



*Ministero degli Affari Esteri*

## **Foreign Policy and Religious Engagement: The special case of Italy**

Draft Concept Paper

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1. The growing research produced in the last twenty years to address the lack of attention as well as the misunderstandings on the role of religion in international affairs has finally begun to break through and inform concrete policy discussions and decisions in the foreign policy making community. To give an idea, a glimpse into the case of the US can be instructive and exemplify this somehow unexpected trajectory from theory to practice: in 1994 the volume *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* was published and made the case for the need to study the relationship between religion and foreign policy; ten years later, when a subfield of research on ‘Religions in International Relations’ had been established with an exponential increase in the number of studies and publications on the topic, the former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright argued in her book *The Mighty and the Almighty* (2006) that ‘as secretary of State you have all kinds of advisers – economic advisers and arms control advisers and climate change advisers...it would be good to have some religious advisers too’. In 2013 the US State Department – following the recommendation of the State Department’s Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group (2011-12) - created the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives whose mission is to implement a new ‘U.S. Strategy on Religious Leader and Faith Community Engagement’.<sup>2</sup> This new US policy emphasizes the need to understand the political role of religion in international affairs beyond what we could call the ‘securitization’ paradigm and envisages a foreign policy strategy of constructive engagement with religions to: 1) Promote sustainable development and more effective humanitarian assistance; 2) Advance pluralism and human rights, including the

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<sup>2</sup> For the new US State Department Office, see <http://www.state.gov/s/fbci/index.htm>

- protection of religious freedom; and 3) Prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict and contribute to local and regional stability and security.
2. The MFAs of other European countries like, for example, France and the United Kingdom have also intensified their efforts at engaging with the unexpected global resurgence of religions in world politics in order to make better policy and to make a bigger difference, to use the words of a recent conference sponsored by the Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> Since 2009 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in co-operation with the Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) has sponsored a yearly international seminar in Trento with the aim to discuss the growing role of religion in international affairs by gathering scholars and experts of religions and international relations, but also diplomats, policy makers and media actors working in the area as well as religious representatives, movements and associations particularly active in inter-religious dialogue.<sup>4</sup> After 5 years of conceptual work to raise the awareness of the growing relevance of religion in international affairs by exploring a number of critical issues related to this agenda (from Global Governance to the Arab revolutions and Freedom of Religion and Belief), it is time to move to a more practical and policy-oriented aim and ask how Italian foreign policy should more systematically engage religious actors and integrate religious knowledge to enhance its foreign policy-making process and produce better policy.
  3. The purpose of this paper is therefore to begin to think through how the Italian government can strengthen its policy making by engaging with religious actors abroad and integrating religious awareness and engagement in its foreign policy process. Our working hypothesis is that Italy can indeed represent a special case of religious engagement in foreign policy because of its unique and complex history of 'informal' religious engagement mediated by its 'special' relationship with the Catholic Church. But is this specialty or uniqueness likely to result in a comparative advantage or disadvantage? Are there interesting points of convergence and/or divergence between a possible Italian approach to religious engagement and other European approaches? Are there any interesting similarities and/or dissimilarities with the more institutionalized U.S. approach to date?

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<sup>3</sup> For two recent initiatives, see the FCO-sponsored conference 'Religion, foreign policy and development: making better policy to make a bigger difference', Wilton Park, 5 February 2014, see <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/conference/wp1311/> and the Quay D'Orsay-sponsored conference on 'Religions et politique étrangère', Sciences Po, Paris, 5-6 November 2013, see <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-et-son-reseau/evenements-et-actualites-du/actualites-du-mae/article/intervention-de-laurent-fabius-au-108962>

<sup>4</sup>For some information on the Trento seminar initiative, see [http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Sala Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Approfondimenti/2011/10/20111024\\_seminario\\_Farnesiana\\_Trento.htm?LANG=EN](http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Sala Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Approfondimenti/2011/10/20111024_seminario_Farnesiana_Trento.htm?LANG=EN) and <http://www.ispionline.it/en/articles/article/promoting-religious-freedom-through-cross-cultural-dialogue-9302>

4. A discussion on the relationship between Religion and Foreign Policy in Italy cannot arguably avoid starting with *the Pope*, as head of the Catholic Church, *the Curia*, as its central administration, the *Holy See* as a unique type of international actor (different in international law from all other types of religious non-state actors), and *Rome* as the central location for all these aspects of the Catholic Church. This is the broader background for our discussion but one that unfortunately too often is misunderstood through two ideological, rather than historically-based, opposing arguments on the influence of the Papacy on Italian foreign policy: on the one hand, the papacy's overwhelming influence and, on the other, its irrelevant role. The actually fascinating and complex history of the interactions between Italian foreign policy and the Vatican as well as the diplomacy of the Holy See hasn't received yet, to our knowledge, a detailed and comprehensive assessment. It is, however, clear to us that the story is not only marked by the different historical international contexts and papacies but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the different ways in which this relationship has evolved through the four main eras of Italian foreign policy – namely the liberal period, the fascist era, the 'First Republic' and the 'Second Republic'.
  
5. An example of this complexity is the role of the Franciscans in supporting Italian foreign policy. In the early years of the newly united Kingdom of Italy, at the highest of the Church/State conflict when catholic religious congregations were legally suppressed and the *non expedit* forbid Catholics to participate in the elections of the new Italian state, some religious missions, especially the Franciscans, were used by the Liberal foreign policy elites as a critical instrument in foreign policy to promote Italy's 'moral and material interests in the Levant'.<sup>5</sup> As a number of institutional reports suggested at the time, the missionaries held the key to Italian influence overseas, especially in the Mediterranean region.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly in the case of the Franciscans, this patriotic alignment argument was instrumentally used by the Order to overcome and get the Italian state approval for the opening of the Roman missionary college of St Anthony (*Antonianum*) as a higher education institution. For the religious order the aim was to rebuild the Franciscan life in the aftermath of the laws of suppression in many countries, while for the Italian government the aim was to establish and protect its interests in the world.<sup>7</sup>
  
6. Following this line of reasoning we could begin to ask how today a variety of Italian religious non-state actors, ecclesial movements, religious organizations -

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Carmody, chapter on 'The Franciscans and Italian Foreign Policy', in *The Franciscan Story: St Francis of Assisi and his influence since the thirteenth century*, Athena Press, London, 2008, 422-439.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, *Relazione al parlamento sulle scuole italiane all'estero* (Roma, 1880).

<sup>7</sup> Carmody, chapter on 'The Roman college of St Anthony (*Antonianum*)', in *The Franciscan Story*, 439-50.

based in Italy and sometimes founded in the country, but now operate globally, could be a resource for Italian foreign policy in the early twenty-first century. As it has been shown, beyond the Vatican factor, another way in which Italy is a special case from a religious perspective relates to the thick and extensive societal presence of the Catholic Church and world which present an array of grassroots structures, religious personnel, social institutions, and lay associations which structures in a significant way Italian civil society and is unrivalled in any other European country.<sup>8</sup>

7. Is it possible there are ways they could help make foreign policy more effective and efficient (in the use of scarce human, material, and financial resources)? Could they even do so in ways that may gain more public support and appreciation for what Italy can do in the world, which could have positive spill-over effects for the government? In so far as some of Italy's foreign policy goals reflect the common good could this approach unite people of faith and those without it - unite all people of good will on the common goals for Italian foreign policy ('Urbi et Orbi, Christmas Day, 2013)? Moreover, is this a particularly strategic time to consider such an endeavor, with the new Pope Francis, who has captured the world's popular imagination, and has initiated some novel forms of 'diplomatic engagements', such as using prayer and reflection as a starting point for hosting the Israeli and Palestinian presidents in Rome?
8. However, the foreign ministry is concerned with specific policy issues, and at least one of the things it wants to know from its dialogue and engagement is *how* religious non-state actors can help achieve its foreign policy goals or objectives (or indeed how together they could identify common foreign policy goals that could facilitate the country's wider objectives). In other words, how can the foreign ministry and religious non-state actors make better connections at home and abroad?
9. If the foreign ministry and religious non-state actors are to better engage and connect with each other on different aspects of foreign policy, then *both* sides need to see how they can make better connections. Both sides also need to see that they require the right kind of tools to make the right kind of connections, and they need to see how they can do so on specific global issues or policy dilemmas. The problem is if all you have is a hammer, then every problem looks like it needs a nail to fix it. It is not always possible to see the new types of connections or even how to make them, if all you have are the old tools that are only able to work on the old materials.

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<sup>8</sup> Franco Garelli (2007) 'The public relevance of the church and Catholicism in Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 12:1, 8-36.

10. Our central starting point is that in some way *religion is also about power* - religion is the most effective, or still one of the most effective, cultural practices that constitute persons as particular kinds of beings, and communities as particular kinds of social groups, in specific social worlds, which establishes, polices (or enforces, disciplines), and authorizes what is good, what is evil, what is right, and what is wrong. How these social and religious worlds are constructed is not the main concern of the foreign ministry, but it is central to religious communities and the religious non-state actors that operate within them, and between them, and which connect the concerns of the foreign ministry to religious concerns, social groups, and communities. Therefore, from this perspective 'religious engagement' becomes a critical way of improving the knowledge-base for foreign policy in an increasingly culturally pluralistic and politically fragmented international society. Integrating religion into foreign policy would be about tackling the growing deficit of knowledge that seems to contribute to the growing disintegration of the international society in terms of its cultural-political arrangements and worldviews and along a number of dividing lines such as the West/Non-West and the Global North/Global South.
  
11. In other words, we need to come to terms with the fact that today the international society is experiencing an epoch-making process of transformation: the economic shift towards the East, the emerging of rising great powers embedded mainly in non-Western cultures, religions, and civilizations (BRICs); global urbanization, with the world now more urban than rural, with not only the majority of people, but also the majority of *young* people living in the megacities of the global South; and the rise of the global middle class, in which the world for the first time in history will move from being mostly poor to *mostly* middle class. The global resurgence of religion is actually significantly related to these structural societal changes much more than the dominant view would suggest. So from Sao Paulo, Chicago, Lagos, and Cairo, to Seoul and Jakarta - contrary to secularization theory, and perhaps even contrary to Europe's experience,<sup>9</sup> megacities, mega-churches, mega-mosques, and being religious, educated, and middle class goes together. Moreover, China may be indicative of all these shifts since by 2050 it could have the largest number of Muslims and Christians in the world.<sup>10</sup>
  
12. Therefore, we need the realism to recognize the emergence of a new multipolar world, one which is also a postsecular world of multiple modernities and varieties of secularisms (especially in Europe), i.e. multiple ways of being religious and being modern in the twenty-first century. The merging of 'modern' political values and practices with traditional local references and ways of living, often rooted in religious

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<sup>9</sup> Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case?* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2009).

traditions will, in all likelihood, be the rule rather than the exception. The fact that for most of the people in the world, even in the West, and especially in the world of the global South, all life is lived not only within secular political ideologies and worldviews, far more importantly, it is lived within theologies and spiritualities. These are the real existing communities that concern the foreign ministry.

13. However, this perspective is not to limit the role of religious (and even secular) non-state actors primarily to be ‘moral cheerleaders’ - prophets, advocates, or activists for ideas, ethics, morality, and norms in foreign affairs and in foreign aid or international development assistance - as this would justify the concern that if you bring religion into foreign policy, foreign policy gets confused with social work.<sup>11</sup> The role of religious non-state actors from this perspective would be basically about: (i) helping to alleviate the suffering, and (ii) acting as moral cheerleaders, to bring ethics, moral values, human rights, etc. into debates on international affairs. This is still a dominant conception of the role of religion, religion is still part of the debate over realism and idealism in foreign affairs, even if over the last 15 years the secular script of international affairs and development is being rewritten (recognizing the role of religious non-state actors in promoting peacemaking, humanitarianism, international cooperation and development, as it is also shown in the new US strategy for religious engagement).
14. The key point is, however, that more than ever in our contemporary world, the bottom and not the top of society can be a privileged or important location to construct knowledge and to understand the functioning of social, political, and economic systems, and for knowledge about the consequences of policy choices. If this is the case then religious non-state actors can be an important resource for generating new knowledge relevant to policy makers - for foreign policy. This is why religious non-state actors have more than a humanitarian and a moral cheerleaders role to offer (i.e. ethics or idealism in international affairs), as important as this role is - they also have a key role in helping the foreign ministry construct new knowledge of what is going on in ways that affect Italy’s interests and foreign policy goals.
15. *New* knowledge is generated on a variety of issues through the encounter and dialogue between religious communities and religious non-state actors. The encounter or dialogue religious non-state actors participate in is not in the first instance over ideas or doctrines, although this does not mean there is no reflection on social practices. The point is that ideas, beliefs, or practices can not be separated from (i) the *people* who use them, and (ii) people who use them in definite *places*, and (iii) in the definite *social circumstances* of their daily lives. Sacred spaces can

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Foreign Policy as Social Work, *Foreign Affairs*, 75,1 (1996): 16-32.

not be understood as separate from the places where things are done - workplaces, hospitals, laws courts, homes, streets, etc., from the media used to do these things, or the relationships constructed around them. This is why it is firstly the encounters that take place in ordinary, day-to-day, friendships and interactions, and secondarily what emerges in the social, political, or economic problems of every day living - which appear in schools, market places, grocery stores, among carpenters, electricians, nurseries, community centers, youth clubs, etc. It is also here that what can be called the 'veiled violence' of the state, local officials, local government - laws, regulations, institutions, bureaucracies, petty government officials, etc. maybe felt, resented, and is revealed (e.g. the street vender in Tunisia who set himself alight?), and it is here that issues emerge that need to be defused before the occurrence of social eruptions or explosions. This is *not* the world of the foreign ministry but it is very much the world of religious non-state actors. Perhaps this is not even the world of much of the secular Western elites, but it is the increasingly relevant social fabric of the world out there that is generating much of the changes and transformations that the predominant euro-centric social and political frameworks of analysis are struggling to understand.

16. One concrete example could relate to the Italian religious non-state actors that often work at the margins of society in Catholic missions around world in communities among poor, marginalized, vulnerable people - they do what Marx said religion does - they help and comfort the afflicted. Religious non-state actors operate at the bottom, in poor, marginal, vulnerable neighborhoods in developed countries, and they operate in similar communities in the religious world of the global South - which often are also religiously *pluralistic* communities, i.e. many communities embedded, often for generations, in one or more often, more than one, of the main world religious traditions. A variety of religious orders are well known for operating at this practical down-to-earth level at home and abroad beyond or below what the foreign ministry would usually recognize as their wide array of global issues and foreign policy concerns. Is there a way in which the foreign ministry and these religious non-state actors could better engage and connect with each other on different aspects of foreign policy beyond the humanitarian developmental agenda that would come immediately to mind?
17. Religious engagement relates to what is neither ordinarily the world of foreign policy practitioners nor religious actors; but, the insights and perspectives it generates is certainly relevant to foreign policy concerns - problems of political stability, social cohesion, and religious extremism – as well as arguably useful to the religious actors, more than they might realize. This means there may be a closer relationship between knowledge, diplomacy, and interreligious dialogue than what is usually thought to be the case. Multi-track diplomacy conventionally understood is the dialogue and negotiations on specific political issues that involves

states and secular or religious non-state actors in civil society. However, if the bottom and not the top is the privileged or important location to construct knowledge, then it will be increasingly beneficial and important for both the MFA and religious actors to have an on-going engagement with each other - on the kinds of new knowledge related to specific *issues* or *regions* of the world. The MFA may benefit from new kinds of knowledge religious actors may bring - anticipate crisis, smoldering situations, tensions, anxieties, resentments, before they erupt, or erupt violently, and become 'events' in international relations. Religious actors can benefit from the way the MFA engage the political constituencies whose policies and actions influence the life of the people religious actors deal with every day.

18. The practical fundamental question is: how to develop a system capable of filtering and transforming the wealth of this under-utilized religiously-based societal information and knowledge into analysis and input for better foreign policy making? How to do it with specific reference to the unique case of Italy? There is a sense in which Rome indeed is religiously-speaking 'caput mundi' - the center of the world - for it has a unique position, more than Washington, London, Paris, or Brussels, as the hub of a transnational network of religions connections. These transnational connections are not only based on the network of the Catholic Church, which is unique among the great worldwide religious organizations for its vertical universal structure converging to Rome. They are also linking Rome to other religious traditions, communities and organizations through the mediation of the Catholic world, that is, via the links that the Holy See, local and national Churches, and the many Catholic organizations or non-state actors headquartered in Rome have worldwide with religious communities and leaders abroad. These connections are often based on long-standing relationships of reciprocal knowledge, sometimes of an official nature, but they are also a part of growing friendships in the form of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation for the common good between the Catholic world and other religions. The Italian MFA can use to its advantage what is often considered to be a disadvantage in the management literature: hierarchy and centralization. Rome is the ideal location to coordinate the kinds of local knowledge beneficial to the global knowledge relevant to the MFA, and on specific policy initiatives Catholic non-state actors can benefit from the MFA's engagement with other governments and international organizations.

## **THE WORKSHOP**

1. The closed-door workshop attempts to analyze the specificities of the religion-foreign policy connections in Italy in order to explore how to overcome institutional incapacity for religious engagement, and how to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits of engagement with religion and religious actors in foreign policy. The



idea is to learn from history and existing best practices to develop an Italian model of religious engagement in the field of foreign policy.

2. The workshop is structured around four panels and one public roundtable. The first panel sets up the broader context of our discussion by providing an overview of the different recent initiatives of religious engagement in the ministries of foreign affairs of a number of countries; the second panel looks at different aspects and epochs of the history of the relationship between religion and foreign policy in Italy with a view of retrieving and reconsidering this history for building an Italian model of religious engagement in foreign policy; the third and fourth panels look at two specific policy areas –the protection of human rights/freedom of religion and crisis management/peace building – to explore how engagement with religious leaders and communities could contribute to Italy’s foreign policy objectives and result in better policy outcomes. The public roundtable will discuss the results of the workshop with some key Italian foreign policy makers and religious actors and inform a broader audience.

## **1. Discussing the Contemporary Experiences of Religious Engagement in Foreign Policy**

Why some country’s Ministries of Foreign Affairs have decided to examine more thoroughly the interplay between religion and foreign policy in international affairs? How have they decided to do this - new personal, with new expertise, same personal, but gaining new expertise, a new bureaucratic or organizational structure of the ministry, or even in other ways? How to build up the religious literacy of diplomats/policymakers to better understand the religious worldviews that shape foreign policy in many countries? What specific issues regarding religion have they decided were important and needed further investigation? What new knowledge or understanding has been gained or learned so far through religious engagement on specific policy issues or more generally on their country’s foreign policy? Are there interesting points of convergence and/or divergence between the US approach to religious engagement and other European approaches?

## **2. An Overview of the Religion and Foreign Policy Relationship in Italy: Retrieving and reconsidering the historical memory for building the future**

What factors influenced the relationship between religion and foreign policy in the last 150 years of Italian history? What role have religious missionaries’ orders played in Italian foreign policy, cultural diplomacy, etc. in extending Italy’s influence? What has been the Holy See’s influence on or relationship with Italian foreign policy? What has been to role of the Italian Catholic Church and world in its complex and rich articulations in the shaping

of Italian foreign policy domestically and internationally? Are there any historical examples or cases of *ante-litteram* religious engagement with non-Catholic religious leaders or community abroad implemented in the context of Italian foreign policy? On the basis of retrieving and reconsidering these histories, can we look ahead positively to the development of an Italian model of religious engagement in the field of foreign policy?

### **3-4. Looking ahead: how to implement creatively religious engagement in Italian foreign policy? Two policy areas:**

#### **3. The case of the protection of human rights**

Is the default position when thinking about this foreign policy area one of opposing the 'human rights' versus the 'religious rights' frameworks? However, is another way forward to think creatively on how to engage religious leaders to facilitate compliance with universal human rights, especially in a context where human rights are increasingly criticized for being a Western-centric discourse? Can interreligious dialogue operate as an additional relevant channel for the protection of human rights, and in particular the freedom of religion? Should the foreign policy action to promote freedom of religion put the emphasis on the duties of states to respect, protect and promote it or the responsibility of faith communities to promote dialogue and tolerance? How can the experience of religious organizations against human trafficking and in support of refugees' protection as well as the recent inter-religious initiative by the Holy See be better engaged by the Italian minister of foreign affairs to stop this massive violation of human rights?

#### **4. The case of crisis management and peace building**

Recent history indicates the difficulties of building sustainable peace through the existing efforts of liberal peace building in areas important for Italian and EU foreign policy. Concepts like healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not the normal part of the MFA's political vocabulary. However, they are a very important part of the religious vocabulary of a variety of kinds of religious actors and can have the kinds of *political* implications that are very much the concern the MFA. What can the MFA learn from these initiatives - those that have succeeded (and what constitutes success, and even those that have failed (what constitutes failure?); and, in those examples involving Italian religious organizations, are there ways that the MFA could have more effectively engaged with them help them be more successful? If religious peace building is a response to conflicts involving peace and justice, then are these objectives relevant to the MFA, and Italy's foreign policy? How have religious actors made a difference, and in what ways could the MFA interact with, facilitate and encourage, religious peace building? What are the various experiences of religiously-inspired initiatives of truth, healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in initiatives of post-conflict reconciliation? Moreover, and crucially, can the societal knowledge of religious NGOs at the grass roots help to act a type of early warning mechanism to prevent crisis and conflict; and, how can the MFA more effectively access this this knowledge as a part of its foreign policy making?