promotion of the right to education and human rights education (in total 133 recommendations made), which is consistent with Italy's active participation in the intergovernmental platform that in 2011 sought to create international consensus for the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (UP-HRC 2012, 17); a noteworthy insistence on the protection of human rights defenders (45 recommendations), which was recently proposed as a priority of Italy's foreign policy by a network of civil society organisations named '*In Difesa di*' (In Defence of), and the issue of sexual orientation and gender (53 recommendations),

which represents a timid but fresh contribution to the raising commitment among the members of the international community. However, such an increased commitment was questioned soon by contradictory domestic behaviour when, after years of polarised debate, the Italian parliament failed to adopt the so-called 'Zan bill', containing new provisions to prevent and prohibit discrimination and violence on the grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability, at the end of 2021. Although laudable and an early sign of Italy's effort to get out of the swamp of immobilism, none of these themes seems to play an important role for Italy in broader international efforts, as happened in the past with the moratorium on death penalty, freedom of religion within the EU context, or the establishment of an International Criminal Court.

After lingering on the main issues that emerge from the recommendations made, the next step is to explore the approach followed by the country. In this context, UPR-Info provides a classification system that allows reasoning along the same lines of the dimensions proposed for content analysis in Chapter 2, with respect to both the generic/specific dichotomy and the 'attitude' in 'bilateral emphasis'. To be sure, the UPR is based on states making each other recommendations, and is a specialistic mechanism, which calls for a certain focus and command on the matter considered. Nevertheless, looking at the approach expressed through recommendations, it is possible to identify some patterns of behaviour which could complement and further problematise some of the findings discussed in Chapter 2.

In particular, UPR-Info's researchers have coded recommendations according to five types of action requested: specific actions, general actions, continuing actions, considering action and minimal action. Looking at the recommendations made by Italy, it is possible to identify a significant number of observations requesting specific action (34 % of the 1,421 total recommendations advanced by the country) but also the primacy of more general recommendations (46 %), and of recommendations that do not point out to any constraining request. Indeed, a 'considering action' recommendation does not really require a country to adopt a certain behaviour, and 'continuing action' requests constitute an endorsement of the kind that Italy has used in most of its bilateral relations with third countries, including serious norm-violators. Although the percentage of specific recommendations is in line with the general trend in the UPR, the remaining figures produce contradictory outcomes. The resort to generic recommendations, that is, those that identify a general problem but without specific actions to stem it, is sensibly higher than the global average, while figures related to the frequency of 'considering action' and 'continuing action' recommendations are inverse to the general

Table 6: Type of recommendations in UPR (Italy and total average).

Type of recommendation	No. of Italy's recommendations (N: 1492)	Percentage of Italy's recommendations	Percentage of total recommendations of that type
Specific action	483	34 %	35 %
General action	655	46 %	39 %
Considering action	173	12 %	7 %
Continuing action	100	7 %	17 %
Minimal action	3	0.2 %	1 %

Source: Author's elaboration on UPR-Info data.

average. These data, summarised in Table 6, confirm the attempt of Italy to call other states to improve their human rights records, without however taking the risks of pushing states in tough positions.

These data also suggest another angle of observation towards which Italy's behaviour could be considered, that is, looking for a significant change of approach in relation to the countries under review. To this end, the next table disaggregates recommendations according to the regional group of the state under review at the UN (the same option is possible with regards to the international organisation of reference, but results might be misleading since the same state can be part of more than one organisation). It then compares the percentage between specific and generic for each regional group, with the latter category understood as the sum of all types of action recommended besides those coded as specific proper. In addition to showing that the number of recommendations is increasingly higher with regard to countries in Asia and Africa, Table 7, below, shows that generic recommendations more than double specific ones for all groups (65–35 % to 69–31 %) with a slight moderation for the Western and other countries group, where the ratio between the two types attests to 41–59 %. As Italy's general bilateral behaviour is to praise or support rather than to name and shame, which is perfectly consistent with these data, the small but significant exception could be due to the fact that it is easier and less risky to make comments to like-minded countries, all liberal democracies, because they are more likely to accept what is recommended as part of the game played in Geneva rather than an attempt to impose outer values.

A last step in the analysis of Italy's recommending behaviour in the UPR is the rate of acceptance of the recommendations made by the country by its peers. Data show that 65 % of these recommendations are

Table 7: Italy's recommendations for regional group (specific vs generic).

Regional group at the UN	No. of Italy's recommendations to group	Specific recommendations	%	Generic recommendations	%
Asian Group	472	161	34 %	311	66 %
African Group	424	151	36 %	273	64 %
GRULAC	262	80	31 %	185	69 %
EEG	148	46	31 %	102	69 %
WEOG	109	45	41 %	63	59 %
Other				3	nd
Total	1421	483		938	

Source: Author's elaboration on UPR-Info data.

supported (930 out of 1,421) and 35 % (491) are noted. In the UPR, the ratio between supported and noted is significantly higher: 74 %-26 %.

There are many possible ways to explain this deviation (of about 9 percentage points) from average figures and what it might tell about Italy's credibility and prestige. It could be that Italy's recommendations are too demanding to implement for states under review. This, however, is contradicted by the primarily generic recommending behaviour that the country adopts and to the fact that specific recommendations (i.e. those which request a higher and more specific commitment) advanced by Italy are in line with overall UPR average. A slightly more convincing explanation comes from disaggregating general percentages of accepted/noted recommendations according to the regional groups of the recommending state. The members of the WEOG group has a ratio of acceptance of their recommendations in line with Italy (some countries of the group even lower, France, for instance attests itself at 62 %-38 %), Other groups have completely different outcomes. For instance, the Asian group has on average an 87 %-13 % proportion. On the one hand, western countries make more recommendations. These could be, on average, more demanding to their peers because they are used, at least in rhetoric, to higher human rights standards in their countries or have more active NGOs which give inputs before the participation of states and also during the ad hoc 'pre-sessions' organised by UPR-info to improve civil society participation in the process. However, this difference may also resound with the sustained and ever-present suspect of

imperialism and inappropriate intrusion in domestic affairs which especially countries in the southern hemisphere share vis-a-vis human rights initiative by Western countries. In other words, states outside Europe and the US would be sceptical and even tend to oppose, in principle, the recommendations coming from these countries. And indeed, the accepted proportion of recommendations from WEOG countries to WEOG countries is on average. If this hypothesis could gain some credit, it is also telling of the fact that despite the propositional and generic approach which has been characterizing the whole Italian foreign policy on human rights bilaterally and in the UPR, in the eyes of others, the country remains affected by a general veil of suspect, consistent with the political legacy of the group of states to which it belongs.

4. Italy as a State under Review: ‘Same-old’ and ‘Brand-new’ Challenges

The 2019 UPR was a record review also for the number of recommendations received by Italy as a whole, as many as 306, an exponential increase compared to the 157 (then summarised into 92 recommendations by the troika) received in the first cycle (2010) and 186 in the second cycle (2014). On the assumption that a stronger grounding in domestic human rights policy is a requisite for a full-fledged and credible foreign policy and that analysing internal performance provides an angle to observe international agency, these final sections focus on what the UPR tells about the international perception of Italy as a human rights-abiding state, focusing primarily on the third review of 2019.

As a first step during the actual review, Di Stefano was called to report to the Human Rights Council the main actions taken by Italy both at national and international levels to promote human rights. In his presentation, he emphasised that Italy had successfully implemented 153 of the 176 recommendations accepted during the second UPR cycle, while the remaining recommendations, concerning the setting up of an NHRI, were being implemented. It should be noted that this statement remained totally unchecked, given the political and consensus-driven nature of the UPR, which lacks any independent mechanism to assess states’ human rights performance, thus leaving governments free to define what constitutes evidence of fulfilment (Cofelice 2017).

During the review, Italy received 306 recommendations on 22 different human rights issues (HRC 2019). However, more than half of these recommendations concern only four thematic areas, namely: racial discrimination (15.4 %); national human rights institutions (15 %); rights of

migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (14.1 %); women's rights, gender equality, violence against women (10.5 %).

Table 8 reports a comparison of the recommendations received by Italy in its three UPR cycles (2010, 2014 and 2019), disaggregated by thematic areas, which allows identifying the main trends as well as structural and/or contingent critical issues affecting the national human rights protection system, as perceived by Italy's 'peers' within the international community.

First of all, what clearly emerges from the above data is that in all UPR cycles the most frequent recommendations addressed to Italy (both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the total number of recommendations received) deal with racial discrimination and the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This finding complements the data from the Universal Human Rights Index discussed in the previous chapters and suggests that, despite the fact that during its 2019 review Italy was under the spotlight for the 'security decrees' adopted by the Conte I cabinet, in the view of the international community, these issues were not contingent, but rather represent the main *structural* challenges to the domestic human rights protection system. At least over the past ten years, indeed, Italy has been constantly called upon to take further and more incisive actions above all to counter the spread of hate speech in the public sphere, administrative forms of discrimination, the violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*, as well as to improve living conditions in reception centres for migrants.

In addition to this stable 'stock' of human rights issues, a growing 'flow' of recommendations deals with the establishment of an NHRI, in accordance with the Paris Principles. As discussed in the previous chapter, the lack of such an institution in the Italian system has become a case of great concern for the international community: the number of peers' recommendations on this issue has almost tripled over the past ten years, from 16 in 2010 (10 % of the total recommendations received in the first UPR cycle) to 46 in 2019 (15 %).

When seen in a longitudinal perspective, the 2019 UPR cycle of Italy also shows some emerging trends, both in terms of a spectacular increase in the number of recommendations on issues that, in previous cycles, were perceived as 'marginal' for Italy, such as women's rights (from 2 recommendations in 2010 to 32 in 2019) or the promotion of economic and social rights (from 2 recommendations in 2010 to 16 in 2019); and in terms of the emergence of brand new priorities in Italy, such as the need to protect human rights defenders more effectively (especially by countering the criminalisation of NGOs carrying out search and rescue

Table 8: Number of recommendations by thematic areas received by Italy during its UPR cycles.

Human rights issues	III Cycle (November 2019)		II Cycle (October 2014)		I Cycle (February 2010)	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
1 Racial discrimination	47	15.4	33	17.7	25	15.9
2 National human rights institutions	46	15.0	25	13.4	16	10.2
3 Migrants and asylum seekers	43	14.1	20	10.8	24	15.3
4 Women's rights, gender equality, violence against women	32	10.5	18	9.7	2	1.3
5 Economic and social rights	16	5.2	5	2.7	2	1.3
6 Trafficking	15	4.9	8	4.3	9	5.7
7 Torture and rights of detainees	15	4.9	6	3.2	5	3.2
8 Sexual orientation and gender identity	14	4.6	5	2.7	4	2.5
9 Minorities	13	4.2	16	8.6	19	12.1
10 International instruments	12	3.9	23	12.4	18	11.5
11 Children's rights	11	3.6	9	4.8	10	6.4
12 People with disabilities	11	3.6	3	1.6	0	0.0
13 Right to education and human rights education	8	2.6	1	0.5	4	2.5
14 Civil rights and the rule of law	6	2.0	3	1.6	4	2.5
15 Other	4	1.3	2	1.1	1	0.6
16 Human rights defenders	3	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
17 Development cooperation	2	0.7	4	2.2	2	1.3
18 Freedom of expression	2	0.7	3	1.6	7	4.5
19 Contemporary forms of slavery	2	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
20 Arms trade	2	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
21 Cooperation with the UN (UPR, Treaty Bodies ...)	1	0.3	2	1.1	2	1.3
22 Freedom of religion	1	0.3	0	0.0	3	1.9
TOT	306	100	186	100.0	157	100.0

Source: Authors' elaboration on HRC data (Cofelice and de Perini 2020).

missions in the Mediterranean) and to fight against contemporary forms of slavery, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Although these concerns reflect the perceptions of Italy's peers and other stakeholders within the international community, especially after the wave of criticism that affected the Conte I cabinet and the attitude of politicians from the *Lega*, to be truly considered, they should persuade Italian national elites and decision-makers that these are the priorities to be addressed. To explore whether this international perception is shared domestically, the frequency of recommendations received by Italy during its third UPR cycle is compared with the number of bills on human rights-related issues introduced in the Italian Parliament in the same year (UP-HRC 2020).

Interestingly, Table 9 shows that the overlap between the 'international' and 'national' human rights agendas is only partial. In other words, while some issues are perceived as equally dominant by both national and international stakeholders (i.e. economic, social and cultural rights, as well as women's rights, gender equality, and violence against women), Italian legislators seem to consider the top three issues in the UPR, namely the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees (6 % of the bills on human rights presented in 2019 compared to 14 % of the UPR recommendations on this issue), the establishment of national human rights institutions (2 % of bills compared to 15 % of the UPR recommendations), and above all, the fight against racial discrimination (1.4 % of bills compared to 15.4 % of the UPR recommendations) at a much lower spot in the national human rights agenda.

After all, the fact that international and national agendas are 'untuned' for Italy is strengthened by one of the main limits of the UPR mechanism, which, despite its original intention, is still characterised by an intrinsic delimitation between international and domestic tables, each of them dominated by distinct logics of actions, thus allowing states to play 'two-level games' (Putnam 1988; Smith 2013; Cofelice 2017). However, playing this game too clearly may have some negative consequences on credibility before peers and national and international public opinion, when the subject has a strongly ethical connotation. If the evident gap between the two agendas questions further the supply for Italy's credibility on these matters, one could also acknowledge a particular path of consistency in this 'being untuned': looking at the number of recommendations made on the most frequent themes on which Italy has received more criticism, one can see that the Italy's behaviour is consistent with the priorities defined by Parliament and opposite to what peers signal: for example, taking the top 3 themes of the received recommendations, Italy advanced 33 recommendations on themes of racism in 10 years (2 % of the total

Table 9: 2019 UPR recommendations vs national bills on human rights-related issues.

Most frequent issues in UPR III cycle (2019)		Bills on human rights introduced in the Italian Parliament (2019)		
N: 306		N: 217		
	<i>%</i>		<i>%</i>	
1	Racial discrimination	15.4	Economic, social and cultural rights	24.0
2	National human rights institutions	15.0	Women's rights, gender equality, violence against women	18.0
3	Migrants and asylum seekers	14.1	Children's rights	16.6
4	Women's rights, gender equality, violence against women	10.5	Civil and political rights	11.5
5	Economic and social rights	5.2	People with disabilities	8.8
6	Trafficking	4.9	International instruments	6.5
7	Torture and rights of detainees	4.9	Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, minorities	6.0
8	Sexual orientation and gender identity	4.6	Torture and rights of detainees	2.8
9	Minorities	4.2	National human rights institutions	2.3
10	International instruments	3.9	Disarmament and humanitarian law	2.3
11	Children's rights	3.6	Racial discrimination	1.4

Source: Extrapolation from Cofelice and de Perini (2020).

recommendations made), 26 on migrants (1.85) and only 2 on NHRIs (0.1 %).

5. Italy's Responses to UPR Recommendations

Italy's overall acceptance rate of UPR recommendations stands at 87 % for the first cycle, 94 % for the second cycle and 95 % for the third cycle (thus, an average of 92 %): these figures are significantly higher than the global mean registered during the first 36 UPR sessions, which as seen, attests itself at 74 %. The (few) recommendations 'noted' (that is, 'not accepted') by Italy for each of its three review cycles have been, respectively, 12 in 2010, 9 in 2014 and 12 in 2019.

At least three interesting observations can be drawn from 'noted' recommendations. Firstly, almost two-thirds deal with the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, which is confirmed to be a highly sensitive issue. On the one hand, indeed, Italy has systematically rejected,

without exception, all requests to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, formulated by all regional groups; on the other hand, encouragements to decriminalise irregular entry and stay in Italy, repeal discriminatory laws against irregular migrants, provide humanitarian protection for all migrants and put an end to the practice of collective expulsion (among others) have been rejected on the grounds that Italy's laws and practice are considered fully consistent with international and European standards. The remaining third of the noted recommendations refer to eight different human rights-related issues, including the protection of minorities (especially the Roma and Sinti peoples), the prohibition all corporal punishment of children, the adoption of a national integrated human rights plan in accordance with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, etc.

Second, these rejections are distributed almost evenly among four of the five regional groupings existing within the UN. Italy, indeed, noted recommendations formulated by 15 African states, 14 Asian states, 14 Latin American and Caribbean states (GRULAC), as well as 11 states belonging to the WEOG (that is, Italy's own regional group). In contrast, Italy noted only three recommendations originating from the Eastern European Group (EEG), whose 'recommending attitude' is however significantly lower than the global mean (UPR-Info 2020).

Finally, even in rejecting the recommendations received Italy's adopts a non-confrontational stance. In this sense, four main strategies can be identified. The most recurrent response (65 % of the cases) consists of considering the recommended action or the right to be protected as already implemented or guaranteed. Illustrative examples are represented by comments on the numerous recommendations inviting Italy to ratify the International Convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers and members of their families, which generally end with the following: 'However, the Italian legal framework already guarantees the rights of regular and irregular migrants'. Similarly, when invited by Kenya and other states, during the third UPR cycle, to put an end to the practice of collective expulsion, Italy replied that: 'The principle of non-refoulement is established by Italian law and is fully implemented in the practice. The rights of migrants and asylum seekers are recognised and respected in full compliance with national, EU and international law.

In other cases (23 %), Italy has made the effort to explain in public why specific recommendations have been noted. For example, following its third review, Italy took steps to respond to concerns expressed by Peru about its firearms control policy and the correlation between its use and femicides, indicating detailed statistical data showing that such correlation

simply does not exist and listing the measures that can be adopted when cases of domestic violence and stalking are reported. While there remain concerns about the substance of these policies, having to publicly explain them is considered as arguably beneficial by NGOs, expert mechanisms and other stakeholders (Schokman and Lynch 2014, 139).

Sometimes, Italy also resorted to a ‘tied hands’ strategy, reversing the logic of the ‘external constraint’ (or using a form of ‘internal constraint’, see Isernia and Longo 2017, 116), which is invoking (alleged) institutional or financial obstacles that prevent the government from taking action. A first example refers to the setting up of NHRIs, as recommended by Denmark in the 2010 review: the government committed to submit a bill on this to the Parliament, ‘as soon as the required budgetary resources are made available’ (HRC 2010, 3). Another example, based on the principle of separation of power, refers to the signature of the UN Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, as recommended by Colombia in 2019: according to the government, Italy is not in a position to accept this recommendation since ‘an assessment by the Italian Parliament on whether to join the Compact is [*still*] ongoing’ (HRC 2020, 4).

In one single case, dealing with a recommendation by Iceland on a sexual orientation and gender identity related issue (third UPR cycle), Italy decided to adopt a slightly more confrontational approach by declaring that it would simply ignore it (i.e., by just ‘taking note’ of it, as expressed in the diplomatic jargon).

In summary, therefore, Italy’s acceptance rate of the received recommendations is higher than the global mean. Furthermore, negative responses to recommendations essentially focus on a single main issue (i.e. the rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers) and, as shown by regional breakdowns, do not appear to be significantly affected by ‘political motivations’, i.e., the level of friendship and alliances between states. Finally, Italy generally tends to favour non-confrontational approaches in rejecting the received recommendations. All these characteristics combined confirm that Italy seeks to exploit the review phase in Geneva to reaffirm, in front of its peers, its role as an international ‘human rights friendly’ actor, although, as mentioned, this attempt is not deprived of risks to the sustainability and credibility of this reputation, due to its domestic shortcomings and recommending strategy.

Conclusions

This analysis of Italy’s UPR has provided mixed results: it has shown a certain dynamism with regard to actively participating in the peer review mechanism, but also confirmed that the country’s behaviour

tends to highlight formal aspects that can increase the country's reputation at little cost, rather than effectively contributing to the growth of this mechanism and its impact as promised to the international community in its pledges. The chapter has also confirmed a certain degree of immobility for the country's domestic action on human rights: the subjects of received recommendations and the motivations used to note them have been reiterated over the past 10 years, showing little overall change.

More than in other aspects of the 'human rights component', indeed, the gap between domestic immobility and international activism seen in the UPR exposes the weak foundation of Italy's human rights agency, questioning its credibility. The absence of a significant matching between the recommendations received in the UPR (as such, the priority of the international community with regards to Italy), Italian legislators' priorities, and the themes on which recommendations were made by Italy witnesses an overly evident two-level game that questions further national and international credibility. The move towards a more consistent human rights foreign policy also go through a serious effort to glue the national and international priorities. When the two agendas will correspond significantly, Italy's performance of the 'human rights role-set' will give coherence to the country's commitment to human rights, improving its credibility. Otherwise, whatever reputation the country has managed to achieve in the UPR framework runs the risk of appearing as what it mostly is: a façade perception, pretty well consistent with the formalistic ritualism of the UPR and, in general, of 'institutional dialogue', and little conducive to any actual improvement of human rights on the ground, which incidentally is the key goal of the UPR.

If Italy aims to effectively comply with the priorities of the international human rights agenda – an agenda which, also due to the flexibility and responsiveness of the UPR mechanism, is particularly dynamic –, a more innovative and stronger 'multilateral initiative' is needed. And to develop such initiative, Italy must solve its long-standing problems at home, especially those highlighted in the context of migration policies, the treatment of Roma minorities, the protection of women and children's rights, and the long-promised development of a dedicated national infrastructure, that is, the creation of an NHRI, consistent with the Paris Principles. Although in general fundamental and still relevant in the global human rights debate, relying on blurring memories of past achievements may not be enough to keep the residual international reputation intact.

While this is mostly a prescriptive comment based on the outcome of this analysis, the recommendations in the UPR, especially the third review of 2019, show that the tones and themes of discussion were not

exacerbated by the shadows of delegitimation that the diversion from the traditional role conception by the all-populist Conte I cabinet and the Lega's ministers in particular, (tried to) cast on the UN, although there was a significant concentration on topics which in previous cycles were just marginally touched. The international perception of Italy, whatever it actually is in substance, has therefore remained unaltered overall. It is now time to revisit this form of reputation based on policy rhetoric and related ritualism in line with the reality on the ground and make the international role of Italy the natural reflection and consequence of a solid domestic performance, not an unrelated table card.

General Conclusions

Based on the analysis conducted into the three dimensions of what this book has labelled the ‘human rights component’ of foreign policy (‘institutional dialogue’, ‘multilateral initiative’ and ‘bilateral emphasis’), this final section aims to discuss the core question that has been underlying this study: besides grand policy pronouncements, how and to what extent do human rights matter in the definition of Italy’s foreign policy?

The literature which has tried to draw the conceptual line on the relation between human rights and foreign policy places the main explanatory onus on the relationship between human rights objectives and the construction of the national interest. Either a country promotes human rights because its national interest coincides with the long term common interest of the international community (Brysk 2009), or advancing human rights abroad is one of the many interests which make up the national interest and, accordingly, needs to be carefully weighed with other security, economic and ‘other interests’, which may often (but not always) reasonably prevail, originating trade-offs and possible inconsistencies (Baehr and Castermans-Holleman 2004; Donnelly and Whelan 2020).

However, Italy’s approach to human rights does not fit well into any of these explanations. Focusing on different dimensions of the ‘human rights component’, each chapter of this book has eventually shown that human rights hardly are a firm priority or a fundamental interest of Italian foreign policy in the sense considered by referred scholars, even considering the margins of inconsistency and quasi-hypocrisy tolerated, from a national foreign policy perspective, by their conceptualisations. As Donnelly (2000) points out ‘excessively grand rhetoric is a sign of an interest having a lower value in practice than policy pronouncements suggest’. In the case of Italy, where there is a significant rhetoric on these matters, although a moral component and a genuine idea that Italy should advance the global human rights agenda emerge transversally among many of the actors who can affect foreign policy-making. However, narrower instrumental considerations eventually prevail over moral and ideational considerations.

Without a doubt, human rights are a recurring element in the Italian foreign policy discourse. However, this recurrence is not as much the outcome of a coherent commitment to improve global justice and inclusion,

consistent with human rights principles, as it is one of the means to achieve an existential need for a ‘middle power’ like Italy: being recognised a prestigious international role. This central necessity of Italian foreign policy has been discussed in this book both in general terms and with regard to specific areas of cooperation and international commitment, such as cultural heritage and the participation in peacekeeping (to which, incidentally, human rights language and normative considerations are frequently connected).

This study confirms it also with regard to the specific ‘human rights component’: the promotion of human rights standards serves in large part the need of reputation. Human rights are indeed an area where Italy can have a say, especially due to the success of some international campaigns related to human rights, as frequently highlighted by the country’s authorities overtime. However, the empirical findings of this book question the possibility of Italy to live up to this ambitious reputation. This is especially evident if one considers that, in large part, reputation is based on credibility and Italy’s credibility is constantly challenged by a series of problems and inconsistencies: the vagueness and selectivity of the human rights discourse (Chapter 2), the immobility of the country’s international human rights agenda (Chapter 3), the lack of any evident intention to go beyond praise and purpose with norm-violating countries (Chapters 2 and 4), the structural problem of the domestic human rights agenda sustained by the lack of a real and coordinated policy structure (Chapter 3), and the consequential radical ‘untuning’ between domestic and international perceptions of what are the human rights priorities for the country and the international community (Chapter 4). This contributes explaining why, over the time frame considered, Italy has developed a loud but confused and eventually contradictory voice in the field of international human rights promotion and protection.

These findings feed back into the broader discussion on the interplay between moral considerations, on the one hand, and material objectives, on the other. They do not help to explain why Italy shows this insistence on human rights, especially if one considers that the rhetoric-performance gap that comes with this generalised inconsistency carries the continuous risk of reducing its international credibility, which can significantly affect reputation, which, in turn, result the preponderant motivation for the country’s support to this component in its foreign policy. An alternative but complementary viewpoint to explore and in part explain such insistence has been explored in role theoretical applications to foreign policy analysis, which accompany and integrate reflections on the moral/material dichotomy throughout the entire book. While role theory, and the NRC framework specifically, aim to explain foreign policy decisions

based on the conceptions of decision-makers about the orientation their country should follow internationally, this book has identified the foundation of a pro-human rights behaviour in the occurrence of 4 specific NRCs in Italian policy discourse, namely those of ‘principled actor’, ‘effective multilateralist’, ‘defender of the peace’ and ‘developer’ (especially in the last decade), which were collectively integrated under the label of ‘human rights role-set’. This approach has allowed introducing perceptions, convictions, and expectations in the analysis, trying to find the motivation for strong human rights pronouncements in foreign policy discourse by going to the bottom of how the country’s elites believe the country should behave internationally, which can include moral, cultural and ideational elements and material considerations as well.

The ‘human rights role-set’ is solidly shared from almost all ideological fronts (excluding the far right, as demonstrated by the role contestation advanced in 2018–2019 by Salvini’s *Lega*) and by all actors who can contribute to foreign policy, from officials within the *Farnesina* and Parliamentarians, to civil society organisations, from local governments to human rights researchers. The presence of a combination of these NRCs in Italian political discourse is helpful in understanding what the literature has defined as the ‘genetic multilateralism’ of Italy, when applied to human rights. Analysing the speeches and texts that mention human rights goals and priorities, both in multilateral venues and in domestic contexts, a genuine understanding that the country is naturally inclined to promote human rights as a core element of multilateralism and positive peace via active neutrality shines through. Some leaders are more vocal and elaborate, some other more vague, but, overall, this role conception is adamant.

Performing this role-set consistently would result in a strong international credibility, and thus a more solid reputation for Italy. However, data collected and analysed show that reaching international recognition for having achieved this role results, on average, much more important than performing it through a full-fledged, coherent, non-selective, domestically grounded and costly foreign policy. This produces grand rhetoric especially on past achievements and little real contributions to the current international agenda. However, leaders do not seem to acknowledge this dichotomy. Or if it is so, they refuse to acknowledge it for not compromising the fragile outcomes achieved with this ambiguous behavior over time. Therefore, the explanation of the contradiction, confusion and, sometimes, intangibility of the ‘human rights component’ of Italian foreign policy eventually results from a fundamental misunderstanding between what it really takes to improve this role, between a genuine self-conception and the existential need to, above all, ensure

that the resulting reputation is supported domestically and recognised by peers and international institutions.

These considerations do not lead to conclude that the picture is all black. Italy may be not a Global Good Samaritan role-model, but it is not even among those states that speak human rights language *only* instrumentally to protect from international criticism and pursue material interests without any substantive moral consideration behind it. Nor are these conclusions claiming that there is no culture of human rights in Italy, as some have argued. In contrast, there is much of it. However, this culture (and commitment) is scattered among institutions and generally not enhanced in line with the ambitions underlain by the widespread self-image of the country. Besides some enlightened officials, and policy-makers, the only typology of actors that behave consistently with the 'human rights role-set' in Italy are those pertaining to civil society organisations. And indeed, as Marchetti (2016, 2018, 2021) and other scholars (Ortali et al. 2014; Pividori 2016; Donà 2018; de Perini 2019b) have demonstrated, Italian civil society was always present when Italy managed to succeed in human rights-related fields. Civil society organisations, in other words, currently fill the lack of knowledge, expertise, resources, and infrastructures, which Italy needs to widespread in all its critical institutions if it aims to credibly bridge its self-conception with the pursued goal of recognition and reinforce the foundation of its international reputation. The challenge is thus transforming this bottom-up force into a systematic contribution to foreign (and domestic) policy-making, as opposed to the recent trend of criminalizing solidarity in the country. A clear and sustained investment in human rights education, formally at all levels of schools and university and informally, with regard to politicians and officials, could set the foundation to ensure this transformation, which would really put the national interest in line with a global interest based on cosmopolitan values, consistent with Italy's self-image. In the meanwhile, the fact that Italy's overall human rights behaviour is still split between more genuine self-conceptions and more instrumental pursuit of reputation (although unbalanced toward the latter) allows for some optimism about what Italy can potentially do to protect the international human rights agenda in the challenging times ahead, if a proper investment is done in discourse and in practice.

Except for some instances, especially with regard to UPR data, this book has focused on Italy as an in-depth case-study without looking for comparisons with other like-minded countries. The critical remarks discussed for Italy question the country's behaviour against its own rhetoric and proclaimed self-conception, but do not rank it among other like-minded states, which, in spite of stronger rhetoric or presumed reputation,

may or may not share similar or even deeper contradictions. Therefore, applying to other countries the same conceptual approach and analytical framework, the tripartite 'human rights component', could help not only to further investigate how like-minded countries perform on these issues compared to each other, but also to grasp what is the current and future status of international human rights in the broader national policy agendas. Who is genuinely supporting, with all the due balances and expectations this agenda, who is (guiltily) resting on its laurels, and who is exploiting this agenda, failing its promises of global justice, empowerment, and inclusion, weakening the global human rights movement?

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Human Rights Studies

Among the broad structural transformation processes at the global level, the international legal recognition of human rights occupies an exceptionally prominent position. The dimensions of this process include standard setting, the functioning of sophisticated machineries for the promotion and protection of human rights, the development of a specific international case-law as well as new priorities of the political agenda.

The human rights paradigm is at the heart of a new set of interrelated principles, which are equally valid at both the domestic and the international levels – such as the rule of law, democratic principles and the responsibility to protect – and of great strategic visions, as human development and human security. New functions, such as human rights monitoring, election observation, fact-finding and inquiry have already been admitted to international practice.

This series intends to foster the publication of volumes that investigate the multiple facets of a strongly evolving reality, and stimulate the production of new and innovative ideas. It offers to highlight how the human rights paradigm is at times used and at times disregarded or exploited in cases and situations that regard among others those belonging to vulnerable groups (immigrants, asylum seekers, persons with disabilities), NGOs and human rights defenders' advocacy, intercultural dialogue, governance of world economy, bio-technologies and peace operations. Those studies which adopt inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches, in accordance with the fundamental principle of interdependence and indivisibility of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, will be favored.

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