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International Relations in Italy through the eyes of the Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica

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In his introduction to the state of the art of International Relations at the end of the Cold War, Luigi Bonanate labelled International Relations (IR) in Italy as a “young discipline” (1990: 66). More than ten years later, Sonia Lucarelli and Roberto Menotti’s survey of Italian IR scholarship concluded that “it is still limited in many respects: number of formally involved scholars, absence of a proper Italian IR community, constrained space within the academic world, quantity of literature produced in foreign languages, level of interaction with foreign/international IR communities, level of interaction among Italian scholars and (although to a lesser extent) between Italian and foreign scholars” (2002: 68). Overall, it seems that the discipline of IR has not fully developed in Italy, notwithstanding the dramatic changes that affected international politics throughout the past decades, and the fact that many of them were of the utmost importance for Italy’s foreign relations and security, such as the shift in NATO’s nuclear posture that led to the deployment of nuclear missiles in the country during the ‘60s; the growing strategic importance of the Mediterranean during the ‘80s; or the growing importance of Italy’s geopolitical role in tackling the new threats to Western (and Italian) security after 1989, just to name a few. More recently, however, Filippo Andreatta and Lorenzo Zambenardi pointed out that the picture is not so gloomy if one focuses on teaching: “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 enrolments, which has pulled the success of the discipline” (2011). Accordingly, one can ask whether a stronger and livelier research community recently complemented the growing interest IR gained among students and schools.

This paper aims at offering some indications to answer this question. To this aim, it investigates the IR articles the Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica (Risp) published from 1971 to 2011, in order to overview the relative weight of IR contributions, the topics IR scholars most studied, and the research centres that contributed to IR research. In short, this paper aims at contributing to answer the “how much”, “what”, and “who” questions about Italian IR research. In this regard, some caveats are needed. First, the Risp is not the only journal to which IR scholars submit their papers in Italian. As far as journals covering a wide range of Political Science (PS) topics are concerned, Teoria Politica published IR contributions for decades, and Quaderni di Scienza Politica has been giving attention to IR topics since its birth in 1994. Moreover, several policy-oriented journals are an option for IR scholars’ submissions, such as, for instance, Politica Internazionale and Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali. Second, since the Italian PS community has traditionally been book-oriented, it cannot be taken for granted that articles in journals are representative of the actual features and trends of the research in the country. As a consequence, this paper is not about overall IR research in Italy; it is about IR research as it is represented in the oldest journal of political science, that is also the “most widespread source of information for Italian political scientists” (Carammia

2011) and the journal of the national PS association, the Società Italiana di Scienza Politica. From this point of view, this paper is also about PS in Italy, because it can offer some suggestions about if IR topics and which ones were recognized as important contributions to help better understand political phenomena and the development of political science in the country.

The first question to be addressed is "how much" IR research has been published? Table 1 shows the number of IR articles the Risp accepted for publication since 1971¹. From the quantitative point of view, even though the total number of IR articles is rather low (slightly less than 11%); one can note three phases of IR research in the Risp. The first phase: 1971-1985, when IR contributions were almost an exception to the scientific debate. During this period, in practice, the Risp published less than 1 article per year. The second phase: 1985-1999, during which IR articles accounted almost 10% of all articles, signalling a growing research community and/or a growing interest from the PS community towards IR topics. The third phase: 2000-2011, during which the growth became steep and led to almost a third of all articles; a figure that is in line with the substantial place IR holds in PS abroad, along with Comparative Politics and Public Administration.

From a qualitative point of view, it could be interesting to note that these changes do not seem to be related to external shocks or important international dynamics. It is surprising that the dramatic shift the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 represented for international politics did not yield an increase in IR contributions. In fact, the second phase (1985-1999) reached the apex of IR articles in the late '80s, and gradually declined until the end of the century. Similarly, the third phase of IR articles especially materialized after 2005, long after the fall of the Twin Towers in 2001. Overall, Table 1 confirms that, on one hand, IR had a slow and late development in Italy; but, on the other hand, it also shows that IR very recently became a lively field of study, not only in classrooms. This shift – it suggests – seems to be related to domestic rather than international factors: in other words, it seems to have been triggered by changes within the Italian PS and IR research communities.

Table 1. The number of IR articles.

	IR articles	All articles	%
1971-1974	4	78	5.1
1975-1979	2	73	2.7
1980-1984	4	67	6
1985-1989	6	68	8.8
1990-1994	7	82	8.5
1995-1999	6	76	7.9
2000-2004	10	79	12.7
2005-2009	22	81	27.2
2010-1/2011	5	16	31.2
Totals	66	620	10.6

Table 2 informs "which" IR topics gained attention in the Risp². The most important of them were Regional integration and World government (18.1%) and Globalization and the State (16.7%); but also the study of Security and War (1.6%), Theory and the Discipline (13.6%), Foreign Policy (9.1%) and International organizations and institutions (9.1%) was well-represented. On the contrary, it is noticeable that the Balance of power and the Democratic peace (corresponding respectively to one of the most ancient IR traditions and to one of the leading theories in the contemporary debate) are almost missing in IR research, totalling 1 article each in 40 years.

If read across time, Table 2 suggests that some topics gained steady attention in the Risp. In particular, the Risp published papers about Regional integration and World government in 8 out of the 9 studied periods of time. Except for 1 article on cosmopolitan democracy, the empirical focus of these articles was on the EEC/EU, thus suggesting a great interest from the Italian PS community in the international dimension of

European integration. But also articles about Foreign policy, Security and War, and Theory and the Discipline were published in the majority of the above periods. One can note, however, that since 2005 IR research covered a much wider range of topics than in the past, thus further confirming the important development of the discipline in recent times.

Table 2. The topics of IR articles.

	1971-1974	1975-1979	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-1/2011	Totals (%)
Balance of Power	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.5)
Hegemony	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3 (4.6)
Security and War	0	0	1	3	3	0	0	1	1	9 (13.6)
Foreign Policy	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	6 (9.1)
Transatlantic Relations	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3 (4.6)
International organizations and institutions	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	1	6 (9.1)
International political economy	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	5 (7.6)
Regional integration and World government	2	1	1	0	1	1	3	2	1	12 (18.1)
Democratic peace	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.5)
Globalization and the State	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	5	0	11 (16.7)
Theory and the Discipline	1	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	1	9 (13.6)

Overall, Table 2 suggests that IR research in the Risp was mainly meant to delve into the integrative processes of international relations, may they be international, transnational or supranational. If one sets theory and the discipline apart, given its lack of empirical referents, the aggregate weight of the integrative topics accounts for 61.3% of all IR articles³. Moreover, it may be interesting to note that when dealing with the study of power distribution, Italian IR focused more on Hegemony (4.6%) than on the Balance of Power (1.5%). All in all, one could suggest that IR contributions in the Risp seem to reflect the national political experience, close attention to multilateral relations coupled with close attention to power asymmetries in bilateral relations (Bonvicini and Colombo 2011). In this regard, another figure is important: among IR contributions devoted to study a specific geopolitical area or specific bilateral relations, 6 articles directly or indirectly focused on the USA and 11 articles on the EEC/EU. The only regions that gained attention were the Middle East, Latin America, the Balkans and the CIS, scoring 1 article each since 1971.

Table 3 can help in answering the question about the research centres that contributed to the IR debate in the Risp⁴. Table 3 shows that the relative majority of IR articles was submitted by scholars with a foreign affiliation (25.7%). It also shows that some Italian research centres prominently contributed to the Risp, such as Bologna, Firenze, Trento, and Catania. Moreover, it may be interesting to note that the variation in the institutional affiliation of authors was rather low during the early times of the Risp, especially until the mid-'80s. In recent times, on the contrary, the IR debate in the Risp is the result of a more composite landscape, because research products came from many different research centres. This could be further evidence that IR research has recently grown in Italy.

Table 3. The Institutional Affiliation of Authors

	1971-1974	1975-1979	1980-1984	1985-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-1/2011	Totals (%)
Foreign Affiliation	0	0	2	1	3	3	0,5	6,5	1	17 (25.7)
Bologna	1	0	1	1	0	1	3,5	2,5	0	10 (15.2)
Firenze	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0,5	7,5 (11.4)
Trento	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0	7 (10.6)
Catania	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	5 (7.6)
Torino	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	3 (4.5)

Other Institutions	0	0	0	1	0	0	0,5	1	0	2,5 (3.8)
Milano	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0,5	2,5 (3.8)
Pavia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1,5	2,5 (3.8)
Siena	0	0	1	0	0	0,5	0	1	0	2,5 (3.8)
Milano Cattolica	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,5	1,5 (2.3)
LUISS	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.5)
Perugia Stranieri	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.5)
Parma	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1 (1.5)
Trieste	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (1.5)
IUE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,5	0	0	0,5 (0.75)
Molise	0	0	0	0	0	0,5	0	0	0	0,5 (0.75)

In conclusion, this paper studied the IR articles the Risp published from 1971 to 2011, in order to assess which role the discipline played in itself and within the overall PS Italian community. On one hand, this study confirms some weaknesses of IR in Italy. The overall number of IR articles has been quite low and the relative majority of articles has been submitted by scholars with a foreign affiliation; moreover, the discipline has covered a narrow range of topics for a long time, and some of the most important issues of the international debate have been almost absent in the Italian research agenda (such as the Balance of Power and the Democratic Peace). However, on the other hand, important changes occurred very recently. The discipline has gained an important share in the Risp (almost a third of all articles); scholars have studied a much wider range of topics and their institutional affiliation has diversified across the country. IR has suffered and still suffers from several problems in Italy; though, seen through the eyes of the Risp, one could be more confident for the future: some evidences suggest IR have become a lively and well-established field of study within the Italian PS community.

Notes

¹ Figures are based on the up-dated version of Sani and Legnante's data-set (2001). Please note the criteria by which the sub-set about IR research has been selected: 1) the sub-set includes papers on the State, if they take the interplay between internal and international factors into consideration while studying its formation and evolution; 2) the sub-set does not include articles about armed forces when they are studied as factors of domestic political stability and change, rather than actors of foreign policy and/or national security; 3) articles about European integration have not been included if they study the EEC/EU as a political system, focusing on its institutions and/or policies; instead, they have been included if: a) they place European integration within the overall theoretical framework of regional integration; b) they study the overall outcome of the integration process.

² Theory and the discipline includes either theoretical articles or reviews of the literature, as long as they do not target specific empirical processes or problems. Any article with a clear empirical dimension has been classified under the corresponding topic.

³ International organizations and institutions, International political economy, Regional integration and World Government, Democratic peace and Globalisation and the State have been selected as integrative topics.

⁴ The institutional affiliation of Authors is coded at the time of publication.

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