

Book reviews – Comptes rendus – Buchbesprechungen

Antonio VARSORI, *La cenerentola d'Europa? L'Italia e l'integrazione europea dal 1947 a oggi*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli, 2010, 478 p. – ISBN 978-88-498-2589-3 – 28,00 €.

It has become common place among Italian historians of Italian (European) foreign policy to criticise the near-total inability of any English textbook on the subject to fully grasp its topic and avoid the accumulation of factual errors and misinterpretations. Add to this the fact that the Italian government's position is all-too often overlooked in numerous studies on European integration, and you realise that a general survey of Italian European policy was urgently needed. Antonio Varsori's book undeniably fills this gap, and will likely become not only a point of reference for anyone interested in the topic, but also a point of departure for many studies on European integration. Perhaps following the inspiration of the French writer-diplomat Romain Gary in his novel *Europa*, the central question of Varsori's new book is whether Italy was (is) not the Cinderella of European integration. In *Europa*, Jean Danthès, the French Ambassador in Italy (!), cherishes Europe, this "conte de fées [...] plus proche des "princesses lointaines" ou autres "éternels féminins" que d'une quelconque réalité".¹ It is of course with reality, however, that Varsori's book is concerned, rather than the cultural and mythological dimension.

Far from the fairy tales of political science (and even some historians) constantly revolutionising European integration (and international) history, the author rightly places his own history in the long-standing vein of la *storia delle relazioni internazionali*, alas so much contemptuously neglected in Anglophone scholarship. This is a pity, as the author indirectly notices, since its research agenda is indeed very close to the more recent advances purported in international and European integration history. Encouraging the study of non-governmental actors, public opinion, the media, is not something invented in the 2000s, but instead which emerged in France in the 1920s with the *Annales* School, which in turn shook up l'*histoire diplomatique*, subsequently transforming itself into l'*histoire des relations internationales*, which later influenced numerous Italian scholars. A quite surprising state of the art given the current enthusiasm for multi-archival, multi-national research, which should have encouraged many scholars to read in other languages than English. But the problem has certainly other roots, as Varsori cursorily notices: all too many researchers at the European University Institute in Florence, for instance, do not even speak the language of their host country!²

Inevitably, and as the author himself reckons, the story told in this book overlooks some aspects of Italian foreign policy which might have been more extensively dealt

1. R. GARY, *Europa*, Folio Gallimard, Paris, 1972/1999, pp.11 and 31.

2. Footnote 125, p.275.

with. If each and every reader might have wished a specific paragraph on a given aspect, this certainly does not prevent Varsori's account from being comprehensive, entertaining and easy to read. This situation partly stems from the scarce availability of sources for some periods explored in the book. These archival limits – as the author himself laments – are indeed a pity. But the real pity is in fact not so much that they concern the recent past. This is actually where Varsori's book has a great advantage, having had privileged access to the Andreotti papers. It is rather a pity (and this is of course due to Italian archives rather than to the author) for a period such as the late 1950s for instance where documents for the Messina conference (p.138) are not accessible! The book is nevertheless based on a wide range of Italian, American, British, EU and French archives. The selection of foreign archival sources is, however, slightly odd, with for instance the French Foreign Ministry sources used only to a limited extent without clear reason; and the French presidential sources completely omitted (and in the French Fifth Republic, a lot happens at the Élysée regarding foreign policy). Finally, and quite inexplicably, the *Banca d'Italia* archives have not been explored – while its papers are accessible at least until the year 1980. This is very surprising since the author does stress the significance (growing over time) of the Banca d'Italia in Italy's foreign policy-making (one can just think of the many famous Banca d'Italia/Italian economists/Brussels/global stage connections, from Rinaldo Ossola and Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa to Mario Monti and Mario Draghi), in particular page 376 and then again page 412.

Albeit structured around the classic "one country and European integration", *La Cenerentola* shows that this traditional template still brings many rewards. Laurent Warlouzet's book on French European policy in the 1960s is another such example.³ Well conducted, this approach indeed has many advantages: it is able to delve more systematically into domestic politics; it traces policy development over a longer time frame (more than fifty years in Varsori's book); and it shows how the foreign policy of a state is embedded in a wider context of policy-making and bargaining. This last point shows the limits and the nuances of each government's position, which do matter in the Italian case – namely that of a big country, not always accepted at the international table of the big four but often there, and having an important regional influence.

The book analyses Italian European policy in chronological order, from Italy's European choice to the 2000s – a possibility most often allowed by national studies rather than multinational ones. This overview of more than half a century helps better trace the continuities and ruptures of Italian European policy. But perhaps most importantly the continuities: it is fascinating to observe the constant features of Italian policy (e.g., economic convergence; pro-European stance; federalism; fear of Franco-German duopoly; remarkable diplomacy; social policy; expertise in financial affairs; etc). These clear continuities give perhaps part of the answer to the question as to

3. L. WARLOUZET, *Le choix de la CEE par la France. L'Europe économique en débat de Mendès France à de Gaulle, 1955-1969*, Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France, Paris, 2010.

why is the "Italian factor" all too often overlooked in many studies: it is largely predictable. This certainly does not excuse its omission, but it explains at least why it is often too cursorily – if at all – mentioned.

The book is divided in eight chapters, each of which is smoothly moving from domestic politics to its European implications (or vice-versa), and the international context. If it is a book on Italy and European integration, *La Cenerentola* is not only about Italy: the author carefully and thoroughly sets the global and European context of the time, showing his extensive knowledge of European integration and the Cold War. It is also not because the book focuses on Italian European policy that it does not contain more general reflections on European integration. One interesting remark about the debate on a European identity, so widely dealt with in recent historiography, usefully replaces this topic in a broader context:

"un'identità europea evanescente con caratteri anodini, spesso creati a tavolino [...] o che a volte appaiono così generici da essere applicabili a qualsiasi democrazia liberale esistente in altre parti del mondo" (p.423).

Importantly also, the book is about "l'Italia a Bruxelles" (pp.212-224; 277-283), that is, how Italians entered European institutions themselves. The conclusion develops further the four fundamental characteristics of Italy's European choice, that is, Italy's international role, economic and social modernisation, public opinion, and the creation of a large political consensus on the topic. From an editorial point of view, a list of Italian governments and Italian members of the Commission would have been a useful referring point for the reader in an annex (though perhaps the former would have taken too much space). More importantly, a list of abbreviations is missing and would have been particularly helpful considering the (many) Italian political parties and corresponding acronyms.

Central to the book is of course the idea of Italy's relationship with European integration as being that of Cinderella: finally reaching prosperity after a period of neglect. Perhaps the author could have pushed this reasoning further. Indeed in many places in the book, the actual implications of European integration on Italy's economic predicament could be more detailed. In some places, Varsori even notes that the constraints may have outweighed the benefits (like page 272 when discussing the limited results of social and regional policies in comparison to other sectors in the early 1970s; pages 357-358 are particularly ambiguous, showing both the successes and failures of the late 1980s/early 1990s but not clearly concluding whether the benefits really outweighed the drawbacks). The case of the increase of public debt is, especially given the current situation, particularly interesting. Is it linked or not with European policy? Did EMS/Euro participation led to lowering the cost for servicing the debt, and thereby had the perverse effect of loosening Italian budgetary policy as it was easier to borrow further rather than to reimburse? A few tables could have helped the reader to make his or her own opinion on the transfer of resources, and on Italian economic and monetary performance. More generally – and perhaps more provocatively – there could have been a discussion as to where Italy actually stood. Has Italy's already gone through its "pumpkin stage"? Put differently: has the "*vincolo*

esterno" worked? Has the "nation-building", to which Federico Romero refers, happened?⁴

Whatever personal conclusion one may draw from this, Varsori aptly summarises the dilemma of the Cenerentola metaphor:

"la partecipazione al processo di integrazione [è] stata sovente un'opportunità che comunque per avere successo doveva trovare efficace attuazione in un contesto nazionale" (p.414).

Cinderella or not, domestic political and economic choices must adapt to European options – or pay the price of inconsistency. A central challenge with which many European countries confronted themselves since the 1950s, but which Italy probably felt most acutely. Let's formulate an ambitious hope: even more than its translation in English – which would fully fill the historiographical gap mentioned at the beginning – let's hope a readiness of people interested in Italian foreign policy if not in European history in general to engage more with works written in Italian.⁵ And rediscover with it an entire historical school of thought.

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Geneviève DUCHENNE, Michel DUMOULIN (dir.), *Généralistes européens depuis le XIXe siècle. Individus, groupes, espaces et réseaux*, Bruxelles, P.I.E. Peter Lang, coll. Euroclio Études et Documents, 2012, 215 p. – ISBN – 978-90-5201-862-1 – 38,60 €.

Cet ouvrage est le résultat de deux ateliers tenus à l'UCL les 13 juin et 2-3 décembre 2009, organisés par le Centre d'étude d'histoire de l'Europe contemporaine (CEHEC). L'objet en était de s'interroger sur le concept de générations appliqué au militantisme européen à des moments-clés, bouleversements sociaux et inquiétudes identitaires, où le projet d'Europe organisée a pu paraître à certains comme une solution nécessaire. Une solide introduction de Bernard Bruneteau entame l'ouvrage, qui revient sur ce concept de génération, pris ici dans son acception historico-sociale plus que biologique: ce concept a longtemps été traité avec méfiance, avant d'être mis à l'honneur dans les années 70 comme possible clé de connaissance des grands débats idéologiques, des registres relatifs à la culture politique et aux représentations et sensibilités à une date donnée. Celles-ci concernent trois moments: avant 1900 (peut-être un peu vague dans l'optique générationnelle choisie) pour s'intéresser au passage à un monde plus complexe où dominent les grands ensembles, autour de 1930, afin de s'intéresser à la perception du «déclin de l'Europe» auprès

4. F. ROMERO, *L'Europa come strumento di 'nation-building': storia e storici dell'età repubblicana*, in: *Passato e Presente*, 36(1995), pp.19-32.
5. With F. ROMERO's *Storia della guerra fredda* published a couple of years ago, this is becoming even more urgent.