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No Longer Waiting for Godot? The Teaching of IR in Italy

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As a variety of scholars have pointed out (Attinà 1989; Sola 1996; Sartori 2004), Italian political science is a late comer in comparison to other national schools such as the American and the British ones. Although Italian scholars like Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto are some of the most important founding fathers of the discipline, the study of politics in our country experienced a major crisis during the fascist era (Bobbio 1997, 168), from which it recovered only in the late 1950s.

The empty space left by political scientists was mainly filled by students of law and history, who researched and taught on some of the most relevant fields of the subject such as political development, international organization and area studies. International relations (IR) theory, as a sub-field of political science, has faced similar and also two additional obstacles. The first difficulty has to do with the boundaries of international politics itself, which are not easy to draw and have been an object of permanent dispute. IR scholars themselves have challenged them by showing that some areas and topics previously overlooked were a central part of the discipline. Secondly and more importantly, the uncertainty as to the boundaries has been combined with a national culture that has traditionally considered politics as an art rather than a science (Sartori 2004), and which explains why students of law, history and sociology still teach on topics related to international politics. Although this state of affairs is not problematic in itself and has actually enriched the discipline by adding different points of view, it has nevertheless limited the full development of IR as a distinct academic discipline.

In this complicated intellectual environment, a few political scientists studying international affairs began, in the late 1960s and in the 1970s, to examine typical issues of world politics such as the causes of war and peace, foreign policy, economic and political integration, and the role of international institutions. Umberto Gori studied the structure of international organization from the League of Nations to the United Nations (1969) and illuminated the concept and the reality of multilateral cultural diplomacy for the case of Italy (1970). Luigi Bonanate made both broad historical analyses, such as his studies on the balance of power (1974) and on the influence of natural law on the relations among states, and empirical analyses as for his research on the policy of dissuasion (1971) and on the consequences of the spread of terrorism in democratic societies (1979). Antonio Papisca (1969) examined the role of the United Nations in popular consultations and analyzed the structure and mechanisms of the European community (1974; 1979).

The approach to these issues was not only theoretical, as it could be expected in a country where theoretical questions were regarded as a superior form of knowledge, but also empirical as shown by the constant attempt to apply theories to historical and contemporary cases. In doing so, these authors identified research puzzles in a way that was not only politically relevant but also empirically tractable. Although issues of methods were also discussed (Gori, Bruschi e Attinà 1974; Bonanate 1973; Bonanate 1973; 1976), Italian scholars remained, similarly to the contribution of French and British authors (Wight 1960; Aron 1970; Bull 1977), largely uninterested with the empiricist or even positivist orientation of the American

school, which tried to test causal hypotheses in a systematic and "scientific" way.

More recently, a new generation of scholars have contributed to debates at the very centre of the discipline. For example, Angelo Panebianco (1997) joined the debate on the democratic peace theory by explaining the peculiar roots of the foreign policy of contemporary democracies. Fulvio Attinà (2008) contributed to the literature on globalization and long-term change. Carlo Maria Santoro had the merit to revitalize the study of foreign policy and geopolitics in Italy (1984; 1987; 1988; 1997), which was a very important step because for decades the latter lost, with the collapse of the Fascist regime, its legitimacy as a valid field of study. This more recent generation of students of international affairs has shown a constant attention to methodological issues (Attinà 1976, 1980; Panebianco 1992) and also an interest in epistemology, especially in the relationship between knowledge and political action (Panebianco 1989; Panebianco 2009), a topic that has recently become of great interest in the American school too (Nincic and Leggold 2000; Tetlock 2005; Walt 2005). From these first two generations of scholars stemmed the major «schools» of international relations in Italy, which can be found in Firenze, Torino, Padova, Bologna, Catania and Milano, although others are also emerging.

Despite this significant intellectual contribution, in their assessment of Italian international relations theory, Lucarelli and Menotti (2002), found that the study of IR in Italy at the turn of the century was still in its heroic and pioneeristic stage. However, since then some significant improvements are tangible and in 2010 one can be more optimistic about the state of the discipline. After almost four decades since the first courses have been activated and a little more than two decades since the first degrees have been introduced, IR is an established subject within the Italian social science scene, as it is demonstrated by the high and rising number of enrollments, which has pulled the success of the discipline. As can be seen in table 1, almost half of the students enrolled in Faculties of political science in Italy are following IR degrees (class XV), with higher proportions in many Universities.

Table 1. Undergraduate enrollments in Political Science Faculties and in IR degrees. (Academic Year 2008/2009)

University	Faculty enrollments	Enrollments in IR degrees (class XV)	Percentage
Univ degli Studi di MILANO	1984	722	36%
Univ degli Studi di TORINO	1031	386	37%
Univ degli Studi di BOLOGNA	1016	485	48%
Univ degli Studi di ROMA "La Sapienza"	874	640	73%
Univ degli Studi di PADOVA	789	313	40%
Univ degli Studi di CATANIA	726	100	14%
Univ degli Studi di FIRENZE	722	494	68%
Univ degli Studi di BARI	596	131	22%
Univ della CALABRIA	568	256	45%
Univ di PISA	474	164	35%
Univ degli Studi ROMA TRE	447	336	75%
Univ degli Studi di NAPOLI "Federico II"	439	244	56%
Univ degli Studi di CAGLIARI	411	244	59%
Univ degli Studi di MESSINA	337	61	18%
Univ degli Studi di SALERNO	286	146	51%
Univ degli Studi di PERUGIA	273	172	63%
Univ degli Studi di TERAMO	273	105	38%
Univ degli Studi di GENOVA	271	230	85%
Univ degli Studi di NAPOLI "L'Orientale"	262	262	100%
Univ Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	257	123	48%
Univ degli Studi di TRIESTE	250	199	80%

Univ degli Studi di PALERMO	232	97	42%
Univ degli Studi di PAVIA	213	124	58%
Libera Univ Inter.le Studi Sociali "Guido Carli" LUISS	208	152	73%
Univ degli Studi della TUSCIA	185	0	0%
Univ degli Studi di SIENA	170	98	58%
Univ degli Studi di SASSARI	167	0	0%
Univ degli Studi del PIEMONTE ORIENTALE-Vercelli	117	24	21%
Univ degli Studi di MACERATA	94	94	100%
Univ degli Studi di PARMA	70	70	100%
Univ degli Studi di URBINO "Carlo BO"	45	45	100%
Libera Univ degli Studi per l'Innovaz. e le Organ. – LUSPIO	34	34	100%
Italy	13821	6551	47%

Over the last few years, many of the courses which had been taught by non-political scientists are now under the responsibility of members of the discipline (sps/04). There are various universities, mainly those which host or have hosted the first two generations of IR scholars referred to above, in which the number of international relations' specialists has reached a critical mass and the subject is taught in various courses offering various points of views as well as covering, on top of the general theory of IR, the various sub-fields of the discipline (international political economy or IPE, foreign policy analysis or FPA, strategic studies).

The number of Ph.Ds in international relations, both in Italy and abroad, is constantly growing, as shown by the rising number of members of the relevant standing group, as well as by the growing number of papers and panels presented at the annual meeting of the Italian Political Science Association (SISP). While only ten years ago there was only a single panel on international relations, at the 2010 edition there are 11 panels with more than 50 papers, which make IR the most active discipline within political science (in 2009 there were 6 panels and 36 papers). Not only the discipline is experiencing a strong growth, but academic recruitment can therefore count on a large number of competent young scholars. There is indeed the worry that, given the continuous cuts to the universities' budget, many scholars will be forced to seek fortune abroad.

From the teaching point of view, there are some objectives which could improve the quality of the IR degrees offered in Italy. In the first place, a tighter integration between IR courses and those of other branches of political science. In certain departments, a certain distance still exists between experts of international relations and comparative politics. Partly this is a legacy of the fact that political science in Italy stemmed from a group of scholars of comparative politics, soon joined by policy analysts. This division has no longer any sense both because contemporary global political processes are eroding the distinction between foreign and domestic politics, and because in much of the academic world IR and comparative politics are overlapping and interacting more strictly than ever. There are three institutional conditions which should facilitate such closer cooperation, which are the commonality of: recruiting mechanisms, major journals and most PhD courses.

Secondly, there should be a higher proportion of political science courses within IR degrees, both at the undergraduate and especially at the graduate level. In Italy, unlike other countries, more than half of the master's degree in international relations (LM 52) offer only two courses or less in political science subjects (typically theory international relations and comparative politics). This situation, as already mentioned, is due to the delay in the development of political science and IR, and to the fact that the relevant topics were taught by scholars of international law or diplomatic history, traditionally strong in Italy. The consequence is that many degrees are insufficiently multidisciplinary, as can be seen in table 2, which highlights that in 16 out of 31 graduate degrees offered in Italy more than 40% of courses belong to one disciplinary group only

(historical, economic or legal). If one compares this situation with well reputed European degrees, such as the MSc in IR of the London School of Economics, one finds a striking contrast with degrees offering an overwhelming number of political science courses.¹

Table 1. Percentage distribution of courses within disciplinary fields in IR graduate degrees (class 52, Academic Year 2008/2009).

University	LM-52	Pol. Science	Law	Economics	History	Others
Bari	Relazioni Internazionali	12%	35%	12%	24%	18%
Bologna	Scienze Internazionali e Diplomatiche	29%	11%	32%	29%	0%
Bologna	Relazioni Internazionali	19%	14%	5%	62%	0%
Cagliari	Governance e sistema globale	7%	21%	14%	50%	7%
Calabria	Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali	6%	38%	25%	19%	13%
Cattolica	Politiche europee ed internazionali	18%	0%	35%	29%	18%
Federico II	Relazioni Internazionali	7%	40%	7%	40%	7%
Firenze	Relazioni Internazionali e Studi Europei	13%	18%	29%	34%	5%
Genova	Scienze Internazionali e Diplomatiche	5%	23%	14%	45%	14%
Genova	Politiche ed economia del Mediterraneo	0%	25%	13%	38%	25%
Messina	Relazioni Internazionali e Studi Europei	6%	29%	18%	47%	0%
Milano	Relazioni Internazionali	11%	47%	42%	0%	0%
Napoli 2	Relazioni Internazionali	4%	43%	13%	26%	13%
Orientale	RI dell'Asia e dell'Africa	12%	15%	12%	42%	19%
Orientale	Relazioni e Politiche Internazionali	11%	37%	16%	16%	21%
Padova	Politica Internazionale e Diplomazia	9%	27%	9%	36%	18%
Padova	Ist. e Pol. dei Diritti Umani e della Pace	7%	43%	7%	14%	29%
Palermo	Relazioni Internazionali e Studi Europei	6%	56%	11%	17%	11%
Parma	Relazioni Internazionali ed Europee	15%	23%	31%	15%	15%
Pavia	Studi dell'Africa e dell'Asia	15%	8%	23%	46%	8%
Pavia	"Econ., Politica e Istituzioni Internazionali"	15%	15%	45%	15%	10%
Perugia	Relazioni Internazionali e Cooperazione	23%	15%	8%	31%	23%
Perugia	Relazioni Internazionali (PG)	8%	24%	20%	36%	12%
S. Pio V	Politiche per le Ist. e Org. Internazionali	14%	29%	14%	43%	0%
Salerno	Scienze delle Relazioni Internazionali	5%	26%	37%	21%	11%
Sapienza	Relazioni Internazionali	6%	33%	2%	37%	23%
Siena	Relazioni Internazionali	12%	29%	12%	41%	6%
Torino	Scienze Internazionali	16%	16%	22%	24%	22%
Trento	Studi Europei e Internazionali	20%	25%	20%	20%	15%
Trieste	Scienze Internazionali e Diplomatiche	12%	12%	12%	35%	29%
Venezia	Relazioni Internazionali Comparate	0%	25%	0%	63%	13%

Finally, at least in part both of the above points are the product of a peculiar Italian legacy, which considers area studies as autonomous disciplines. This is unusual as disciplines should not be defined by the empirical object of research (a geographic region) but by the methodology with which it is studied. There are therefore a number of mostly small disciplines (m-sto/03, sps/05, sps/13, sps/14) which group humanists and social scientists, historians of antiquity and modernity, linguists and philologists, sociologists and political scientists, all specializing on the same region. On the contrary, in the rest of the Western world, area studies specialists are to be found within established disciplines (mainly history and political science). Abroad, political scientists are therefore in general more numerous, as they include area studies' specialists, as well as more tightly connected, since often there are in the same departments scholars which study various

regions from the various points of views of political science. A richer presence of the various area studies within political science would also avoid the danger of entire departments concentrating on the traditional regions of comparative politics (Europe and America), while neglecting areas (Asia, Africa and Latin America) which are becoming more important on the global stage as well as more interesting for research.

Notes

¹ <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/graduateProspectus2010/taughtProgrammes/MScInternationalRelations.aspx>

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