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“FOGGIA SÌ ESQUISITA DI GOVERNO”.
TRA IDEALIZZAZIONE E DISPOTISMO: LE IMMAGINI
DELLA CINA NELL’ITALIA DELLA PRIMA ETÀ MODERNA

di Paolo C. Pissavino

Nelle opere pubblicate in Italia durante la prima età moderna le indagini sulla Cina, sui suoi costumi civili e la sua forma di governo assolsero a due funzioni distinte. Da un lato, e soprattutto nelle relazioni di viaggiatori o di missionari, alcuni tra i principali concetti elaborati dalla tradizione del pensiero politico (monarchia assoluta, dispotismo, governo misto, filosofi-re) furono usati per descrivere la distanza culturale della Cina entro una prospettiva di facile comprensione per i lettori italiani¹. Dall’altro lato, invece, il “modello Cina” ebbe la funzione di esemplificare alcuni concetti propri alle principali dottrine politiche dell’età della Controriforma e barocca, in particolare alla ragion di stato e alla ricerca della “ottima forma” di governo che aveva il suo culmine nella composizione di utopie². Queste interpretazioni non si fondava-

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¹ Il gesuita portoghese Alvaro Semedo (1585 o 1586 – 1658) aveva puntualmente segnalato la difficoltà di dare una corretta descrizione di quel lontano impero: “Lo scrivere di cose remote ha quasi sempre tirato seco l’inconveniente di molti e non piccioli difetti. Di quelli che hanno scritto della China, ho visto alcuni, che lasciando in oblio quasi tutte le verità, solamente si raggirano in cose, che sono dal vero lontane: perché essendo questo regno, & havendo sempre con ogni studio fuggito la communicatione co’ forestieri, conservando per sé le sue cose come proprie con particolarissima cautela, viene in conseguenza che di quella solamente si sa di fuori ciò, che si lascia cadere, come soprabbondanza, nelle falde del paese di Cantone, parte di questo Imperio, alla quale sono pervenuti i Portughesi”, cfr. A. SEMEDO, *Relatione della Grande Monarchia della China*, Romae, Sumptibus Hermann Scheus, 1643 [*colophon*: “In Roma, nella Stamperia di Lodovico Grignani, 1643], *Proemio*, pp. 1-2.

² Per la presentazione di tali generi di scrittura politica quali fondamentali costitutivi della trattatistica dell’età della Controriforma si veda P. C. PISSAVINO, *Le forme della conservazione politica: Ragion di Stato e utopia*, in C. VASOLI, *Le filosofia del Rinascimento*, a cura di P. C. PISSAVINO, Milano, Bruno Mondadori editore, 2002, pp. 552-606.

no solo sulla raccolta di osservazioni empiriche, più o meno veritiere e più o meno coerentemente esposte, ma erano costruite a partire da consolidate teorie dell'ordine politico, capaci, cioè, di integrare l'auto-rappresentazione, che quel lontano impero dava del proprio governo, con le tipologie che connotavano il pensiero politico italiano. In questa prospettiva, il saggio che qui si presenta si soffermerà, oltre che sulle relazioni dei viaggiatori e sui trattati redatti dai gesuiti, sulle opere di alcuni tra i maggiori autori politici dell'età della Controriforma, Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) e Lodovico Zuccolo (1568-1630).

1. *La solitudine del sovrano assoluto, la figura del despota*

Dagli scritti di viaggiatori e gesuiti emergeva un'immagine complessa dell'impero, che incise variamente sulla diffusione del mito cinese nella trattatistica politica dell'età della Controriforma. Vediamo come, proprio esaminando la descrizione che essi fornirono dei caratteri della sovranità e del comportamento tenuto dall'imperatore. Nelle loro opere era ricorrente la minuta ricostruzione degli assetti di potere che caratterizzavano la Cina, ricostruzione presente anche nella *Relatione della gran Città del Quinsai, & del Re della China* scritta da Contugio Contughi³. Anzi, l'importanza che tale analisi assumeva nella *Relatione* trovava conferma nella sua peculiare collocazione editoriale: venne infatti inserita nel *Thesoro politico*, forse l'opera più significativa di quella cultura civile italiana ed europea che si esprimeva in *Trattati, Ragguagli, Istruzioni pertinenti* – come si legge sul frontespizio – *alla perfetta intelligenza della Ragion di Stato et alla intiera cognitione degli interessi e dipendenze de' più gran Principi, & Signori del Mondo*: insomma si trattava di una sorta di diffusissima e consultatissima enciclopedia di geopolitica, che si collocava agli albori della politica comparata⁴.

³ La *Relatione* è datata 16 giugno 1584, ed è presente nella *Continuatione del Thesoro politico, nella quale si contengono i Trattati, Discorsi, Relationi, Ragguagli, Istruzioni, di molta importanza per li maneggi, interessi, pretensioni, dipendenze e disegni de' Principi. Raccolta per il Sig. Lodovico Ricci*, In Bologna, Presso gli Heredi di Giovanni Rossi, 1603.

⁴ Su questa opera e sulla sua importanza si vedano i saggi di A. E. BALDINI, *Origine e fortuna del Tesoro Politico alla luce di nuovi documenti dell'Archivio del Sant'Uffizio*, in "Studia Borromaeica", XIII, 2000, pp. 155-174; S. TESTA, *Una interpretazione del Thesoro Politico (1589)*, in "Nuova Rivista Storica", LXXXV, 2001, pp. 347-362; S. TESTA,

Dopo aver ricordato l'enorme ricchezza di cui disponeva l'imperatore della Cina, Contughi indagava minutamente i comportamenti del sovrano, osservando che "Il Re rarissime volte si lascia vedere, e quelle volte con grandissima solennità. [...] solo se ne vive rinchiuso nel suo Palazzo fra il gran numero di Damigelle, e Paggi". L'imperatore era quindi raffigurato esercitare il suo immenso potere – "L'amministrazione del tutto sta in potestà del Re"⁵ – essendo inviccinabile non solo dai sudditi ma anche dagli ambasciatori inviati da altri sovrani⁶. Tale condizione non impediva, tuttavia, che le sue decisioni garantissero un sistema politico e sociale ben regolato: infatti "la giustizia che viene immediatamente dal Re non permette, che muoia alcuno, perché dicono non convenirsi alla Clemenza sua", e le stesse leggi "con le quali i Cinesi si governano (per quello che si riferisce) sono giustissime, di modo, che rare volte fra loro occorrono omicidi, o altre violenze di qualunque sorte"⁷.

Radicalmente opposto, e decisamente negativo, era stato invece il giudizio con cui il gesuita Giovanni Pietro Maffei (1536-1603) chiuse

Alcune riflessioni sul Tesoro Politico, in "Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance", LXIV, 2002, pp. 679-687, e, infine, S. TESTA, *From the 'Bibliographical Nightmare' to a Critical bibliography. Tesori Politici in the British Library and elsewhere in England*, in "eBLJ", 2008, 1, pp. 1-33, che considera la *Relatione* del Contughi una "another edition of Marco Polo's descriptions of China, with additions taken from other travellers", p. 11. Non a caso, a sostituire l'ormai datata operetta di Contughi, venne stampata la *Relatio de amplissimo Sinarum regno* del gesuita IACOBUS PANTOGIA (Diego de Pantoja, 1571-1618), apparsa sia nel *Thesoro politico la parte seconda*, Francofurti, Apud Ioannem Wolffium, Impensis Ioannis Theobaldi Schönwetteri, 1611, sia nella *Praxis Prudentiae Politicae pars secunda Opus collectum ex italicis com publicatis tum manuscriptis variis variorum Ambassadorum observationibus & discursibus a Philippo Honorio*, nello stesso anno e presso i medesimi editori.

⁵ C. CONTUGHI, *Relatione della gran Città del Quinsai*, cit., p. 209.

⁶ Tale separatezza ritornava più volte nelle prose civili e letterarie di importanti autori italiani dell'età della Controriforma. Si veda, ad esempio, quanto scrisse Tommaso Garzoni (1549-1589), in *La Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, In Venetia, Presso Giovanni Battista Somasco, 1585, di cui, per la citazione, seguiamo però l'edizione curata da P. CHERCHI e B. COLLINA, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, vol. I, p. 552: "S'afferma il loro re essere il maggiore di tutto il mondo, come quello che, fra l'altre grandezze, abita in un palazzo di sette meraviglie cinto, ove di fuori stan sempre alla guardia dieci mila uomini, mutandosi a vicenda". Alessandro Tassoni (1565-1635), per parte sua, coniugava in una sorta di battuta il potere assoluto di cui godeva l'imperatore e la sua separatezza dal mondo: "Però se la potenza e lo star separato provano l'essere incorporato, anche il Re della China sarà incorporato, che è potentissimo e mai si lascia vedere", si cita da *Pensieri e scritti preparatori*, a cura di P. PULIATTI, Modena, Franco Cosimo Panini, 1986, p. 779.

⁷ C. CONTUGHI, *Relatione della gran Città del Quinsai*, cit., p. 209.

deva la descrizione della Cina contenuta nel libro VI delle sue *Historie delle Indie orientali*⁸. Per Maffei la legislazione cinese era ben lontana dalla perfezione attribuita dalla *Relatione* di Contughi e, anzi, predisponeva il popolo a sottostare a un governo dispotico. Infatti “Le leggi e gli statuti sono tali, che rendono i popoli più atti alla servitù, e alla viltà, che alla virtù, e alla grandezza dell’animo”, così che il sovrano poteva depredare a proprio arbitrio i patrimoni dei sudditi: “Il Re [...] tiene ufficiali, ed esattori severissimi, con i quali va diminuendo l’ avere de privati, e le facoltà acquisite con gran sudore”⁹.

Le *Historie* presentavano, quindi, un ritratto della Cina a tinte fosche: eppure nelle pagine iniziali del VI libro Maffei non aveva mancato di mostrare meraviglia di fronte alla complessa macchina burocratica in cui si articolava l’amministrazione dell’impero, sia nelle due corti (Pechino e Nanchino) sia nelle quindici province in cui era diviso il suo territorio. Anzi, aveva descritto minutamente la rigida selezione a cui i candidati a ricoprire magistrature erano sottoposti nel loro percorso di formazione. Infatti, ricordava che, dopo aver superato numerosi esami pertinenti ai grandi temi della politica, i giovani ritenuti idonei venivano dall’imperatore posti nel ceto dei mandarini da cui si “costuma creare i Giudici, i consiglieri e i magistrati; [questi] non possono per ambizione o corruzione arrivare subito ai più alti gradi senza aver dato qualche saggio di sé ne’ luoghi più bassi”. Solo quando avessero mostrato la propria capacità avrebbero potuto salire “grado per grado a’ superiori”¹⁰.

Tuttavia, Maffei proponeva solamente una sorta di anatomia dell’apparato amministrativo imperiale, da cui non si ricava però alcun accenno alle interazioni tra le varie magistrature. Da tale atteg-

⁸ G. P. MAFFEI, *Le historie delle Indie orientali. Tradotte di Latino in lingua Toscana da M. Francesco Serdonati Fiorentino*, In Venetia, appresso Damian Zenaro, 1589. Per un primo ragguaglio su Maffei se ne veda la voce redatta da S. ANDRETTA, in “Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani”, vol. LXVII, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2006, pp. 232-234.

⁹ G. P. MAFFEI, *Le historie delle Indie orientali*, cit., l. VI, c. 105v.

¹⁰ G. P. MAFFEI, *Le historie delle Indie orientali*, cit., cc. 100v-101r. Certo, l’esatta divisione di compiti e uffici tra le varie magistrature e, soprattutto, la pratica degli esami come la lenta progressione che il singolo magistrato poteva incontrare all’interno della macchina burocratica imperiale mostrava un’immagine ben differente dal malcostume italico dei “carichi di salto” che contraddistingueva non raramente l’ascesa di giovani patrizi nell’agone politico delle repubbliche oligarchiche, cfr. P. C. PISSAVINO, *I giovani, i “carichi di salto”, e l’ambizione: la competizione politica nella cultura repubblicana italiana nella prima età moderna*, in “Metabasis. Filosofia e comunicazione. Rivista internazionale di filosofia on line”, VII, 14, 2012, pp. 1-27, www.metabasis.it.

giamento intellettuale si discostò, però, il gesuita maceratese Matteo Ricci, che già in una lettera all'amico Giulio Fuligatti (datata 24 novembre 1585) indicava quale elemento centrale del buon governo imperiale l'assunzione dei funzionari mediante pubblici esami "senza alcun privilegio dovuto alla nobiltà", sicché "quelli dotati di ingegno tutti possono essere grandi"¹¹. Anzi è proprio attorno all'importanza assunta dai mandarini che Ricci venne a tracciare la propria ricostruzione della microfisica del potere imperiale nel suo manoscritto *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella Cina*.

2. *Tra impero feudale, monarchia assoluta e repubblica. La tipologia delle forme di governo in Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella Cina di padre Matteo Ricci*

La *silhouette* che Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)¹² disegnò del governo della Cina sotto gli ultimi sovrani della dinastia Ming annunciava la struttura di un potere burocratico tradizionale quale sarebbe stata descritta da Max Weber¹³, il cui centro – piuttosto che dalla figura

¹¹ M. RICCI, *Lettere (1580-1609)*, edizione realizzata sotto la direzione di P. CORRADINI, prefazione di F. MIGNINI, a cura di F. D'ARELLI, con un saggio di S. BOZZOLA, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2001, p. 113.

¹² Sulla figure del gesuita maceratese da ultimo cfr. R. PO-CHIE HSIE, *Un gesuità nella Città Proibita. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012.

¹³ Secondo Arnold Zingerle, per il Max Weber di *Economia e società* la Cina rappresentava nella storia lo stato patrimoniale sviluppato con maggior coerenza, cfr. A. ZINGERLE, *La burocrazia cinese e il mutamento dinastico nel secolo XVII. Considerazioni sulla percezione della continuità in Martino Martini*, in F. DEMARCHI, R. SCARTEZZINI (a cura), "Martino Martini umanista e scienziato nella Cina del secolo XVII", Atti del Simposio Internazionale su Martino Martini e gli scambi culturali tra Cina e Occidente, Accademia Cinese delle Scienze Sociali, Pechino, 5-6-7 aprile 1994, Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 1995, p. 126. Anzi, secondo Zingerle, il confronto sui mezzi di dominio che si sviluppava tra "signore" e "quadro amministrativo" in tutti i tipi di stato patrimoniale trovava in Cina un peculiare compromesso il cui principale pilastro istituzionale era proprio il sistema degli esami. Tuttavia, che tale forma di selezione del funzionariato mettesse capo alla costituzione di uno stato razionale era esito contestato da Weber nelle sue ultime lezioni all'università di Monaco (inverno 1919 – primavera 1920) rifuse in M. WEBER, *Storia economica. Linee di una storia universale dell'economia e della società*, introduzione di C. TRIGILIA, Roma, Donzelli, 1993, pp. 294-295, dove metteva l'accento sulla formazione solo umanistica del mandarino, che "non è minimamente addestrato nell'amministrazione": insomma "uno stato con funzionari di tal fatta è cosa diversa da uno stato occidentale" ovvero razionale. A ben vedere, tale critica era già stata espressa da Diego de Pantoja, pronto ad accusare i mandarini di incapacità nell'amministrazione,

dell'imperatore – è rappresentato dai mandarini sottoposti appunto a rigida selezione. E, sempre attraverso esami, i funzionari erano soggetti a un sindacato periodico, che sanciva la permanenza nel loro ruolo o la promozione, quando non fossero però degradati o rimossi a causa delle ingiustizie compiute nell'esercizio del loro ufficio¹⁴. La centralità che il corpo di magistrati era venuta ad assumere, agli occhi di Ricci finiva per trasformare completamente la forma di governo, tanto che lo stesso gesuita poteva scrivere che “tiene molto del Repubblico”¹⁵. Tuttavia, il comportamento dell'imperatore Wanli, regnante al tempo di Ricci, ne ribadiva piuttosto il carattere dispotico.

Seguiamo ora puntualmente la descrizione della statualità imperiale offerta dal Gesuita. Consapevole di quanto “le cose della Cina comunemente sono assai diverse dalle nostre, e [*che*] questo trattato si fa principalmente per i nostri europei”¹⁶, Ricci descriveva il governo della Cina entro schemi filosofici molto diffusi, coniando, anzi, un autentico *cliché*, di cui si sarebbe avvalsa la letteratura gesuitica successiva. Richiamando Platone, affermava infatti che “se di questo regno non si può dire che i filosofi sono Re, almeno con verità si dirà che i Re sono governati da filosofi”¹⁷.

di assoluta ignoranza del diritto determinata da una formazione solo umanistico-retorica, e di malversazioni: “complures Mandarinis praeclare excogitare multa, sed cogitata factis non persequi. Quid plura? Administratio pene ethnica, & plurimis vitiis cumulata. Carent multis legibus: in iure dicundo animi sui sententiam sequuntur; in suis provinciis novas ferunt leges ut libent. Potest enim quis vel ex eo conicere, non optime hoc regno administrari, quod non quisquis ornate scribere didicit, idem etiam habeat legislatoris prudentiam. Taceo quod saepe lites in rem suam convertunt, ius violant &, qua licet, rapiunt”, cfr. IACOBUS PANTOGIA S. I., *De amplissimo Sinarum regno relatio*, cit., p. 240, cfr. n. 4.

¹⁴ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, prefazione di B. VALLI, con un saggio di F. MIGNINI, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2011, cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 80: “I capi di tutti i magistrati [...] sono obbligati di tre in tre anni a comparire tutti insieme personalmente in Pacchino alla Audientia reale, e dar obedientia al Re; nel qual tempo nelle Corti si fa un esame et inquisitione universale di tutti i mandarini della Cina fuori delle Corti, sì di quei che sono obbligati a venire alla Corte, come di tutti gli altri, con molto rigore, di come fanno il loro offitio. E conforme a quello che si ritruova di essi o sono nell'offitio o sono abbassati ad altri più bassi o sono totalmente privati o sono castigati senza nessuna remissione o scusa”. Il testo della *Descrizione della Cina* qui seguito riproduce, con alcune varianti, il primo capitolo del manoscritto ricciano *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*, recentemente riedito, sotto la direzione di P. CORRADINI e con prefazione di F. MIGNINI, a cura di M. DEL GATTO, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2000.

¹⁵ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 64.

¹⁶ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. I, *Della Causa di scrivere questa Istoria e del modo che in essa si ha da procedere*, p. 24.

¹⁷ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. V, *Delle arti liberali, scientie e gradi che nella Cina si danno*, p. 48.

Sin dalle prime pagine della *Descrizione* appariva un'immagine del governo cinese perlomeno composita: accanto alla *silhouette* assolutistica, che Ricci *de stylo* disegnava al potere imperiale, emergevano tratti discrepanti che, o in un lontano passato o nelle prassi di governo vigenti, ne qualificavano altre forme. Così, se netta era la dichiarazione che si legge ad apertura del capitolo VI: "in questo Regno non si usò mai altro governo che di governo Monarchico", tuttavia la frase successiva tracciava una storia differente, quasi ad articolare i caratteri di una monarchia di tipo feudale: "E nel principio, ancorché fusse un solo Re e signore, con tutto vi erano anco molti signori soggetti al signore Universale, sotto varij titoli, come tra noi, di Duchi, Marchesi e Conti. Ma da 1800 anni a questa parte, fu sempre senza questi stati particolari"¹⁸. Di più, illustrando le gesta del fondatore della dinastia Ming, Ricci faceva emergere comportamenti che parevano riproporre il costume feudale del *beneficium*: "A gli Compagni del Re Humvu nella conquista del Regno non solo diede grandissime rendite, ma anco grandi titoli come di Duchi, Marchesi e Conti [...] per sé e per i suoi successori et vari privilegi [...], ma in tutto soggetti ai pubblici Magistrati"¹⁹.

Tuttavia, se la storia imperiale presentava delle tracce feudali, l'affermazione della monarchia assoluta, per propria parte, doveva confrontarsi con la centralità assunta dal ceto dei mandarini. Vediamo perché, secondo Ricci, il governo della Cina "tiene molto di Republico": "Percioché, se tutto quanto si fa nel governo deve essere approvato dal Re nei pubblici memoriali che i magistrati gli danno di tutto quello che hanno da fare, con tutto il Re non fa altra cosa che approvare e riprovare quello che gli propongono, e quasi mai fa niente sopra qualche negozio senza essergli proposto prima dai magistrati che hanno cura di quello. E così mai fa nessun favore o grazia, se non gli fusse proposto da' magistrati esser degno e meritevole di tal grazia e favore". Da questa citazione è evidente che la forma "repubblicana" con cui Ricci intendeva rivestire il governo dell'impero era un'enfaticizzazione che tuttavia sarebbe stata smentita da altri passi della stessa *Descrizione*, dal momento che l'imperatore manteneva su tutti gli affari di stato un supremo controllo, perfino sui pochi memoriali che i privati gli

¹⁸ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 64.

¹⁹ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 67. In realtà il fondatore della dinastia Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang (imperatore dal 1368 al 1398), aveva come titolo di regno Hongwu, non Humvu.

facevano pervenire dove, non a caso, scriveva “Tal magistrato esami-
questo negozio e mi dia avviso di esso”²⁰.

Come si è visto, non si dava nessuna espropriazione degli attributi di sovranità o, weberianamente, dei mezzi oggettivi dell’impresa politica (risorse economiche, militari, logistiche, ecc.) da parte dei mandarini²¹. Semmai, tra magistrati e imperatore interveniva quel compromesso, secondo Zingerle²², o quel bilanciamento, secondo Mignini²³, che davvero rendevano peculiari le dinamiche fisiologiche al sistema politico cinese. Quelle fisiologiche, va aggiunto, perché – come si vedrà in seguito – quelle patologiche paiono tragicamente infrangerne l’equilibrio in senso dispotico.

Puntuale, anche in Ricci si presentava la ricostruzione della capillare organizzazione burocratica dell’impero cinese: a capo di essa stavano sei tribunali o ministeri, “il maggiore e più eminente di tutti gli altri” era quello “*de’ Magistrati*” che si occupava “di distribuire tutti i Magistrati e officij” e di controllare il corretto comportamento dei funzionari²⁴. Ricci enumerava poi il tribunale “*degli erarii*”, quello “*dei riti*”, quello “*de’ Soldati*”, quello “*delle fabbriche*” (ovvero degli edifici pubblici) e, infine, quello “*de’ Castighi*, che risponde ai nostri giudici criminali”: “Tutte le cose di tutto il regno dipendono da questi sei tribunali, e così in tutte le Province e le Città tengono Mandarini e notarij pubblici a loro rispondenti con grandissima comunicazione e subordinazione”²⁵. Superiore per autorità a questi sei tribunali, Ricci ne ricordava “un altro, il più alto di tutta la Corte e di tutto il Regno che è di *Colao*, che sono tre o quattro [magistrati] e possono essere sino a sei”. Fondamentalmente il Colao, o Gelao, aveva il ruolo di consiglio del Principe, ma proprio nella descrizione che ne offriva il

²⁰ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 68.

²¹ Si veda per tale prospettiva M. WEBER, *La politica come professione*, in M. WEBER, “La scienza come professione. La politica come professione”, introduzione di W. Schluchter, Torino, Edizioni di Comunità, 2001, p. 50.

²² A. ZINGERLE, *La burocrazia cinese e il mutamento dinastico nel secolo XVII*, cit., p. 126.

²³ F. MIGNINI, *Matteo Ricci e la Cina dei Ming*, in M. RICCI, “Descrizione della Cina”, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2011, p. 159.

²⁴ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 70: “in questo Tribunale si fa tutto per ordine, cominciando tutti da’ più piccoli officij et andando ascendendo ad altro maggiore, conforme alle leggi e statuti, e conforme alle informazioni che hanno del modo che lo fece negli officij precedenti, et abbassando e anco privando degli officij quei che la fecero male”.

²⁵ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, pp. 70-71.

Gesuita emergono elementi che qualificano il potere imperiale come dispotico. Vediamo perché:

“Questi non tengono offitio particolare, ma sono come Consiglieri del Re, e sono soprintendenti di tutto, i quali ogni giorno entrano nel Palazzo del Re, e anticamente parlavano spesse volte con l’istesso, stavano con lui sedendo e trattando i negocij anche a bocca. Adesso che il Re mai esce alla udientia, stanno lì dentro tutto il giorno, et a tutti i memoriali che si danno al Re pongono la spiditione che se gli deve dare, e poi tornano a mandare al Re, il quale o approva o riprova o muta quello che sta scritto e di sua mano la pone nel proprio memoriale per eseguirsi”²⁶.

Appare evidente come la funzione decisionale che il sovrano conservava per sé di molto riducesse il carattere “repubblicano” ascritto da Ricci al sistema di governo cinese. Non bastasse, tale eminenza del sovrano si mostrava anche nei confronti di due magistrature (*Choli* e *Tauli*) che rivestivano la funzione di censura sull’operato di tutte le magistrature e anche sul comportamento dell’imperatore: “sono assai rispettati e temuti: hanno il compito di avvisare il Re di tutto quanto fanno di male, non solo di tutti i magistrati, grandi e piccoli, ma anche dello stesso Re e della sua Casa reale [...]”. Per quanto fossero temuti e rispettati, questi magistrati tuttavia agivano in modo “conforme a quello che il Re comanda”. In effetti assai limitato alla fine risultava il loro potere di controllo: “questi non hanno altro potere che di parlare e piuttosto di scrivere, non potendo far niente se non gli è concesso dal Re”. Anzi, l’imperatore era pronto infatti a castigare “molto atrocemente” i censori, anche se essi, secondo Ricci, non smettevano mai di esercitare la loro censura²⁷.

Nonostante ciò, Ricci era perentorio nel sostenere che “tutto il regno si governa per letterati”, anche se poco dopo ribadiva come il sovrano fosse a capo della catena di comando, ricordando: “La grande subordinazione che un magistrato inferiore tiene al suo superiore, e quelli fuori della Corte a quelli della Corte, e tutti insieme al loro Re”²⁸.

Di più: esisteva anche per Ricci, come per Maffei, una sorta di *dark side* di questa meravigliosa macchina di governo: ovvero la nefasta in-

²⁶ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, pp. 71-72.

²⁷ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 72.

²⁸ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 79.

fluenza che gli eunuchi esercitavano sulla corte e sull'imperatore, a tal punto da infrangere l'immagine di "governo di letterati", che inizialmente aveva voluto costruire, trasformandola appunto nel governo degli eunuchi: "tutti i servitori, Consiglieri e i più amici del Re, e che si può dire governano questo regno, sono eunuchi, de' quali stanno nel Palazzo diecimila". Amaramente poi segnalava anche le crudeltà compiute dai mandarini: "E se il Capo di questo governo sta di questa guisa, facil sarà pensare quali siano i suoi membri che sono i magistrati e mandarini", pronti "a lor voglia" a fustigare a morte i sudditi e a deprenderli di ogni avere²⁹.

Sicché, l'immagine del meraviglioso governo della Cina, che con tanta cura era stata elaborata nelle pagine iniziali del capitolo VI, veniva infranta dalla crudeltà dei comportamenti dispotici, così come offuscata ne era l'ascrizione alla forma repubblicana, che più correttamente il gesuita Nicolas Trigaut (1577-1628), traducendo in latino l'opera di Ricci³⁰, aveva presentato invece come governo misto, dottrina della quale si era avvalso il pensiero politico italiano ed europeo della prima età moderna per descrivere regimi politici a organizzazione complessa, quale, appunto, quella che caratterizzava l'impero³¹.

3. *Differenti immagini del potere: governo misto o i platonici filosofare?*

Infatti, nella *De Christiana expeditione* Nicolas Trigaut ricorreva alla formula del governo misto per qualificare l'interazione di poteri che legava la monarchia e il ceto dei mandarini descritto come aristocrazia:

"Etsi dixerim initio, Monarchicam esse huius regni administrandi rationem, tamen e dictis facile constat, & e dicendis constabit, Aristocratiae

²⁹ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. IX, *Delle superstizioni et d'alcuni abusi della Cina*, pp. 116-117.

³⁰ Cfr. *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta a Societate Iesu. Ex P. Matthaei Ricij eiusdem Societatis commentarijs libri V ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In quibus Sinensis regni mores, leges atque instituta & novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & et summa fide describuntur. Auctore P. Nicolao Trigautio Belga ex eadem Societate, Augustae Vind., apud Christoph Mangium, 1615*

³¹ Tra le più recenti opere dedicate a tale importantissima formula del linguaggio politico si veda M. GAILLE-NIKODIMOV (a cura), *Le Gouvernement mixte. De l'idéal politique au monstre constitutionnel en Europe (XIIIe-XVIIe siècle)*, Saint-Étienne, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005.

non parum admisceri. Quamquam enim omne, quod a Magistratibus statuitur, necesse sit, ab Rege libellis ei datis confirmari; nihil tamen ulla in re decernit prius, quam a Magistratibus ante sollicitetur aut moneatur”³².

Soprattutto, tale *silhouette* pareva riproporre, nell’interazione tra imperatore e mandarini, la relazione tra sapere e potere volta a moderare l’arbitrio e la crudeltà esercitate dal sovrano.

La relazione tra sapere e potere, di ascendenza platonica, ritornava nell’opera di un altro gesuita dalla cultura enciclopedica, quale fu Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680)³³, in cui si assisteva alla compiuta assimilazione del ruolo dei mandarini a quello dei filosofi-re che Platone (*Respublica*, 473d) aveva posto a capo della sua città ideale. Vale osservare che l’una e l’altra formula (governo misto e filosofi-re) nella coeva tradizione del pensiero politico erano state formule per idealizzare sistemi politici vigenti o perfino per descrivere una forma di governo utopico. Al governo misto, infatti, si ispiravano sia le presentazioni del regime veneziano offerte da Gaspare Contarini (*La Republica, e i Magistrati di Vinegia [...] Nuovamente corretta e stampata*, In Vinegia, Per Domenico Giglio, 1564) e Paolo Paruta (*Della Perfettione della vita politica [...] Libri tre*, In Venetia, Appreso Domenico Nicolini, 1599) sia il progetto delineato da Donato Giannotti in *Della Republica Fiorentina [...] libri quattro* (In Venezia, Per Gio. Gabbriel Hertz, 1721). D’altro lato, i filosofi-re erano addirittura posti da Tommaso Campanella a guida della sua utopia, la *Citta del Sole*.

Anche Kircher non disconosceva affatto la struttura assolutistica del potere che, *prima facie*, dominava l’impero, tuttavia metteva chiaramente in luce la peculiare *machinery* dei saperi che la articolavano, ricordando come il consiglio del Colao, caratterizzato da una raffinatissimo sapere politico, detenesse un potere inferiore solo a quello esercitato dall’imperatore, mentre la cura delle città e degli affari pub-

³² *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta a Societate Iesu*, cit., p. 47.

³³ A. KIRCHER, *China monumentis, qui sacris qua profanis, nec non variis naturae & artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrata, auspiciis Leopoldi Primi [...]*, Amstelodami, Apud Jacobum Meurs, 1667, Pars IV, *De Politica Sinarum*, p. 166: “Rex Monarchiae totius absolutissimus & Caput & Dominus est, totumque imperium ita ab Imperatore regitur, ut nulli quid ipso inconsulto liceat”. Per una articolata ricostruzione della biografia intellettuale di questo gesuita dalla cultura enciclopedica si veda J. GODWIN, *Athanasius Kircher’s Theatre of the World. His Life, Works and the Search for Universal Knowledge*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2015².

blici fosse affidata a vari gradi di Mandarini. Sicché, per Kircher, l'impero cinese diveniva compiuta realizzazione della dottrina platonica secondo la quale sarebbe stato felice quel regno in cui i re avessero filosofato, o i filosofi avessero governato (“felix nimirum Regnum id futurum, in quo Rex philosopharetur, vel Philosophus imperitaret”).

Di più, a stabilizzare il sistema politico cinese concorreva una formidabile amministrazione della giustizia: “Summus Judicum in sceleratis puniendis rigor, & severitas: quae quidem in tanto Imperio originem suam non habent, nisi ex optimis legibus ad pacem, & tranquillitatem Regni conservandam, stabilitis”³⁴. Già Ricci aveva descritto tale risultato, quando aveva lodato le leggi emanate dall'imperatore Humwu nelle quali, appunto, “la principal mira [...] fu la pace e quiete del regno, e perpetuare lo stato ne' suoi successori”³⁵. Ma, a ben guardare, era esito che omologava la descrizione del “modello cinese” alla elaborazione, a livello dottrinale, delle logiche di governo perseguite dalla monarchia spagnola in Italia. Infatti *pax* y *quietitud* erano i valori a cui l'ideologia degli Asburgo ricorreva al fine di giustificare e conservare il proprio dominio sulla Penisola. Non solo: quel che resta importante notare è che la costruzione dell'ideologia della *paz* y *quietitud* avveniva nelle opere di letterati filo-asburgici facendo ricorso ad argomentazioni che sarebbero tornate immutate nelle pagine dei gesuiti. Si legga, ad esempio, quanto scriveva Luca Contile (1505-1574) nella sua lettera dedicatoria *All'Invittissimo e Potentissimo Filippo d'Austria Catholico Re di Spagna* premessa al suo *Ragionamento sopra la proprietà delle imprese*: “La Quietè (dico) e la tranquillità veramente in quella città si fruiscono dove la Giustizia si conserva per il publico e privato bisogno”³⁶.

Ancora un gesuita, Martino Martini (1614-1661), connotava *de stylo* la forma assoluta di governo della Cina, ricordando, inoltre,

³⁴ A. KIRCHER, *China monumentis* [...], cit., p. 166.

³⁵ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 66.

³⁶ L. CONTILE, *Ragionamento sopra la proprietà delle imprese con le particolari de gli Accademici Affidati et con le interpretazioni et croniche*, in Pavia, l'anno 1574 (colophon: “nella Inclita città di Pavia, Appresso Girolamo Bartoli”). Sulla sua biografia cfr. C. MUTINI, *Contile, Luca*, in “Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani”, vol. XXVI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1983, pp. 495-502. Sull'ideologia della *paz* y *quietitud* a cui si informava il dominio spagnolo nell'Italia dell'età della Controriforma, cfr. P. PISSAVINO, *Per un'immagine sistemica del Milanese spagnolo. Lo Stato di Milano come arena di potere*, in P. PISSAVINO, G. SIGNOROTTO (a cura), *Lombardia Borromaica Lombardia Spagnola 1554-1659*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1995, pp. 163-231.

come la separatezza dell'imperatore in nulla ostacolava il controllo oculatissimo che poteva esercitare sull'immenso territorio:

“Rex ipse vitae ac bonorum omnium absolutissimus est dominus, ipse unus omnium omnino caput, adeoque regnum Sinicum jure absolutissimum Monarchicum dicendum. Illud praeterea in hoc regimine rarum, quod licet Imperator palatio numquam, aut vix umquam exeat, tamen totius Regni statum, ac omnium praefectorum probe novit, propterea annis singulis ad singulas Provincias, visitatorem mittit, ampla supra omnes praefectos auctoritate munitum, tamquam legatum suum; hic Provinciam suam visitat, & praefectorum omnium virtutes, ac vitia accurate examinat, ut in Regiam reversus, de singulis Imperatorem scripto datis informationibus edoceat”³⁷.

La funzione di governo esercitata dai mandarini e gli esami a cui erano sottoposti non mutò, secondo Martini in altra opera intitolata *De Bello Tartarico*, neppure dopo la conquista operata dai Manciu: “stylum Politices Sinicae modumque gubernationis omnino non mutarunt [...] imo sinicis Philosophis, ut antea, regendas urbes ac Provincias concesserunt [...] examina Litteratorum, ut antea, reliquerunt”³⁸.

Tuttavia, l'immagine che del ceto dei mandarini Martini tratteggiava nella *Sinarum Imperii geographica descriptio* si differenziava da quella lasciataci da Ricci o da Kircher: infatti rileggeva l'immagine dei platonici filosofi-re nella *silhouette* dell'organizzazione propria agli ordini religiosi della Chiesa Cattolica: “plane Sinica respublica bene constituti Religiosi ordinis regimen imitatus”³⁹. Quasi che la regola degli ordini religiosi costituisse il vero modello della vita associata, l'assimilazione a essi delle prassi di governo della Cina intendeva

³⁷ M. MARTINI, *Atlas Extremae Asiae, sive Sinarum Imperii geographica descriptio*, in W. J. BLAEU, “Theatrum orbis terrarum, sive novus atlas”, Amsterdami, apud Ioannem Blaeu, 1650-1654, p. 11. L'opera è stata recentemente ripubblicata nel volume III, 2 degli *Opera omnia di Martino Martini*, editi a Trento 1998-2002, a cura di F. DEMARCHI con la direzione scientifica di G. BERTUCCIOLI. Sulla vita e sull'opera del gesuita si veda ora F. MASINI, *Martini, Martino*, in “Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani”, vol. LXXI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2008, pp. 244-246.

³⁸ M. MARTINI, *De Bello Tartarico Historia*, pubblicata in appendice all'*Atlas Extremae Asiae, sive Sinarum Imperii geographica descriptio*, in W. J. BLAEU, “Theatrum orbis terrarum, sive novus atlas”, cit., p. 15.

³⁹ M. MARTINI, *Atlas Extremae Asiae, sive Sinarum Imperii geographica descriptio*, cit., p. 11.

certamente segnalare la perfezione degli assetti del potere imperiale. Anche tale assimilazione, tuttavia, non era affatto estranea agli scrittori politici italiani del Cinque e Seicento (in particolare agli utopisti), anche se – bisogna notarlo – vi ricorreva con un significato dichiaratamente opposto e derogatorio. Infatti Lodovico Zuccolo paragonava le forme del vivere associato prescritte da Thomas More nella sua *Utopia* all’asfittica esistenza che si poteva condurre in “un grandissimo Monasterio”, e Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) ricordava nella *Quaestio quarta de Optima republica* che i critici della sua *Città del Sole* obbieltavano che “quanti vivono in una simile repubblica, vivono come monaci”⁴⁰.

4. *Botero: l’ideologia della conservazione e il governo dispotico*

Rispetto alle relazioni sulla Cina redatte dai gesuiti, va subito detto che altra era la prospettiva dottrinale perseguita da Giovanni Botero nelle sue opere. La descrizione più estesa, contenuta nelle *Relazioni Universali*, si presentava come una sorta di sistematizzazione delle numerose osservazioni che appaiono nelle opere precedenti, ovvero *Delle cause della grandezza delle città libri III* (Roma 1588) e *Della Ragion di Stato libri X* (Venezia 1589), ma proprio per questo motivo le *Relazioni Universali* presentavano una dottrina generale della conservazione dei sistemi politici⁴¹.

In *Delle Cause della grandezza delle città* Giovanni Botero aveva illustrato i fondamenti economici della potenza dell’Impero:

“Non è mai stato un regno (parlo de’ regni uniti e per così dire d’un pezzo) né più grande, né più popolato, né più ricco e dovizioso d’ogni bene, della China, né che si sia per più secoli mantenuto. Quindi nasce che le

⁴⁰ L. ZUCCOLO, *L’Aromatario, ovvero della Republica d’Utopia*, in L. ZUCCOLO, “Dialoghi”, In Venetia, Appresso Marco Ginammi, 1625, p. 260, e T. CAMPANELLA, *La Città del Sole e Questione quarta sull’ottima Republica*, a cura di G. ERNST, Milano, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1996, p. 103.

⁴¹ Sull’ideologia della conservazione sviluppata nella trattatistica cinque e seicentesca – oltre al già citato saggio di P. C. PISSAVINO, *Le forme della conservazione politica: Ragion di Stato e utopia* – si vedano gli scritti di G. BORRELLI, *Ragion di Stato e Leviantano. Conservazione e scambio alle origini della modernità politica*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1993, e ‘*Non far novità*’. *Alle radici della cultura italiana della conservazione politica*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2000.

città, nelle quali i suoi re han fatto residenza, sono delle maggiori che mai siano state al mondo; e queste sono tre: Suntien, Anchin e Panchin”⁴².

La descrizione “della fertilità del paese, della ricchezza delle miniere, dell’innumerabile moltitudine degli artigiani e dei mercanti, della comodità delle strade lastricate per tutto il regno, dell’opportunità de’ fiumi navigabili, del numero, grandezza, frequenza delle città” con l’indicazione delle ingentissime entrate pubbliche (oltre cento milioni d’oro), fu ripresa anche nella sua *Ragion di Stato*⁴³. In tale opera, tuttavia, Botero spostò dichiaratamente l’attenzione sull’analisi degli assetti politici che rendevano quella lontana “provincia” “ottimamente regolata”, proponendola anzi come paradigma di razionalità per la costruzione di una efficiente burocrazia. Consigliando al principe “due diligenze, l’una nell’elezione, l’altra nella conservazione degli ufficiali” affinché, appunto, “si provveda di ministri [di giustizia] sufficienti e da bene”, Botero lo invitava a scegliere “gente dotata, e di scienza, e di pratica necessaria”, e a tal fine suggeriva proprio l’esempio degli imperatori cinesi “che [...] danno i magistrati per ordine, cioè a novizi i più bassi, e di mano in mano i più alti, accioché con l’isperienza di quelli si facciano scala a questi”⁴⁴.

Non solo, in un momento storico in cui in Europa dominava la venalità degli uffici, Botero portava come esempio il comportamento tenuto dagli imperatori cinesi per illustrare le procedure di controllo che il principe doveva attivare per garantirsi l’integrità dei magistrati:

⁴² G. BOTERO, *Delle cause della grandezza delle città*, a cura di R. DESCENDRE, Roma, Viella, 2016, l. II, cap. XII, *Della residenza del principe*, p. 107. Sulla biografia intellettuale cfr. L. FIRPO, *Botero, Giovanni*, in “Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani”, vol. XIII, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971, pp. 352-362. Si veda altresì il volume A. E. BALDINI (a cura), *Botero e la ‘Ragion di Stato’*, Atti del convegno in memoria di Luigi Firpo (Torino 8-10 marzo 1990), Firenze, Olschki, 1992.

⁴³ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, l. VII, cap. X, *Che nel tesoreggiare non si deve procedere in infinito*, in G. BOTERO, “Della Ragion di Stato con Tre libri delle cause della grandezza delle città, due ‘Aggiunte’ e un ‘Discorso’ sulla popolazione di Roma”, a cura di L. FIRPO, Torino, Utet, 1948, p. 237. Il capolavoro boteriano è stato riproposto nel 2016 da Einaudi, a cura di P. BENEDETTINI e R. DESCENDRE, con introduzione di Romain Descendre.

⁴⁴ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, cit. l. I, cap. XVI, *De’ ministri di giustizia*, p. 80.

“il primo [modo] è di salarli e di vietar loro sotto pene severissime il ricevere presenti, il che fanno in modo singolare i re della China, perché provveggono i giudici e di viatico e di stanze, apparato, ministri, servitori e tutto ciò che appartiene alla commodità e all'onorevolezza loro, sì che ad essi non resta altro pensiero, che d'attendere con tutto lo spirito all'amministrazione della giustizia e dell'ufficio commessoli”⁴⁵.

Vale notare, però, come non tutte le istituzioni e le pratiche di dominio dispiegate nel lontano impero incontrassero in Botero quella approvazione che, invece, avrebbero ricevuto nell'opera di Ricci. Infatti, se il gesuita maceratese, ricordando i “molto belli ordini del Governo” emanati da Hongwu, ne sottolineava il “grande ingegno e giudizio” – in primo luogo per decisione di allontanare dai centri di potere tutti i famigliari del sovrano⁴⁶–, tutt'altra posizione era stata sostenuta sullo stesso tema da Botero. Proprio trattando delle sedizioni, e conseguentemente delle persone “la cui autorità e possanza può dare sospetto al prencipe”⁴⁷, accomunava le azioni degli imperatori cinesi a quelle degli altri despoti orientali e africani, sottolineando il fatto che “né li re della China, né gli imperatori dell'Etiopia col confinar i parenti, né i Turchi con l'ammazzarli [...] assicurano gli loro stati dalle sedizioni e da' sollevamenti”⁴⁸. Tuttavia, su un punto i due autori dichiaravano, pur con differenti prospettive teoriche, la loro ideologia della conservazione, operando entrambi un decisivo confronto tra la politica di potenza condotta dai dinasti europei e la scelta completamente opposta a cui si erano attenuti gli imperatori orientali⁴⁹. Infatti, elencando le principali differenze che, dal punto di vista del “buon governo”, intercorrevano tra Cina ed Europa, Ricci ricordava che i sovrani cinesi non perseguivano in alcun

⁴⁵ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, cit., l. I, cap. XVII, *Del contenere i magistrati in officio*, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁶ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 66: “perché si vede chiaro nelle storie antiche che tutte le famiglie reali si persero o per ribellioni di parenti del Re o di altri stati particolari, per stare grande parte del Governo nelle loro mani”, Hongwu stabilì “che nessun Parente del Re avesse mai nessun governo nel regno, né di Città né di soldati”.

⁴⁷ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, cit., l. II, cap. III, *Dei Grandi*, p. 160.

⁴⁸ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, cit., l. II, cap. IV, *De' prencipi di sangue*, pp. 161-162.

⁴⁹ Sulla fine dell'espansionismo della dinastia Ming – e sul conseguente ripiegamento su una strategia solo difensiva adottata dalla Cina a seguito dell'ordine di rientro impartito a tutte le flotte nel 1421 dall'imperatore Zhu Di dopo l'incendio della Città Proibita – si veda G. MENZIES, *1421. La Cina scopre l'America*, Firenze, Carocci, 2003.

modo mire espansionistiche pur possedendo un territorio ricchissimo di popolazione e di materie prime con cui costruire “artiglieria et altri strumenti di guerra, con che potrebbero facilmente soggettar al loro dominio al manco tutti questi regni vicini”. In tale prospettiva per Ricci risultava facile il paragone con le pretese egemoniche e le guerre di conquista che avevano scandito la storia europea: “[le] nostre nationi, le quali soventemente perdono i proprij regni per voler signoreggiare agli altrui, e che, per l’insatiabile voglia di allargare lo imperio, mai potero conservare il suo originale centinaia o migliaia di anni come fecero i Cinesi”⁵⁰. Già affrontato nella *Ragion di Stato*⁵¹, questo tema sarebbe ritornato ancora nelle *Relationi universali* in cui Botero illustrava la decisione presa dagli imperatori cinesi di non voler più condurre guerre offensive:

“Questa risoluzione de Chinesi, se ben non sarebbe approvata dalla prudenza moderna, si deve però stimare piena di saviezza. Perché non è sciochezza maggiore, che il perdere il suo territorio per fare acquisto dell’altrui [...]: molto maggiore opera d’un Prencipe è il conservare [...] che l’aggrandire [lo stato]”⁵².

Nonostante tale testimonianza di “saviezza”, nelle *Relationi Universali* il governo dell’imperatore era descritto come dispotico:

“Il governo della China ha del dispotico assai: conciosiacosaché non è in tutta la China altro signore, che il Re; né sanno che cosa sia Conte, Marchese, o Duca; né vi è altro a cui si paghi tributo o gabella. Il Re conferisce tutti i Magistrati, e la nobiltà istessa. Egli somministra loro il modo di mantenersi; e non fanno alcuna cosa d’importanza, della quale non ne sia avvisato. Onde egli non è solamente ubidito come un Re, ma quasi adorato come Dio”.

⁵⁰ M. RICCI, *Descrizione della Cina*, cit., cap. VI, *Del Governo della Cina*, p. 78.

⁵¹ G. BOTERO, *Della Ragion di Stato*, cit., l. VII, cap. VIII, *Dell’astenersi dalle spese impertinenti e dal dar vanamente*, p. 235: “se non si ricerca tesoro infinito per la difesa, egli è molto meno necessario per l’offesa e per l’acquisto dell’altrui [...]. Molto maggior prudenza mostrano i Chinesi, perché quantunque essi signoreggiassino tutte quasi le isole dell’Oceano Eoo e la più parte dell’India, nondimeno, vedendo che un’impresa tale li consumava infinite ricchezze, armate, genti, sostanze, si risolsero di lasciarla e di ritirarsi nel loro paese facendo una legge per la quale si proibiva di navigare in quei paesi e di far la guerra offensiva”.

⁵² G. BOTERO, *La seconda parte delle Relationi Universali [...]. Nella quale si discorre della potenza de’ maggior Prencipi, che siano al mondo: & le cagioni della grandezza, e sicurezza de’ loro stati*, In Brescia, Appresso la Compagnia Bresciana, 1599, p. 91.

In modo conseguente alla divinizzazione della figura del sovrano, la pagina delle *Relationi Universali* sottolineava il più completo asservimento dei sudditi: “e non solamente il Re, ma i Presidenti ancora, e i Giudici sono riveriti di tal sorte, che non si parla loro se non in ginocchio: il che avviliisce grandemente gli animi de’ popoli, e li rende schiavi anzi, che sudditi del lor Prencipe”⁵³.

Tuttavia Botero sembrava far della Cina un modello perfettamente consolidato grazie a quelle prassi conservative della comunità politica che era stato scopo precipuo della sua *Ragion di Stato* prescrivere:

“è finalmente regno regolato di tal maniera, che non ha altra mira che la pace, e la conservatione dello stato: e per questo vi fiorisce la giustitia, madre della quiete, la politica maestra delle leggi, e l’industria figliuola della pace: e non v’è regno né dominio antico, né moderno meglio regolato di questo. Conciosia che sono già più di due milla anni [...] che si governa con le medesime leggi, e pure noi ci meravigliamo della Repubblica di Venetia, che s’è mantenuta 1100 anni, e del regno di Francia, che s’è conservato per 1200”⁵⁴.

Bisogna osservare che proprio queste ultime due citazioni, per altro tratte dal medesimo capitolo della *Seconda parte delle Relationi Universali (Re della China. Governo)*, danno conto in modo puntuale di come la descrizione della Cina possa differentemente articolare la riflessione politica nell’Italia tra XVI e XVII secolo. Il primo brano mostra come le categorie politiche elaborate dal pensiero occidentale fossero rese funzionali a una precisa inclusione della realtà cinese nelle consuete tassonomie delle forme di governo. Il secondo brano è inteso, invece, a confermare il valore fondativo del principio di conservazione della comunità politica, riconoscendo anzi all’impero orientale un primato di durata e, conseguentemente, di perfezione, tema che era stato oggetto di lunga disputa nella letteratura politica della prima età moderna. In meno parole: l’impero cinese non era solo una realtà che poteva essere compresa, pur nella sua alterità, solo applicandovi

⁵³ G. BOTERO, *La seconda parte delle Relationi Universali [...] Nella quale si discorre della potenza de’ maggior Prencipi, che siano al mondo: & le cagioni della grandezza, e sicurezza de’ loro stati*, cit., p. 96.

⁵⁴ G. BOTERO, *La seconda parte delle Relationi Universali [...] Nella quale si discorre della potenza de’ maggior Prencipi, che siano al mondo: & le cagioni della grandezza, e sicurezza de’ loro stati*, cit., p. 97.

una strumentazione teorica che sin dall'antichità era stata adeguata all'esperienza politica e alle prospettive ideologiche europee. Con ogni evidenza, nella scrittura di Botero la Cina diventava la conferma storica e anzi la realizzazione perfetta del modello politico che la tradizione della dottrina della ragion di stato intendeva prescrivere.

5. *La Cina in Lodovico Zuccolo: tra “foggia sì esquisita di governo” e modello per utopia*

Se nelle opere di Botero la Cina rappresentava un modello delle pratiche di conservazione dello stato, in Lodovico Zuccolo divenne esempio di come alcuni caratteri del suo sistema sociale e politico potessero essere assunti come elementi costitutivi della costruzione utopica. Per Zuccolo la perfezione di una comunità politica non era costruita solo sull'uso di tecniche di prudenza, che potevano dar corso a prassi repressive, ma doveva fondarsi anche su forme di giustizia premiale. Infatti, di fronte alla corruzione presente nel suo tempo, Zuccolo sosteneva l'importanza dell'onore e della vergogna per mantenere il popolo in pace e in quiete:

“Né perché gli animi sì infermi come hora si trovano, non si possono medicare se non col castigo, resta però, quando si attendesse da dovero a levare via le cagioni delle infermità, non si potessero ridurre a sì buona composizione, che poco più facesse di mestiero la pena, ma più riuscissero opportuni l'Honore e la vergogna”.

A darne esempio, lo Zuccolo richiamava – accanto ai grandi modelli politici e civili dell'antichità classica: Sparta e Roma – anche la Cina. L'impero orientale si reggeva “immenso, e potentissimo già per lo spazio di due migliaia d'anni con tanta giustitia, & equità, che premio, pena, Honore, vergogna sono con sì ben intesa proportione distribuiti, che né merito, né demerito si possono dare senza giusto compenso di bene, o di male: foggia sì esquisita di governo, che forse non fu mai veduta altrove”⁵⁵. La Cina diveniva così un approdo di quella ricerca sulle “ragioni del governo” che costituirono l'oggetto pressoché

⁵⁵ L. ZUCCOLO, *Discorso dell'Honore*, in L. ZUCCOLO, *Discorsi dell'Honore, della Gloria, della Riputazione, del Buon Concetto*, In Venetia, Presso Marco Ginami, 1623, pp. 155-156.

costante della sua indagine⁵⁶, in cui all'analisi empirica dei fenomeni politici seguiva la riflessione sull'ottima forma di governo, delineata anche nelle sua utopia: *La Repubblica d'Evandria*. Il fatto che Zuccolo avesse descritto, per primo nel dottrinarismo italiano, la "convenienza" che doveva intercorrere tra ragion di stato e ogni specifica forma di governo apriva la sua analisi a un relativismo⁵⁷ che conseguentemente riduceva l'alterità che caratterizzava la Cina, avanzando così le specifiche ragioni che giustificavano l'assunzione di suoi peculiari assetti sociali a segmenti costitutivi di un ordine politico descritto come perfetto. Infatti, nella *Repubblica d'Evandria* la Cina incarnava alcune delle condizioni di esemplarità utopica. In *Evandria* le arti "passano, come ereditarie, da padre a figliuolo. Talché le arti si riducono, come pure scrivono de' Cinesi e si legge altresì degli antichi Egizi, a esquisite finezza". Inoltre, si possono leggere altri passi, che facevano riferimento allo statuto di immodificabile perfezione politica proprio del genere utopico. Ad esempio, una glossa a margine avvisava che gli *Evandri* imitavano i cinesi nel rifiutare ogni aumento territoriale: "Ne manco i cinesi vogliono fare nuovi acquisti"⁵⁸. In questo modo, alcuni caratteri che nei memoriali dei gesuiti e dei viaggiatori descrivevano il modello sociale e politico cinese, erano adattati da Zuccolo ad architettura compositiva della sua repubblica ideale. Così, anche nella sua opera veniva meno quella radicale polarizzazione tra realtà politiche europee e modi di governo praticati in Cina.

⁵⁶ Che tale tema fosse il centro della speculazione di Zuccolo trova conferma nell'avviso *L'Autore a chi legge* premesso alla seconda edizione delle sue *Considerazioni politiche, e morali sopra cento oracoli d'illustri personaggi antichi*, che il frontespizio recita come *Rivedute, e corrette, et aggiuntavi una breve risposta alle Oppositioni dell'Accademico Pellegrino*. In Venetia, Appresso Marco Ginami, 1623. Sull'opera di Zuccolo si veda ora P. C. PISSAVINO, *Le ragioni della Repubblica. La "Città felice" di Lodovico Zuccolo*, Centro Sammarinese di Studi Storici, Università degli Studi della Repubblica di San Marino, San Marino, Aiop, 2007.

⁵⁷ L. ZUCCOLO, *Considerazioni politiche, e morali sopra cento oracoli d'illustri personaggi antichi*, cit., Oracolo XI, *Della Ragion di Stato*, pp. 54-73: per Zuccolo, infatti, la "ragion di stato tutta si rivolge intorno al conoscere que' mezzi e avvalersene, i quali siano opportuni per ordinare o per conservare qualsivoglia costituzione di repubblica, qualunque ella si sia", la citazione è però tratta dall'edizione dell'oracolo apparsa in *Politici e moralisti del Seicento. Strada-Zuccolo-Settala-Acetto-Brignole Sale-Malvezzi*, a cura di B. CROCE e S. CARAMELLA, Bari, Laterza, 1930, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁸ L. ZUCCOLO, *Il Porto, ovvero Della Repubblica d'Evandria*, in L. ZUCCOLO, "Dialoghi", In Venetia, Appresso Marco Ginammi, 1625, p. 219, p.228.

6. *L'ideologia dell'ordine: il governo della legge e la meccanica del comando*

Il gesuita Daniello Bartoli (1608-1685) ripropose le descrizioni dell'autocrazia esercitata dal sovrano cinese in una riflessione su quel regime politico che in parte acquisiva nuove prospettive, grazie agli studi scientifici di cui era cultore non saltuario⁵⁹, in parte, ancora, si avvaleva di altri fondamentali concetti politici che andavano oltre alla mera ideologia della conservazione che le scritture utopiche e sulla ragion di stato avevano mostrato.

Pur riconoscendo che il “Re della Cina” era un “principe d'assolutissimo imperio”⁶⁰, il gesuita esaltava il “maraviglioso provvedimento” che poneva freni all'arbitrio regio. Infatti, consapevoli che il regime monarchico potesse sempre degenerare in tirannide, “gli antichi savi della Cina” stabilirono che il re dovesse attenersi scrupolosamente a quanto gli era indicato dai consiglieri. Tale risultato era stato ottenuto “obbligando il Re a non volere altro che il giusto, e 'l retto, e retissimi sono, né possono essere altramente i suoi ministri [...], onde per conseguente egli de' volere ciò che essi consigliano”⁶¹. Attraverso tale prassi, avvertiva Bartoli, non avveniva però né cessione né trasferimento di sovranità, e neppure si stabiliva quella forma mista di governo che pure era parsa a Ricci e a Trigaut costituire la profonda realtà della politica cinese. Che, poi, una efficiente burocrazia fortemente gerarchizzata fosse condizione “per l'eccellenza del [...] Governo” della Cina era riflessione che venne puntualmente testimoniata anche da Giovan Francesco Gemelli Careri (1651-1725) nel suo *Giro del Mondo*. Il Careri ricordava infatti che “Fra le leggi che son quivi tenute, quella de' Letterati è la prima, e la più antica; il suo fin principale è il buon governo del Reame”. Infatti Careri descriveva

⁵⁹ Sugli interessi scientifici coltivati da Bartoli e, in generale, sulla sua attività letteraria si veda A. ASOR-ROSA, *Bartoli, Daniello*, in “Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani”, vol. VI, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1964, pp. 563-571.

⁶⁰ D. BARTOLI, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesù. La Cina terza parte dell'Asia*, In Roma, nella stamperia del Varese, 1663, p. 98.

⁶¹ D. BARTOLI, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesù. La Cina terza parte dell'Asia*, cit., p. 98. “Ma nondimeno, perciocché si doveva eleggere l'ottimo della Monarchia, con tale avvedimento, che non avesse a temersene il pessimo della Tirannia, dove avvenisse, che il Re, o per potenza assoluta da ogni timore, o per giovanile baldanza, dispreziati, o non attesi i buoni consigli, maneggiasse il governo a capriccio di libertà, non a regole di dovere, maraviglioso è quel provvedimento che si trovò da quegli antichi savi, a far che i consigli senza punto uscir de' loro termini si eseguiscono come fosser comandi”.

puntualmente l'organizzazione burocratica dei mandarini che "in tutto l'impero si distinguono in nove ordini: ed ogni ordine è diviso in nove gradi", soffermandosi a sottolinearne la forte gerarchizzazione: "La conoscenza, la distinzione, e la subordinazione di questi ordini è sì perfetta, la sottomissione e venerazione degli ultimi verso i primi, e l'autorità di quelli sopra questi è sì grande, ed in fine la potenza sovrana del Re sovra gli uni, e gli altri è sì assoluta, che non è comparabile al nostro governo, o che sia Secolare, o Ecclesiastico"⁶².

In verità, ancora prima di Careri, Bartoli aveva posto l'accento sul governo delle leggi come norma indefettibile per garantire la perfetta realizzazione dell'ordine politico: "La rettitudine, così dei Ministri nel consigliare, come del Re nello statuire, tutta è presa dalla norma inflessibile delle leggi". Quindi, a impedire le degenerazioni in cui poteva incorrere, il monarca doveva continuamente adeguare la propria volontà al rispetto della legge: "Il Re, col veramente poter tutto, e fare il tutto egli solo [...] non però si ardirà a voler fare nessuna cosa diversamente da quello che le leggi dispongono, e l'uso antico prescrive"⁶³. La solitudine e la separatezza del monarca trovava, insomma, conforto nelle leggi e nel consiglio dei savi, ma soprattutto nel principio d'ordine che pareva introdurre una visione meccanicistica della politica. Bartoli chiedendosi, infatti, come fosse possibile che "un Re, che nulla vede, tutto risappia, e tutto operi", ne riportava la ragione a "l'Ordine", del quale, appunto, sono custodi i "Letterati". Infatti, "il pubblico reggimento non si commette che alla sola classe de' Letterati", e la loro funzione conseguentemente diveniva "ordinare alla perfezione, al mantenimento, alla pratica del buon governo ciò che studiano, e ciò che insegnano; né in altro maggiormente faticano, che nella conservazione dell'Ordine". Il risultato di tale impegno era stata la costruzione di "una sempre durevole macchina di governo, che muovendo le cose di un sì vasto imperio, nondimeno riesce al maneggiarla sì facile, che più non si farebbe una ben regolata famiglia". Non a caso "Tutto è così

⁶² G. F. GEMELLI CARERI, *Giro del Mondo. Parte quarta contenente le cose più ragguardevoli vedute nella Cina*, In Napoli, Nella Stamperia di Giuseppe Roselli, 1700. Notizie su questo funzionario togato dell'amministrazione del Vice Regno di Napoli, che a causa delle persecuzioni subite da un potente personaggio, compì lunghissime peregrinazioni in Europa e nel mondo si veda P. DORIA, *Gemelli Careri, Giovanni Francesco*, in "Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani", vol. LIII, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000, pp. 42-45.

⁶³ D. BARTOLI, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesù. La Cina terza parte dell'Asia*, cit., p. 98.

ben compartito per ordine, e concatenato per soggettione e dipendenza de' gradi l'un superiore all'altro, che nol può esser meglio qualunque macchina d'ingegnere, composta di molte ruote, che comunichino l'un l'altra il moto"⁶⁴. Resta ovvio che lo schema meccanicistico di questa monarchia amministrativa incarnava efficienza ed efficacia nell'azione di governo, ammodernando l'immagine tutta platonica che Matteo Ricci, Athanasius Kircher e Martino Martini avevano elaborato per descrivere il ruolo che i letterati-filosofi ricoprivano nel sistema politico cinese. Bartoli, dunque, presentava una innovativa immagine della politica, che aggiornava le tecniche di conservazione prescritte dalla ragion di stato nell'ideologia dell'ordine meccanicistico del mondo, propria della cultura europea a fine secolo XVII.

Abstract - The present study aims at analyzing the relationship between the image of the Chinese Empire in the writings of travellers and Jesuits and the main themes (Reason of State, Utopianism, Mixed Constitution) of the Italian political thought during the XVIth and XVIIth centuries. The writings of travellers and Jesuits presented a complex view of the Empire, which impacts in various ways the spread of the Chinese myth in the political treatises of the Counter-Reformation era. This complexity is evident in the description the relations provide of the characteristics of sovereignty and the behavior of the emperor. From the very beginning of *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* is presented a complex image of the Chinese government: along with the absolutist de-

lineation of the imperial power proposed by Ricci, there are conflicting images that, regarding either a distant past or current government practice, recognized other forms: a feudal style of monarchy, a sort of mixed constitution, or a form of despotic government. Ricci and other Jesuits, as Martino Martini and Athanasius Kircher, presented the Mandarins as a sort of Kings-Philosophers of Plato's *Republic*. Following the works composed by Jesuits, some authors of Reason of State and utopists (Giovanni Botero and Lodovico Zuccolo) pointed out that the perfection of the Chinese political and social institutions could really preserve the Empire from the corruption, an Empire that had to be considered a paradigm of a well ordered state, as another Jesuit, Daniello Bartoli, wrote in his book on China.

⁶⁴ D. BARTOLI, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesù. La Cina terza parte dell'Asia*, cit., pp. 87-88.

IS THERE A SYKES-PICOT SYNDROME IN THE MIDDLE EAST?

by Francesco Mazzucotelli

Introduction

In a satirical segment aired on *The Daily Show*, host Jon Stewart engages in a conversation with his guest Sir Archibald Mapsalot III, a fictitious British colonial officer interpreted by British-born comedian John Oliver. Arrogant, boorish, and patronizing, Sir Archibald Mapsalot III is portrayed as the embodiment of a “mindless imperialism” that draws “arbitrary lines” across the “ridiculous tribal allegiances” of the native populations in order to enhance British colonial interests. In an innuendo of politically incorrect comedy, he draws a “nice straight line” on the map because “when borders get squiggly, people get squiggly”, angrily dismissing the criticism of his host that he is “forming new countries with no attention paid to ethnic or religious tensions”. This post-WWI arrangement is defined as “the original sin” that later pushed the region into utter chaos¹. As *The Daily Show* habitually blurs the line between satire and political commentary, a few considerations on its representation of the history and geography of the Middle East do not appear out of place. After all, the sketch with Sir Archibald Mapsalot III draws heavily upon arguments that have been variously articulated in political circles and mainstream media during the past decade, and particularly after the wave of uprisings in 2011 subsided into civil strife or a comeback of authoritarian regimes in many territories of the region.

University of Pavia.

¹ *Sir Archibald Mapsalot III-The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, available at: <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/kovgs5/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-sir-archibald-mapsalot-iii>.

In these analyses, regional instability is framed as the “culmination of tensions and contradictions that had been simmering” since the end of World War I and the demise of the Ottoman Empire, its lands being carved up as spoils of war among the victorious Allied Powers. Post-war arrangements, as defined in the Paris Peace Conference and the San Remo Conference, appear as external interventions that disrupted existing balances and imposed artificial new orders, based on “fractious territories” and rump states. The perspective is largely primordialist, with “extraordinarily complex tapestries of tribes and subtribes and clans” and “ancient social orders” assumed to constitute the primary source of identity, allegiance, and political legitimacy². Sectarianism is framed as the major cause of the fragility of post-Ottoman states in the Middle East, but is read inconsistently as both the persistence of primitive societal configurations (rather than as a by-product of Ottoman modernization projects) and the result of colonial “divide-and-conquer” policies that relied on the empowerment of local minorities against a disenfranchised majority. This representation of the ethnic and sectarian landscape of the region is largely incongruous with a scholarly debate that has analyzed complex, context-related patterns of ethnicization of communal identities since the nineteenth century³, the rise of nationalisms in the context of the disaggregation of the Ottoman Empire⁴, the spread of ideologies based on collective mobilization⁵, the continuous construction and reconstruction of na-

² S. ANDERSON, *Fractured Lands: How The Arab World Came Apart*, in “The New York Times Magazine”, 11 August 2016, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/11/magazine/isis-middle-east-arab-spring-fractured-lands.html>.

³ H. EISSENSTAT, *Modernization, Imperial Nationalism, and the Ethnicization of Confessional Identity in the Late Ottoman Empire*, in S. BERGER, A. MILLER (eds.), “Nationalizing Empires”, Budapest, Central University Press, 2015, pp. 429-460.

⁴ M. H. YAVUZ, *Warfare and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst of Homogenization*, in M. H. YAVUZ, I. BLUMI (eds.), “War and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, and Their Sociopolitical Implications”, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2013, pp. 31-84.

⁵ R. H. ÖZTAN, *Nationalism in Function: “Rebellions” in the Ottoman Empire and Narratives in Its Absence*, in M. H. YAVUZ, F. AHMAD (eds.), “War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State”, Salt Lake City, The University of Utah Press, 2016, pp. 161-202. P. DORN SEZGIN, *Greeks, Jews, and Armenians: A Comparative Analysis of Non-Muslim Communities and Nascent Nationalisms in the Late Ottoman Empire through World War I*, in M. H. YAVUZ, F. AHMAD (eds.), “War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State”, cit., pp. 301-329.

tional identities dictated by contingent circumstances⁶ and the transformative nature of conflicts⁷. While the general discourse on the Middle East appears to be permeated with primordialist tropes, a great part of the academic research instead focusses on the contextual, relational nature of identities, and on the agency of groups and communities.

However, in spite of these scholarly efforts to uncover a dense fabric of alignments and recompositions, the image of the region on the brink of World War I is still described in ahistorical terms, and the map signed by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot on 16 May 1916 is often chastised as “the root cause of much that has happened ever since”. The Sykes-Picot Agreement is criticized for ignoring local identities and political loyalties, determining borders “with a ruler”, and creating a colonial carve-up that proved vulnerable. In this perspective, civil wars in Iraq and Syria are interpreted as little more than the final collapse of “the veneer of statehood” arbitrarily imposed from above in the wake of World War I, and as the final exposure of the “emptiness” underneath the ill-fated attempts of state-building and nation-building in the region⁸.

Just as in *The Daily Show* segment, the tendency to draw straight lines is often emphasized, as well as the fact that “the newly created borders did not correspond to the actual sectarian, tribal, or ethnic distinctions on the ground”. In some essays, the underlying premise is the deeply problematic and historically untenable claim that “the different sects effectively lived separately from each other”⁹, and therefore that “natural enemies”¹⁰ were forced to lived together under the same politics. Again, these views differ from the ongoing scholarly research on processes of communal polarization¹¹, the interaction between mi-

⁶ F. KENTEL, *Reconstructions nationalistes face à la disparition des frontières*, “Revista CEDOB d’Afers Internacionals”, No 82-83, 2008, pp. 325-355.

⁷ E. GINIO, “*Landscapes of Modernity and Order*”: *War and Propaganda in Ottoman Writing during World War I*, in M. H. YAVUZ, F. AHMAD (eds.), “War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State”, cit., pp. 282-298.

⁸ R. WRIGHT, *How the Curse of Sykes-Picot Still Haunts the Middle East*, in “The Yorker”, 30 April 2016, available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-the-curse-of-sykes-picot-still-haunts-the-middle-east>.

⁹ T. OSMAN, *Why Borders Lines Drawn With a Ruler in WWI Still Rock the Middle East*, “BBC”, 14 December 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25299553>.

¹⁰ *Sir Archibald Mapsalot III-The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, cit..

¹¹ F. MÜGE GÖÇEK, *Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society*, in “Poetics Today”, Vol. 14, No 3, 1993, pp. 507-538.

norities and majorities in the Ottoman Middle East¹², and the scope of “deep” imagery (connected with life, death, the sacred, and the sexual) in the imagination of national communities¹³. Also, the application of a postcolonial approach to late Ottoman history further problematize processes of inequality, hegemony, and power relations in connection to Ottoman modernity, the imperial administration and its local subjects, and their relations to European interventionism¹⁴.

In this frame, was the Sykes-Picot Agreement really a defining moment for later developments in the region, and did it seal the destiny of the populations living there? Or is there a risk of overstating the importance of a deal that, in fact, has been “moved to the realm of cliché”? Did it betray the promises to the Arab tribal lords that they would be rewarded with an independent Arab polity for their rebellion against the Ottoman Empire during World War I¹⁵, or was the 1916 agreement simply one step in a longer process of reconfiguration of international relations and local politics?

In this article, I argue that three main arguments are being raised to reconsider or downplay the scope of the deal. The misnomer argument explains how the final borders in the post-Ottoman Middle East were actually defined not in 1916, but at later times and in different venues, with substantial differences from what had originally been drawn on map by two rather secondary diplomats¹⁶. The border regime arguments claims that boundaries remained porous well into World War II and until the formation of centralized authoritarian states that asserted their control over land and peoples¹⁷. The artificial state argument maintains that the allegedly unnatural character of the states in the

¹² A. MANGO, *Minorities and Majorities*, in “Middle Eastern Studies”, Vol. 23, No:4, 1987, pp. 512-528.

¹³ A. M. BANTI, *Deep Images in Nineteenth-Century Nationalist Narratives*, in “Historein”, No 8, 2008, pp. 54-62.

¹⁴ F. MÜGE GÖÇEK, *Postcoloniality, the Ottoman Past, and the Middle East Present*, in “International Journal of Middle East Studies”, Vol, 44, No 3, 2012, pp. 549-563.

¹⁵ H. MORRIS, *Sykes-Picot: The Centenary of a Deal That Did Not Shape the Middle East*, “Time”, 13 May 2016, available at: <http://time.com/4327377/sykes-picot-the-centenary-of-a-deal-that-did-not-shape-the-middle-east/>.

¹⁶ F. G. GAUSE III, *Is This the End of Sykes-Picot?*, in “The Washington Post”, 20 May 2014, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/20/is-this-the-end-of-sykes-picot/>.

¹⁷ N. DANFORTH, *Nomads, No Problem: Envisioning Borders in the Post-Ottoman Middle East*, in “Afternoon Map”, 10 January 2017, available at: <http://www.midafternoonmap.com/2017/01/the-myth-of-myth-of-borders.html>.

Middle East is largely a colonial narrative that was deployed to justify a policy of Western interventionism in the area¹⁸.

While these remarks are largely correct, I argue that the underlying, rarely expressed question (whether the borders drawn by Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot were “wrong”, and actually need to be “corrected” to ensure regional stability in the Middle East)¹⁹ is largely a self-serving intellectual exercise that evades the symbolical relevance of the agreement as a marker of political legitimacy (or lack thereof), and therefore largely ignores the ongoing debate on the changing nature of territoriality and bordering practices.

Drawing Borders on the Sand?

In June 2014, al-Hayat Media Center, the English-language media outlet of the self-styled Islamic State (also known as Daesh or ISIL), released video footage in which a foreign fighter is seen touring the former border between Iraq and Syria, entering abandoned garrisons and outposts, and blowing up a government building on a mound that previously marked the international border. The fighter brags about the destruction of the “so-called border”, calls for *jihād* in accordance with the communication style and narrative of the group, and celebrates the demise of the boundaries created by the Sykes-Picot Agreement²⁰.

Although a few observers captured the symbolical relevance of the video, noting how it attacked not just the actual frontiers, but the whole colonial construction of institutions and insignia²¹, some commentators engaged in futile attempts to disprove the arguments of Daesh through pedantic corrections on local history. While it is true that the border

¹⁸ S. PURSLEY, “*Lines Drawn on an Empty Map*”: *Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State*, in “Jadaliyya”, 2 June 2015, available at: http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/21759/lines-drawn-on-an-empty-map_iraq%E2%80%99s-borders-and-the.

¹⁹ R. FALK, *A New World Order? ISIS and the Sykes-Picot Backlash*, in “Foreign Policy Journal”, 26 December 2015, available at: <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2015/12/26/a-new-world-order-isis-and-the-sykes-picot-backlash/>; J. BARR, *Sykes-Picot is Not to Blame for Middle East’s Problems*, in “Al Jazeera”, 16 May 2016, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/05/sykes-picot-blame-middle-east-problems160516083606123.html>.

²⁰ *The End of Sykes-Picot*, available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy2gHEonz_8.

²¹ R. FISK, *ISIS: In a borderless world, the days when we could fight foreign wars and be safe at home may be long gone*, in “The Independent”, 19 November 2015, available at:

shown in the video was defined at the San Remo Conference in April 1920 and formalized a few months later through the Treaty of Sèvres²², these arguments completely miss the point. In the eyes of Daesh militants, the Sykes-Picot Agreement is not relevant *per se*, but as a signifier of *taghūt* (idolatry, but also connected to the notion of tyranny), whose destruction is a necessary step on the way to the restoration of “the promised caliphate” (*al-khilāfa al-maw‘awda*). By defiling national symbols as signs of *kufṛ* (unbelief) and *shirk* (polytheism), the video shared by Daesh pits the Westphalian order (imposed from outside) against the idea of a genuine, native, non-national *umma* (community of believers)²³.

In fact, it is difficult to dispute that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was meant to define spheres of influence in the Ottoman provinces of the Middle East, and to promote British and French interests, concessions, rights of navigation or development²⁴. Hastily negotiated between November 1915 and May 1916, the deal was an attempt to reconcile the British strategic interest in securing a land connection between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea with the French colonial project in the Levant. Ultimately, the final arrangement had the British side conceding more than anticipated:

“[T]he acceptance of the whole project, as it now stands, will involve the abdication of considerable British interests, but, since His Majesty’s Government recognises the advantage to the general cause of the Allies entailed in producing a more favourable internal political situation in Turkey, they are ready to accept the arrangement now arrived at”²⁵.

The text of the agreement was conceived in a way that safeguarded the strategic interests of both countries, but was vague enough to allow

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-in-a-borderless-world-the-days-when-wecould-fight-foreign-wars-and-be-safe-at-home-may-be-long-a6741146.html>.

²² J. MILLER, *Why Islamic State Militants Care So Much About Sykes-Picot*, “Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty”, 16 May 2016, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/a/why-islamic-state-cares-so-much-about-sykes-picot/27738467.html>.

²³ *The End of Sykes-Picot*, cit..

²⁴ See the letter sent by Sir Edward Grey to Paul Cambon on 15 May 1916, available at: https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sykes-Picot_Agreement.

²⁵ See the letter sent by Sir Edward Grey to Paul Cambon on 16 May 1916, available at: https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Sykes-Picot_Agreement.

the postponement of all contentious issues and of all the trivial details of its practical implementation. The map annexed to a letter sent by Sir Edward Grey to Paul Cambon on 15 May 1916 loosely outlined the areas placed under direct British or French control, and areas meant to be ruled by a vaguely defined Arab polity under indirect British or French control:

“It is accordingly understood between the French and British governments:

That France and Great Britain are prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab State or a confederation of Arab States [in the areas] (a) and (b) marked on the annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of enterprise and local loans. That in area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall alone supply advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

That in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states. [...]

The negotiations with the Arabs as to the boundaries of the Arab states shall be continued through the same channel as heretofore on behalf of the two powers”²⁶.

It is however disputable that Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot were fixated on the exact definition of new borderlines. A significant portion of the text of the agreement is dedicated to the status of major ports and railroads, and seems to highlight that the primary concern of their respective governments was to ensure the free flow of goods, to grant the possibility of future economic exploitation in the region, and to prevent any third party from becoming a possible competitor in local markets. The insistence on keeping the existing customs tariff regime and excluding future internal barriers also indicates that the signatories limited their attention to the promotion of economic interests rather than to a precise territorial rearrangement²⁷.

²⁶ *The Sykes-Picot Agreement: 1916*, available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp. See Map 1 and Map 2, p. 43.

²⁷ *The Sykes-Picot Agreement: 1916*, cit..

The minutes of a meeting held in the residence of French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau on 20 March 1919 show how the British and French interpretations of the territorial implications of the 1916 agreement were radically divergent. Stephen Pichon, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, elaborated on the historical connections between France and Syria, and French involvement in the area. He elaborated on geographical features in order to plea for the indivisibility of the whole Syrian region, and to argue that France should become its mandatory power under the aegis of the League of Nations. Through an intense exchange, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George retorted that France had committed itself to the recognition of an Arab state in the Syrian interior, including the cities of Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, and called for the inclusion of the Mosul area in the British zone of influence. Pichon claimed that France could not be bound by any provision of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence, “the very existence of which was unknown to her at the time when the 1916 agreement was signed”²⁸. Italy, which participated to the meeting of 20 March 1919, had already expressed its own claims to get “a just share of the Mediterranean region” in the Ottoman *vilayets* of Konya and Aydin through the Treaty of London (26 April 1915) and the Agreement of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne (26 April 1917)²⁹. US President Woodrow Wilson, who “wanted to establish his presence” in the Paris Conference and demanded recognition “as a matter of right and not of courtesy”, emphasized the principle of “the consent of the governed”. British general Edmund Allenby briefed him that successive visits by Mark Sykes, François Georges-Picot, and other liaison officers to Beirut, Aleppo, and Damascus produced controversial and inconsistent results³⁰.

On 10 June 1919, the United States Government launched an official investigation concerning the prevalent opinions of the public in non-Turkish speaking areas of the former Ottoman Empire that, after the Armistice of Mudros (30 October 1918)³¹, had been placed under the joint British-French Occupied Enemy Territory Admin-

²⁸ *The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919*, United States Department of State, available at: <http://goo.gl/S6pT6D>.

²⁹ *The Treaty of London (1915)*, available at: [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_\(1915\)](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_(1915)).

³⁰ *The Council of Four: Minutes of Meetings March 20 to May 24, 1919*, cit..

³¹ *The Armistice Convention with Turkey*, available at: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/armistice_turk_eng.pdf.

istration. Henry Churchill King and Charles Richard Crane toured the area for forty-two days, meeting delegations of mayors, village chiefs, landlords, tribal elders, urban notables, tradesmen, commoners, clerics, and various associations across the entire ethnic and confessional spectrum. The King-Crane Commission received thousands of petitions that revealed a very wide range of recommendations and a vibrant debate in local environments³². Eventually, the Commission submitted a report on 28 August 1919, calling for the recognition of the unity of geographical region of greater Syria (including Palestine), “in accordance with the earnest petition of the great majority of the people”, under one Mandatory power. The report suggested the institution of “a constitutional monarchy along democratic lines” under the reign of Faysal, the third son of Hussein al-Hashimi, *shārif* of Mecca. King and Crane recommended a “serious modification of the extreme Zionist program for Palestine of unlimited immigration of Jews, looking finally to making Palestine distinctly a Jewish State” and saw “no reason why Palestine could not be included in a united Syrian State” on the basis of broad decentralization principles and large measures of local autonomy that could had also quenched the separatist projects of most Christian circles in Mount Lebanon³³.

These recommendations were of course discarded at the Conference of London (12-24 February 1920) and at the San Remo Conference (19-26 April 1920), where the representatives of the United Kingdom, France, and Italy discussed the partition of former Ottoman territories and their reconfiguration according to article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, attached as a preamble to the Treaty of Versailles (signed on 28 June 1919). The text stipulated that the existence of such lands “as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone”³⁴. The delegations in San Remo agreed on the establishment of a British Mandate for Palestine³⁵ and a French Mandate in Syria, but the boundaries were still left un-

³² T. CHALABI, *The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation-State, 1918-1943*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 68, pp. 71-84.

³³ *The King Crane Commission Report, August 28, 1919*, available at: http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_King-Crane_Report.

³⁴ *Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles)*, available at: <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf>.

³⁵ *The British Mandate for Palestine, San Remo Conference, April 24, 1920*, available at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/britman.htm>.

specified and slated for later agreements. Not even the Treaty of Sèvres (signed on 10 August 1920) specified the internal borders between the new Mandates, stipulating that the determination of these frontiers should “be made by the Principal Allied Powers”, and “submitted to the Council of the League of Nations for approval”³⁶.

In sum, there is validity in the argument that the Sykes-Picot Agreement alone cannot be held responsible for the transformation of the political geography of the Middle East after the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The process of drawing took several years with the concurrent contribution of external and internal actors, and could not be called closed as late as September 1932, when a commission was entrusted by the Council of the League of Nations to suggest the demarcation of the frontier in Northern Mesopotamia between Iraq, Syria, and Turkey³⁷. Reductionist, deterministic readings of the 1916 agreement also ignore the decades-long debate on the scope and content of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence³⁸, the 1917 Balfour Declaration³⁹, and the French-sponsored formation of Greater Lebanon in 1920⁴⁰.

What the misnomer argument misses is the appreciation that the relevance of the Sykes-Picot Agreement is not related to the practical definition of territorial boundaries, but rather to its role as magnifier and catalyst of internal processes of social and political transformation. The disclosure of the 1916 deal set in motion very complex patterns of political recompositions, characterized simultaneously by transitions and continuity⁴¹. These recomposition which shattered existing alliances and balances of power and created new ones in the context of the process of capital accumulation and the rise of a domes-

³⁶ *The Treaty of Peace Between The Allied and Associated Powers and Turkey, Signed at Sèvres, August 10, 1920*, available at: https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Section_I_Articles_1_-_260.

³⁷ *Report of the Commission Entrusted by the Council with the Study of the Frontier Between Syria and Iraq*, available at: http://biblio-archiv.unog.ch/Dateien/CouncilMSD/C-578-M-285-1932-VI_EN.pdf.

³⁸ A. TOYNBEE, I. FRIEDMAN, *The McMahon-Hussein Correspondence: Comments and a Reply*, in “Journal of Contemporary History”, Vol. 5, No 4, 1970, pp. 185-201.

³⁹ W. M. MATHEW, *War-Time Contingency and the Balfour Declaration of 1917: An Improbable Regression*, in “Journal of Palestine Studies”, Vol. 40, No 2, 2011, pp. 26-42.

⁴⁰ M. ZAMIR, *Faisal and the Lebanese Question, 1918 -20*, in “Middle Eastern Studies”, Vol. 27, No 3, 1991, pp. 404-426.

⁴¹ F. MAZZUCOTELLI, *From Ottoman Lebanon to the French Mandate: The End of the “Long Peace”?*, in M. H. YAVUZ, F. AHMAD (eds.), “War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State”, cit., pp. 1134-1161.

tic bourgeoisie⁴². A very extensive literature on economic and social transformations, and on processes of mass politicization problematizes all accounts of artificiality and focusses instead on the agency, resilience, and responsivity of local actors. This agency should be understood in relationship to the Western agency of line-drawing: Ottoman Palestine or Mesopotamia were not empty boxes of sand, and the new Mandatory states were created “through the resolution of competing claims to territory and sovereignty by deployments of power, including acts of insurgency”⁴³.

Borders as Sites of Power and Legitimacy

Empirical evidence suggests the porousness of borders between Mandatory Palestine and Lebanon, or Syria and Mandatory Iraq before 1948. This is invoked to downsize the magnitude of the Sykes-Picot Agreement and its later development. Yet, the apparent softness of these new boundaries should be tempered by the awareness that discourses and practices of bordering are also inextricably linked to discourses and practices of ordering and othering, or “making others through the territorial fixing of order”⁴⁴. Border regimes were soft in the initial years of the Mandates period because the ordering process was still rudimentary, but as the practices of state-building and nation-building gradually became more entrenched in local constellations of power, the paradigm of the “fragile state” was replaced by centralized, increasingly militarized governments⁴⁵. The fortification and the rigidity of borders increasingly appeared as an ontological

⁴² H. BATATU, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'ithists and Free Officers*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979; H. BATATU, *Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling, Military Group and the Causes for Its Dominance*, in “Middle East Journal”, Vol. 35, No 3, 1981, pp. 331-344; M. JOHNSON, *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State, 1840-1985*, London and Atlantic Highlands, Ithaca Press, 1986; F. TRABOULSI, *Social Class and Political Power in Lebanon*, Beirut, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Middle East, 2014, pp. 15-24.

⁴³ S. PURSLEY, “*Lines Drawn on an Empty Map*”: *Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State*, cit..

⁴⁴ H. VAN HOUTUM, T. VAN NAERSEN, *Bordering, Ordering and Othering*, in “Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie”, Vol. 93, No 2, 2002, pp. 125-136.

⁴⁵ R. ZIADEH, *Power and Policy in Syria: Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations and Democracy in the Modern Middle East*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2011, pp. 5-12.

necessity for these new regimes in order to project and assert their sovereignty. Traditional networks and lines of supply were cut, creating estranged local communities and sterilized border zones that were condemned to marginality and militarization⁴⁶. It is perhaps through the prism of cinema and literature that the heaviness of border practices can be best appreciated. Ghassan Kanafani's 1962 novel *Men in the Sun* (later filmed as *The Dupes* by Tewfik Saleh in 1973), Emile Habibi's 1954 short story *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Yılmaz Güney and Şerif Gören's 1982 film *Yol* vividly portray stories of loss, dislocation, misery, and tragedy against the backdrop of checkpoints, nearly impassable border crossings, and fortified frontiers.

In contemporary Turkish politics, the "Sèvres Syndrome" is defined as "a framework of fear and anxiety over the possible annihilation, abandonment or betrayal of the Turkish state by the West", the re-enactment of a treaty that was never ratified by the Ottoman Empire and was later superseded by the Treaty of Lausanne. The threat of a new Sèvres is therefore played by the ruling elites as a scarecrow "to sustain their political power and control over the social and economic resources of the state"⁴⁷. In fact, what matters is not the text of the treaty *per se*, but to what an extent it is constantly interpreted, challenged, and appropriated as part of a language of legitimization and exclusion that defines the perimeter of the political field⁴⁸.

If a treaty that never entered into force still haunts Turkey's international relations and domestic politics through a mixture of feelings of frustration, internalized inferiority, suspicion, and perceived encirclement⁴⁹, could we reasonably argue that the same considerations can be extended to the effects of the Sykes-Picot Agreement in the Middle East? In this perspective, it is of secondary importance to scrutinize the petty practical details of the deal. In fact, what matters is arguably how, when, why, and by whom the agreement was (and is) activated for contentious politics, based on perceptions of external conspiracy, internal betrayal, insecurities and survival. In my opinion, this line of

⁴⁶ A. BEYDOUN, *The South Lebanon Border Zone: A Local Perspective*, in "Journal of Palestine Studies", Vol. 21, No 3, 1992, pp. 35-53.

⁴⁷ F. MÜGE GÖÇEK, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2011, p. 99.

⁴⁸ A. L. GLYPTIS, *Kemalism as a Language for Turkish Politics: Cultivation, Reproduction, Negotiation*, PhD thesis, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007, pp. 30-37.

⁴⁹ F. MÜGE GÖÇEK, *The Transformation of Turkey*, cit., p. 183.

analysis would be largely in consonance with the ongoing research and scholarly debate on the creation of the national body politic, foundation myths, and policies of commemoration⁵⁰. It is telling and worrisome that many current analyses on the Sykes-Picot Agreement seem instead to be grounded in petty political polemics, whether pretending to counter the propaganda of Daesh⁵¹, taking side over concurrent claims in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict⁵², framing later political developments in the region⁵³, or eventually justifying how the United States became “fatefully entangled” in Syria and Iraq⁵⁴.

Historically decontextualized analyses also fail to include the debate generated by critical border studies that have problematized the notion of borders as fixed and tangible lines⁵⁵. In this perspective, borders should not be conceived as discrete objects, but as processes and networks that are linked to space, identity, and power relations⁵⁶. Multiperspectival, non-state centric approaches also question the possibility of understanding borders and bordering processes from a single, privileged vantage point: there are different, equally valid perspectives on the same bordering processes, and it is improper to reify one’s perspective as the unique narrative and discursive frame⁵⁷.

Discourses on the artificiality and erroneousness of the borders delineated by the Sykes-Picot Agreement often miss these problematizations of processes and perspectives, but so do many of their refutations. Objectification of borders and deterministic conceptions of history on both sides are sometimes underlain by the assumption that

⁵⁰ R. ZEIDEL, *Between the “Unknown Soldier” and the Cemetery: Commemorating the Fallen Soldiers in Iraq, 1958-2010*, in P. BRANCA, M. DEMICHELIS (a cura), “Memorie con-divise: Popoli, Stati e Nazioni nel Mediterraneo e in Medio Oriente”, Narcissus, 2013, pp. 98-112.

⁵¹ J. MILLER, *Why Islamic State Militants Care So Much About Sykes-Picot*, cit..

⁵² R. FISK, *ISIS: In a borderless world*, cit..

⁵³ *Unintended Consequences*, in “The Economist”, 14 May 2016, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21698442-sykes-picot-carve-up-led-century-turbulenceunintended-consequences>.

⁵⁴ C. M. SENNOTT, *How ISIS Is Tearing Up The Century-Old Map Of The Middle East*, in “Global Post”, 17 June 2014, available at: <http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-06-17/how-isis-tearing-century-old-map-middle-east>.

⁵⁵ N. PARKER, N. VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS et al., *Lines in the Sand? Towards an Agenda for Critical Border Studies*, in “Geopolitics”, Vol. 14, No 3, 2009, pp. 582-587.

⁵⁶ G. POPESCU, *Bordering and Ordering in the Twenty-first Century: Understanding Borders*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012, pp. 7-21.

⁵⁷ C. RUMFORD, *Towards a Multiperspectival Study of Borders*, in “Geopolitics”, Vol. 17, No 4, 2012, pp. 887-902.

the characteristics of a border regime can be defined once and for all, leading at best to a patchwork of half-truths. Equally unsound are attempts at assessing *in abstracto* the goodness of the 1916 agreement. Even when they are animated by the denunciation of colonialism, these attempts are particularly problematic when the assessment relies upon the premise of homogeneity: the Sykes-Picot Agreement was bad because it created ethnically mixed states, just as the *The Daily Show* sketch inadvertently implies⁵⁸. What might hover around (consciously or not) is then “the fantasy of ethnosectarian homogeneity as the foundation of stable statehood”⁵⁹, a dangerous fantasy that inevitably carries with it the implication that only monoethnic (or quasi-monoethnic) states are viable and the precondition for regional stability. This is a very risky assumption in a region where homogenizing policies, much more than border drawing, has carried fateful implications for the lives of millions of people⁶⁰.

Conclusions

The Sykes-Picot Agreement was neither the single determining factor in the history of the Middle East in the twentieth century, nor an irrelevant deal that has been blown out of proportions. The 1916 stipulation was a point in a long trajectory of European interventionism and interference in local dynamics of power, which in their turn often manipulated the external powers⁶¹. Not only it is demanding to make sense of the vibrant landscape of discourses and practices, of persistence and change that accompanied the end of the Ottoman era and the formation of a post-Ottoman space, but even the very act of writing this history is entangled in local politics and conflicts over the construction and contestation of identities⁶².

⁵⁸ Sir Archibald Mears III - *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, cit..

⁵⁹ S. PURSLEY, “*Lines Drawn on an Empty Map*”: *Iraq’s Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State*, cit..

⁶⁰ M. H. YAVUZ, *Warfare and Nationalism: The Balkan Wars as a Catalyst of Homogenization*, cit..

⁶¹ C. FARAH, *The Politics of Interventionism in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830-1861*, London, The Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 2000.

⁶² J. REILLY, *The Ottoman Cities of Lebanon: Historical Legacy and Identity in the Modern Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2016, pp. 155-162.

In this context, it is of scarce heuristic significance to keep asking if the Sykes-Picot Agreement provided the right borderlines for the Middle East. What is needed is more fieldwork research that will provide insightful information on how bordering discourses and practices actually function at the micro level, at the margins, and in the materiality of everyday life.

Riassunto - La vulgata prevalente tende a raffigurare gli accordi siglati nel 1916 tra Mark Sykes e François Georges-Picot come la causa prima della perdurante instabilità del Vicino Oriente. Tracciando arbitrariamente nuovi confini senza tenere nel dovuto conto le peculiarità etniche e confessionali, gli accordi avrebbero posto le basi per la creazione di entità artificiali, destinate alla fragilità. Pur senza volere assumere posizioni apologetiche riguardo all'espansionismo europeo, questo articolo suggerisce di problematizzare alcuni assunti di fondo. La delineazione di una nuova mappa politica del paesaggio regionale post-ottomano ebbe una parabola

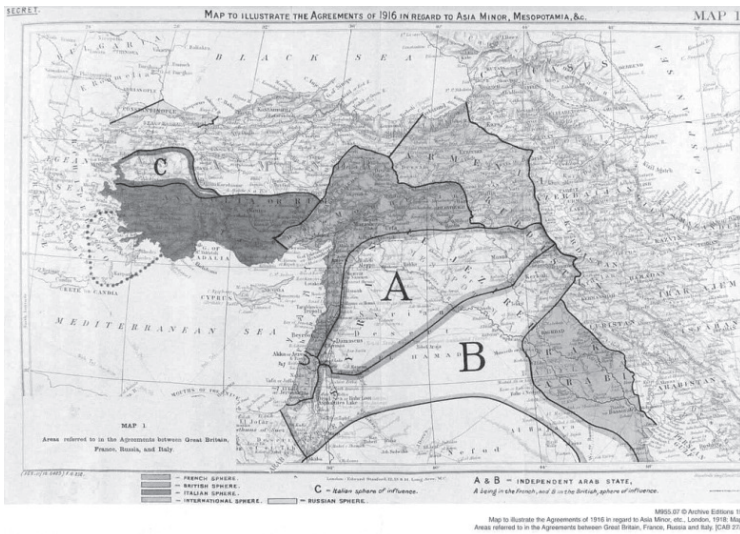
lunga, nella quale si sovrapposero pressioni esterne e interne, lacerazioni degli equilibri di potere, ricomposizioni e riallineamenti. In linea con il dibattito storiografico e politologico in corso, un'analisi critica della portata degli Accordi Sykes-Picot deve considerare non solo i loro risvolti concreti, senza dubbio meno rilevanti di quanto comunemente si pensi, ma soprattutto la loro portata simbolica come elemento di un linguaggio politico di legittimazione, inclusione ed esclusione nel panorama locale e regionale. Una ricognizione del lascito storico degli accordi del 1916 va inoltre inserita nel filone di ricerca che problematizza il concetto di territorialità.

Map 1 - Map of Eastern Turkey in Asia, Syria and Western Persia



Source: The National Archives of United Kingdom

Map 2 - Map to illustrate the Agreements of 1916 in regard to Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, etc.



Source: Foreign Office Research Department

**RECOVERING REGIONAL POWER.
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN UNDER ROUHANI'S
PRESIDENCY**

by Tiziana Corda

1. *Introduction*

Iran's geographical and human size, its economic and military capabilities and its strategic location at the crossroads of multiple sub-regions and on the Hormuz strait¹ make it a pivotal actor in a region marked by unstable conflict-ridden countries and competitors which likewise have ambitions of regional influence. Such human, material and political capital did not go unnoticed and rather made Iran a geopolitical attraction for many. Not only was this foreseen by some geopolitical theories on the rimland power², but it also marked Iran's actual recent history³: object of contention during World War II, in the Cold War it was identified by the US as a relevant tile for the containment of the Soviet expansionism and for the guardianship of

University of Pavia.

¹ Second highest GDP and most populous country in the Gulf, two-thirds of the population under 30, 85% of adult literacy, and the third-highest number of engineers in the world. Cf. World Bank database on Iran and on the Hormuz strait, a natural bottleneck, through which one-third of the world's seaborne energy trade is shipped: cf. US ENERGY INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, *World Oil Transit Chokepoints*, 10 November 2014.

² Applying Nicholas Spykman's notion of rimland, that strip of ocean-washed land which surrounds Eurasia, Iran can be described as a rimland power and great powers' desired foothold used by maritime powers to contain rival continental powers or likewise by those landlocked powers to gain access to warm waters: cf. F. BORDONARO, *La geopolitica anglosassone. Dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, Milano, Angelo Guerini e Associati, 2009, pp. 51-60.

³ E. ABRAHAMIAN, *A History of Modern Iran*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 97-98; F. HALLIDAY, *The Middle East in International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 102.

the Gulf⁴. Despite becoming itself the target of containment after the revolution in 1979, foreign powers' interest in Iran remains, amplified by the removal of sanctions.

Indeed, the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran created a new regional framework and transformed its security dynamics in such a way that the former US ally became a threat to be contained. The Islamic Republic's security strategy, influenced by such perceived encirclement and the trauma of the Iraqi invasion, is ultimately focused on ensuring its regime's survival, to be achieved by containing eventual similar threats through strategic depth based on regional footholds, rather than regional dominance. As a consequence, apart from the survival of the revolutionary regime, today Iran's strategic objectives as defined by the Supreme Leader Khamenei's "20-Year Vision" outlined in 2005⁵ are the enhancement of its economic capabilities and its regional security framework. The adoption of those objectives would help achieving regional power which, drawing from the works by B. Buzan and D. Nolte⁶, consists in the status possessed by those actors that are able to alter the regional balance of power on their own and define the polarity of their regional complex. Such regional leaders employ both material assets such as military, economic, demographic, technological and human resources, and ideational assets such as norms and values to influence the regional security agenda. Despite claiming this role and owning the required power resources, Iran's regional role has been restrained by sanctions and lack of recognition. Even so, recent foreign interventions in the region, like in Afghanistan and Iraq, showed that relevant regional issues can hardly be solved without Iran's involvement and no military means alone can solve a crisis: hence the need to recognise Iran as an accountable contributor to regional stability, by leveraging common interests through negotiations rather than resorting to counterproductive sanctions which Iran defied for almost forty years. After all, more than by ideological considerations, Iranian foreign and national security policies are influ-

⁴ R. McMAHON, *US national security policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy*, in M. LEFFER, O.A. WESTAD, *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, v. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 288-311.

⁵ Cf. <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/20-year-national-vision>.

⁶ B. BUZAN, O. WÆVER, *Regions and powers: the structure of international security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 37, p. 55, p. 62; D. NOLTE, *How to Compare Regional Powers: Analytical Concepts and Research Topics*, in "Review of International Studies", No 36, 2010, pp. 881-901.

enced by pragmatic and balance-of-power concerns⁷. The one-year-old Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Rouhani's single most important achievement signed in July 2015 and implemented in January 2016, showed that national interests can be secured through diplomacy. Furthermore, there was a tacit consensus in the international community about the need to disclaim regime change and reintegrate Iran in the regional balance of power. An act of trust intended to make Tehran more accountable for regional stabilization⁸ and a more beneficial compromise than the current regional disorder upset by terrorism, extremist non-state actors and power vacuums: threats jointly shared by Iran and the international community.

The number of stakeholders related to the implementation of the nuclear deal show, beyond the technicalities, its political breadth and geopolitical implications: the deal has shown that Iran can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem and that apparently intractable regional crises can be solved through diplomatic solutions and political dialogue. The analysis of Rouhani's policies suggests however that checks and challenges to a full recovery are posed not only by external competitors, but also by domestic opponents fearful of losing the advantage gained in the years of the sanctions. After all, the peculiar double legitimacy of the Islamic Republic as it was devised by its founder Ayatollah Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih*, where elective institutions such as the Presidency, the Majlis, and the Assembly of Experts, interact with unelected clerical groups, creates multiple centres of power and allows for more domestic infighting⁹ than in other countries in the region. As regards foreign policy decisions, the Supreme Leader is the final decision maker who draws red lines around President's actions and directly controls some security appa-

⁷ M. KAMRAVA, *Iran and its Persian Gulf neighbors*, in T. JUNEAU, S. RAZAVI (eds.), "Iran Foreign Policy Since 2001: Alone in the World", London, Routledge, 2013, p. 104.

⁸ S. MALONEY, *Rouhani Report Card: A Year of Diplomatic Breakthrough and Breakdown*, Brookings Institution, August 2014; P. LEWIS, *Iran's Nuclear Hedge*, Chatham House, 29 June 2015.

⁹ To describe domestic political affiliation this paper resorts to renown labels such as reformists and hardline conservatives, but a more accurate classification identifies supporters of Islamic institutions (theocrats) opposed by those prioritising republican bodies (republicans), both divided between radicals and pragmatists as regards the pace of change. Yet, this structure is flexible with many opportunistic actors often changing sides ("party of the wind"): cf. A. VAEZ, *Rouhani's Incomplete Victory in Iran's Parliamentary Elections*, International Crisis Group, 4 May 2016.

ratues like the IRGC¹⁰; nonetheless, he is surrounded by a broad range of decision shapers who do have a role in determining the country's foreign and security policies, including nuclear ones, as shown by the composition of the Supreme National Security Council¹¹.

Therefore, few months ahead of elections, with Rouhani under fire at home for the slow pace of economic recovery and Khamenei's aversion to further US cooperation, this paper aims at providing a critical assessment of Rouhani's presidency, focusing on his attempt to recover the Islamic Republic's regional power waned during the years under nuclear sanctions. By evaluating the impact of Rouhani's foreign-related policies on the country's ability to enhance its economic power and regional security framework, it is argued that his measures have been instrumental in Iran's gradual reintegration in global political and economic networks. However, they prompted opportunities and challenges together: Rouhani displayed the merits of his diplomatic approach for constructive engagement with Iran. However, it remains to be seen whether this approach is sustainable.

2. *Regional political framework: taking advantage of the regional chaos*

Since the beginning of the new millennium, Iran's regional influence swung in reaction to regional events and power vacuums which directly or indirectly affected also the Islamic Republic's influence. Bush's Middle Eastern campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in unintended benefits for Tehran, namely the overthrowing of two regional threats (the Taliban and Saddam Hussein) which eventually led to the establishment of friendly governments in Kabul and Baghdad. The inclusion of Iran in the "axis of evil", the tightening of its encirclement by US troops close to its borders, and the continuation of instability did not shrink Tehran's influence but rather ended up wid-

¹⁰ The Islamic Republic's Guards Corps, or *pasdaran*, are held accountable to the Supreme Leader, not the President: cf. R. GUOLO, *La via dell'Imam*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2007, p. 21.

¹¹ Mandated by article 177 of the Constitution and chaired by the President, its composition reflects the dualism of the Islamic Republic: half of the members represent elected institutions (the President, five Ministers, the Majlis Speaker) while half are appointed by the Supreme Leader out of religious and paramilitary bodies (Chief of Justice, Army, IRGC, and two representatives). Once the SNSC reaches its conclusions, then on that base the Supreme Leader ratifies such decisions.

ening its appeal among the populations increasingly more reluctant to Western presence, then gradually provided access to Asian fora of multilateral regional cooperation¹², and eventually favoured its penetration in the emerged power vacuums where Tehran could strengthen its ties with local actors. Later, also Hezbollah's unexpected military resistance in the one-month war against Israel added up to Iran's regional ascent in the mid 2000s.

Instead, despite being welcomed by Khamenei for its similarity to the Iranian revolution, Iran did not manage to reap the benefits of the wave of instability which led to the collapse of pro-West regimes in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. First of all, the Iranian assessment of the Arab rulers' lack of legitimacy performed poorly in the eyes of the regional populations after Iran's harsh repression of its Green Movement just two years before¹³. Then, the fear of losing further influence over Iran fuelled security tensions with the Gulf¹⁴ and pushed the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to intervene directly in Bahrain, in Yemen, and through regional proxies in the Syrian civil war. However, Tehran managed to safeguard its interests from the regional chaos through various means: the political, religious, and economic leverage on neighbouring actors and the deployment of IRGC forces abroad. In addition, the rise of *Da'esh*, the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (IS) in 2014 threatened Iran by creating a deep and wide jihadist haven close to its borders and challenging the regional order built after World War I. It also obliged the international community to take into consideration tactical cooperation with Iran, acknowledging its role of brokering the involvement of anti-IS Shia militias on the ground and in collaboration with Assad¹⁵.

In the meantime, mounting international pressures sparked by the disclosure of secret activities in Iran's nuclear programme in 2002 soon

¹² Iran indeed has been part of these fora, even if sometimes only as an observer, and sometimes is initiator of numerous regional organisations, such as the Economic Cooperation Organisation, in quality of founder in 1985; the Organisation of the Caspian Sea States, as founder in 1992; the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, observer since 2005; the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, observer since 2008: cf. the official websites of the relevant regional organisations.

¹³ E. GIUNCHI, A. PERTEGHELLA, *Il nuovo Iran nel quadro regionale*, Milano, ISPI, November 2013, p. 3.

¹⁴ Military expenditure in the Middle East in the last 15 years has almost doubled, as it went from 97.4 to 173 constant billion US\$: cf. SIPRI Military Expenditure database.

¹⁵ *Iranian foreign policy. The long arm*, in "The Economist" 24 January 2015.

resulted in economic sanctions¹⁶ which undermined Iran's parallel geopolitical awakening in a worrisome way that reached its peak in 2011, when the fears of a preemptive attack against Iranian nuclear plants by Israel and the US triggered a psychological war of mutual aggressive declarations, but also of attacks against Iranian nuclear technicians¹⁷. Coupled with Ahmadinejad's aggressive policies driven by the very self-perceived increase of geopolitical weight, this led to political and economic isolation which rendered almost worthless the previous gains derived from Iran's ability to fill regional power vacuums. Aware of such events, Rouhani's presidency, with the initial endorsement by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, built Iran's recovery of regional power on a different track: instead of imposing its regional influence by capitalising on other's strategic mistakes, he endorsed constructive engagement to preserve states' integrity and promote regional economic development.

3. *Rouhani's hekmat: Iran's new diplomatic approach*

On June 14th, 2013 Rouhani surprisingly won the first round of the presidential elections¹⁸: the Iranians, showing great political maturity, discarded fears of abstention due to extreme vetting of reformist candidates by the Guardian Council and voted for the candidate who could better channel the society's request of moderation and change. Rouhani, former minister and diplomat, was the point of convergence of different factions: also because of the premature withdrawal of the only reformist candidate Reza Aref, former Presidents Rafsanjani and reformist Khatami worked behind the scenes to facilitate the convergence of votes on Rouhani, who then gathered the votes of both the reformists and the more pragmatic conservatives tired of the incumbent ultra-radical administration, deemed responsible for the rampant unemployment, international isolation, economic mismanagement and political repression. Remembering the 2009 election frauds which weakened the Islamic Republic as they led to mass protests and handed

¹⁶ Cf. the highlights of the four most relevant UN resolutions in K. KATZMAN, *Iran Sanctions*, Congressional Research Service, 21 April 2015, p. 33.

¹⁷ Cf. R. REDAELLI, *L'Annus Horribilis iraniano: diviso all'interno e minacciato all'esterno*, in M. TORRI, N. MOCCI (a cura), "L'Asia nel triangolo delle crisi giapponese, araba ed europea", Asia Maior 2011, Bologna, I libri di Emil, 2012, pp. 39-42.

¹⁸ Cf. the latest polls from the *Archive: Iranian Presidential Elections 2013 Tracking Poll* available at <https://www.ipos.me/elections92/en>.

the most relevant positions in business and politics to the ultra-radicals and IRGC¹⁹, the Majlis modified the electoral law to reduce interference from the Ministry of Home Affairs²⁰, and Khamenei himself refrained from any interference, because he knew that Rouhani was part of the system (*nizam*), and that another repression or fraud would threaten his own authority as an impartial referee of domestic competition and as a leader (*rahbar*) of the country.

Therefore, Rouhani looked like a responsible but not too powerful authority, the kind of authority not perceived as a threat to the Supreme Leader. His moderate and prudent nature pushed him closer to the reformists without making him a reformist himself. Similarly important was his former experience as secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, which allowed him to tighten his ties with Khamenei in a relationship of mutual respect which averted clashes with the Leader which characterized the later Ahmadinejad's presidency. Rouhani is a cleric of the first generation who took part in the Islamic Revolution and whose main objective still remains the stability of the regime, to be achieved through less oppressive domestic policies and a more cooperative foreign policy²¹, deep opposition to Ahmadinejad's attempts to side-line the domestic conservative establishment close to Khamenei and isolate the country from international networks²².

A special focus of Rouhani's presidency was necessarily placed on foreign policy, as the enhancement of economic power and regional security framework could not be achieved in isolation. Well aware of the relevance of reciprocal legitimacy in international relations, the new president aspired to clean the tarnished image of the country and resume the traditional principle of *hekmat*, a Persian word rooted in Iranian history as much as in Islam²³, meaning wisdom and signaling a more constructive and moderate behaviour towards the international

¹⁹ P. RIVETTI, *What's surprising about Iran's election*, in "Foreign Policy", 17 June 2013.

²⁰ R. REDAELLI, *Il ritorno dell'Iran*, in M. TORRI, N. MOCCI (a cura), "Il drago cinese e l'aquila americana sullo scacchiere asiatico", *Asia Maior* 2013, Bologna, I libri di Emil, 2014, p. 40.

²¹ Cf. Rouhani's UN General Assembly debates at <https://gadebate.un.org/en/71/iran-islamic-republic>.

²² R. REDAELLI, *La crescita del ruolo geopolitico regionale dell'Iran*, in M. TORRI (a cura) "L'Asia nel grande gioco", *Asia Maior* 2007, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2008, p. 45.

²³ M. MILANI, *Sufism in the Secret History of Persia*, New York, Routledge, 2014, chapter 2 and also cf. Quran 45:37 "All Wise is one of Allah's names".

community²⁴. Rouhani's important revision of Iran's foreign policy and economic guidelines was initially supported also by Khamenei: recognizing the changed nature of the international environment, the Supreme Leader encouraged the administration to be prepared to tackle increasing challenges by developing lenience and tactical cooperation in the definition of external relations. This approach was supposed to begin with the recovery of Iran's economy, an essential requirement for its quest for regional power²⁵.

4. *Economic recovery*

In economic affairs Rouhani was called to recover a country from the previous mismanagement and the burden of sanctions which decreased living standards and put the most lucrative sector of domestic production to the test: the energy industry²⁶. Moving within Khamenei's "resistance economy" guidelines, his prescriptions were more responsible expenditure, reduction of inflation and unemployment, and a road to economic liberalisation to modernise inefficient infrastructure needed to boost domestic production²⁷. However, one necessary condition was the removal of Western sanctions imposed on the country in opposition to Iran's nuclear programme²⁸. The impact of

²⁴ It is worth noticing that also Khamenei's vision of foreign policy is rooted in the principles of dignity, wisdom, and expediency (national interests): <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1861>.

²⁵ Khamenei's "resistance economy" based on self-reliance was devised in order to help developing the country during sanctions and isolation. However, harmful effects on oil and gas under-exploitation, infrastructure obsolescence, and bans from military imports and swift transactions convinced him to endorse Rouhani's attempt to remove the sanctions and reintegrate the country in global political and economic networks: cf. R. REDAELLI, *Il ritorno dell'Iran*, cit., p. 46

²⁶ Iran is not a purely rentier state because of the diversification of its economy; however its economy is significantly dependent on energy: cf. the portion of GDP linked to oil export revenues in R. PARSİ, *Iran: A revolutionary republic in transition*, EUISS Chaillot Papers, February 2012, p. 42.

²⁷ Rouhani's economic policy is similar to Rafsanjani's market-driven vision, encouraging privatisation, foreign investment, transfer of know-how, and integration in international legal frameworks when compatible with its Islamic Constitution: cf. S. MALONEY, *Rouhani Report Card: A Year of Economic Stabilization and Suspense*, Brookings Institution, August 2014.

²⁸ Besides US unilateral sanctions being enforced since 1979, in 2006 the UN Security Council began imposing new sanctions onto Iran's uranium enrichment. Following a new

sanctions on the economy caused a slowdown of all major economic activities²⁹, and further polarized society by enriching Ahmadinejad's supporters³⁰. However, to promote the full recovery of the Iranian economy, the removal of the sanctions would not be sufficient: Iran's below-mentioned average economic performance was also due to deliberate choices made by the previous government's mismanagement and corruption. Ahmadinejad's discretionary attempt to reach economic independence even when high oil prices mitigated the impact of sanctions resulted in a further loss in foreign investments, contributing to the reduction of exports and revenues³¹. Moreover, alleged spending review, subsidy reforms on consumer goods and privatization plans urged by the global economic downturn and the strengthening of sanctions were used mainly to revitalize his support platform³².

Therefore, Rouhani's economic policy included some measures aimed at safeguarding domestic production from vulnerability due to exports' over-reliance, introducing stricter rules on high public salaries, and reforming an unproductive tax mechanism pervading the public sector which in Iran still amounts to 80% of the economy³³. With

IAEA report, the US and EU imposed more severe financial and commercial measures in 2011 and 2012, sanctioning banks, the energy industry and international financial transactions: cf. A. CORDESMAN, B. GOLD, C. COUGHLIN-SCHULTE, *Iran-Sanctions, Energy, Arms Control, and Regime Change*, CSIS, January 2014, pp. 2-3.

²⁹ Oil exports were more than halved; roughly \$100 billion of various hard currency reserves abroad were frozen; vehicle production declined by 40%: cf. K. KATZMAN, *Iran Sanctions*, cit., p. 51.

³⁰ Mainly IRGC and merchants (*bazaari*): cf. R. REDAELLI, *Il ritorno dell'Iran*, cit., p. 38.

³¹ Cf. 55% of import tariff in Transformation Index BTI 2014, *Iran Country Report*, at <http://www.bti-project.org/reports/country-reports/index.nc> and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Foreign Direct Investment Database*, World Investment Report 2010.

³² To implement his welfare economy he even used money from the Oil Stabilisation Fund, a mechanism created by Khatami which aimed at protecting the economy from the vulnerability deriving from volatile oil revenues by injecting funds into the economy in the case of a plunge in oil prices: cf. R. PARSI, *Iran: A revolutionary republic in transition*, cit., p. 48.

³³ The actual private sector is limited to the powerful social group of the merchants, called *bazaari*, whereas other entities like the religious foundations (*bonyad*) are actually quasi-public actors which were created after the 1979 revolution with the assets seized from the shah for charitable or commercial purposes. They are extremely powerful structures and are exempted from tax payments like many commercial regime-affiliated entities managed by IRGC members: cf. Transformation Index BTI 2014, *Iran Country Report*, cit..

his first mandate approaching the end, the pace of Rouhani's economic recovery has been slower than expected: the administration turned the GDP growth rate positive, more than halved inflation, enlarged the tax base, and boosted reforms on subsidies and the banking sector, namely a more independent role for the Central Bank and an action plan to implement the Financial Action Task Force regulations³⁴. However, he failed to decrease the unemployment rate³⁵ and, even worse, the economic windfall expected from the removal of the nuclear-related sanctions is still far from being seen. Since the signature of the JCPOA in July 2015 and its implementation in January 2016, an incredibly huge number of foreign delegations have visited the country to sign memorandums with the objective to improve the poor shape of Iran's energy infrastructure and transportation³⁶. However, the permanence of US and EU non-nuclear related sanctions and a restrictive business environment lacking transparency and dispute settlement mechanisms have hindered full economic recovery.

The solution is markedly political: on the one hand, foreign institutions such as the US Department of Treasury³⁷ have still much more room to reassure and stimulate foreign companies interested in but still hesitant to invest in Iran; on the other hand, Iranian institutions can do more to facilitate a more reliable and competitive business environment, by enforcing FATF regulations³⁸ and adopting new legal frameworks in strategic investment areas. This would affect some

³⁴ All the economic data in this paragraph are taken from the official Statistical Centre of Iran, at <http://www.amar.org.ir>, and WORLD BANK, *Iran Overview*, at <http://www.worldbank.org/>.

³⁵ Between 2013 and 2015 unemployment amounted to between 10.7% and 9.5%, but amounted to over 20% for the youth (25.7%), who make up for two-thirds of the population, and women (20.3%).

³⁶ *When the sanctions come off*, in "The Economist", 25 July 2015.

³⁷ Its Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has to grant export licences to foreign banks and suppliers to let them use the US financial system when trading with Iran, like in the case of Boeing and Airbus purchases. Cf. <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/OFAC-Enforcement/>.

³⁸ The implementation of FATF regulations is a natural by-product of the JCPOA, to unlock the future of Iran's economy by reintegrating it into the international financial system: non-compliance would keep foreign banks and investors away because of fears of being accused of funding terrorism or laundering money by doing business with banks backed by black-listed entities like the IRGC. Rouhani is therefore trying to separate the Iranian banking system from the IRGC financial networks: cf. *Money Laundering and Terrorism: Rouhani vs the Revolutionary Guards*, IranWire, 7 September 2016, available at <https://iranwire.com/en/features/3969>.

powerful domestic economic actors which thrived under sanctions, such as the IRGC.

5. *Underexploited energy resources*

It cannot be denied that much of Iran's economy recovery depends on the energy industry. Iran is the pioneer of oil production in the Middle East after it was discovered at the turn of the twentieth century³⁹ that it has the fourth largest proven reserves of crude oil, around 10% of overall world reserves, and the world's largest natural gas reserves after Russia⁴⁰. The entire energy sector was greatly affected by nuclear-related energy sanctions, which more than halved oil exports from 2.6 to 1.1 million barrels per day and reduced oil production from 4.1 to 3.1 million barrels per day⁴¹. Moreover, exploration and development of projects, necessary to increase production capacity to satisfy Iran's steady growth of population and energy consumption⁴², were also affected by a lack of foreign investment in technologies and expertise due to the difficult political relations deriving from the sanctions regime and also because of unattractive legal frameworks and the fall of global oil prices.

The removal of nuclear-related sanctions has stimulated multiple initiatives aiming at developing the exploitation of the South Pars' gas reserves⁴³ and making Iran more active in regional and global markets, by exploring the possibility to resume gas swap projects with the

³⁹ For the historical background cf. S. TAGLIAPIETRA, *Iran After the (Potential) Nuclear Deal: What's Next for the Country's Natural Gas Market?*, Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei, n.31, 2014, p. 13.

⁴⁰ British Petroleum (BP) and US Energy Information Administration (EIA), the main databanks for energy data, give different rankings to Iran and Russia because of a different method assessing Russian estimates. However, Iranian reserves amount to roughly 34 Tmc, around 17% of the world total: cf. *BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2015*, British Petroleum, June 2015.

⁴¹ Data 2009-2013 about Iran from the US Energy Information Administration database.

⁴² World Bank databank on Iran at <http://www.worldbank.org/>. The removal of energy subsidies on gasoline prices, part of the subsidy reform powered by Ahmadinejad's administration, has contributed to the 75% of gasoline price increase but has not reduced consumption: cf. *Iran's Oil and Gas Annual Report 2014*, Facts Global Energy, Report 2014, 19 December 2014.

⁴³ Iran's largest field, responsible for 40% of the country's total gas reserves, part of a larger 9,700 square-kilometer field which in Qatari territorial waters constitutes the

Caspian neighbours, developing liquefied natural gas export facilities, and building new gas pipeline exports projects with Iraq, Oman, and Pakistan⁴⁴. In order to turn these projects into reality and benefit from the geopolitical weight vested in such “pipeline diplomacy”, Tehran firstly needs to further increase production, improve energy efficiency, and respond to growing domestic demand both for consumption and oil fields re-injection, which pushed the gas share up to 65% in the energy consumption basket⁴⁵. This may happen if we consider that many reserves are underexploited, that further exploration can lead to new discoveries, and that modern infrastructure can reduce the waste derived from gas flaring and gas venting. However, Iran’s objectives also remain challenged by a combination of geopolitical and commercial barriers. While the former are due to the adverse political environment caused by the 1979 revolution and can be overcome only when trust is rebuilt, the commercial ones have to do with the permanence of non-nuclear sanctions affecting some big energy contractors like IRGC, owned Khatam al-Anbia, the legal disputes on take-or-pay clauses of gas pricing formula, and the delayed introduction of new exploration contracts which can attract foreign financial and technological capital necessary to develop infrastructure. According to the Islamic Republic’s Constitution, energy resources cannot fall under private or foreign ownership and typical production-sharing agreements are not allowed⁴⁶. This forced Iran to resort to buyback schemes, through which international oil companies are commissioned to develop oil and gas fields at their own expense. Once the fields are ready for production, project management is returned to Iranian state companies, which pay off the foreign companies’ services with part of the energy revenues

North Dome field: cf. US ENERGY INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, *Country Analysis Brief: Iran*, 21 July 2014.

⁴⁴ *Prospects improve for pipeline gas exports by Iran*, in “Oil&Gas Journal”, 23 December 2013.

⁴⁵ *Prospects for Iran’s gas production, usage and exports*, in “Natural Gas Europe”, 22 April 2015.

⁴⁶ Cf. Article 44 and 81 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Production-sharing agreements are contractual arrangements through which the field owner, which in this case is the Iranian state, recruits a foreign contractor to explore and develop the resource, and then, as a reward for the service, the contractor acquires a share of the produced resource, even if the sole owner remains the state: cf. K. BINDEMANN, *Production-Sharing Agreements: An Economic Analysis*, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, October 1999, p. 1 and pp. 5-7.

staggered in annual rates over a few years⁴⁷. However, the scheme's inflexibility, the reliance on predetermined targets, the disregard of market fluctuations, and the limitation in the rate of returns⁴⁸ made it unpopular with international oil companies. As a consequence Rouhani's team worked on a new legal arrangement, the Iran Petroleum Contract, which after many revisions is going to replace the buyback scheme, allowing for technology transfers and the creation of joint ventures between foreign contractors and the state-owned company in all the project phases, from exploration to production and oil recovery⁴⁹. In conclusion, to make up for the high criticism that Rouhani received for his inability to turn many foreign energy investors' promises into concrete action, one has to acknowledge that his team's energy policies have not been blessed by the recent global oil oversupply and the consequent drop in prices⁵⁰, as well as by some domestic opposition to foreign companies' return in order to protect their share of Iran's lucrative energy industry⁵¹.

Apart from oil and gas, another resource Iran has resorted to for electricity generation is nuclear energy⁵², source of discord with the international community. Considering the present and future growth of domestic demand for electricity⁵³ and the willingness to reduce the country's dependence on hydrocarbons, an increase of the nuclear power share in electricity generation by building more nuclear reac-

⁴⁷ *Iran's Oil and Gas Annual Report 2014*, Facts Global Energy, Report 2014, 19 December 2014.

⁴⁸ *Buyback Vs. New Iran Petroleum Contract*, in "The Gulf Intelligence", 15 April 2015.

⁴⁹ *What Makes IPC Different from Buy-Backs?*, Project Iran Petroleum Contract, accessed on June 25 at <http://iranpetroleumcontract.com/what-makes-ipc-different-to-buy-backs-2/>.

⁵⁰ A 50%+ decrease which could be hardly mitigated by a reduced break-even point: cf. *Fiscal break-even oil prices for major OPEC members*, in "Oil&Gas Financial Journal", 2 April 2014.

⁵¹ *Iran's oil Rusty taps*, in "The Economist", 4 April 2015.

⁵² So far, in Iran the only working nuclear power plant is the pressurized water reactor Bushehr 1 in Halileh developed by a Russian consortium. It became operative in 2013 and in 2014 produced 3.7 billion kilowatthours: cf. IAEA's Power Reactor Information System (PRIS) database on Iran, at <https://www.iaea.org/pris/CountryStatistics/Country-Details.aspx?current=IR>.

⁵³ As for the electricity sector, consumption and production have regularly increased since 1990s. Gas accounts for 67% of electricity generation, while oil for around 25%. The remaining 7% comes from different sources such as renewables, most of which hydropower, and nuclear energy: cf. the electricity sector in US ENERGY INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, *Country Analysis Brief: Iran*, cit.

tors is not completely unsound, in view of a growing global interest in investing in this energy source⁵⁴.

Iran started looking into the development of nuclear industry under the shah. Being part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty since 1968, Iran refrained from military uses but claimed and still claims its right to acquire and develop civil nuclear capability, granted by article IV of the treaty itself⁵⁵. Its civil nuclear programme started in 1957 within the framework of US-sponsored Atoms for Peace⁵⁶. Iran's nuclear ambition could be therefore interpreted as a consequence of Cold War competition, at a time when it was allied with the Western bloc: nuclear facilities and know-how flourished until the 1970s thanks to training and technical assistance coming mainly from France and the US. It were the same US, today the toughest opponent to Iran's nuclear programme, to invite the Persian ally to develop nuclear reactors which could diversify its own energy resources, use nuclear energy for domestic electricity needs, and free hydrocarbon resources for exports⁵⁷. Exactly the same thing that today Iran, with nearly triple population and ten-fold electricity consumption⁵⁸, claims to do. After a break due to the revolution and the war against Iraq, the programme was reactivated only in the 1990s with Soviet, Asian, and South African support⁵⁹. The West, formerly Iran's central supplier of expertise and resources, became its biggest opponent, advancing concerns about a possible military programme raised more by the threat of its radical change of regime than by an actual development of non-conventional military capabilities. Tensions increased only in 2002 when the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a dissident group opposed to the regime, denounced the presence of secret nuclear programmes in Arak and Natanz facilities, and the IAEA, which previously never detected ir-

⁵⁴ On nuclear energy's cost competitiveness cf. J.H. KEPPLER, *How competitive is nuclear energy?*, OECD's Nuclear Energy Agency, 2010, n. 28.1. For data, cf. IAEA's PRIS database and Nuclear Energy Institute's statistics at www.nei.org/Knowledge-Center/Nuclear-Statistics/World-Statistics.

⁵⁵ Cf. NPT Article IV at <http://www.un.org/en/conf/npt/2005/npttreaty.html>.

⁵⁶ Cf. https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/atoms_for_peace.html.

⁵⁷ A. Cordesman, *Iranian Nuclear Weapons? The Uncertain Nature of Iran's Nuclear Programs*, Center for Strategic and International Studies CSIS, 12 April 2006, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁸ Cf. World Bank database on Iran's population growth and electricity consumption in 1971 (29 million people and 273 kWh per capita) and in 2012 (77 million and 2,752 kWh).

⁵⁹ Especially Chinese and Pakistani: cf. A. CORDESMAN, *Iranian Nuclear Weapons?*, cit., pp. 25-26.

regularities⁶⁰, reported that Iran was exceeding research needs both in the percentage of uranium enrichment and kilograms produced⁶¹. This opened a decade of negotiations and financial, military and trade sanctions imposed by the international community and the West, which were resolved only in July 2015 with the signature of the JCPOA between the P5+1 and Iran⁶². The terms of the nuclear negotiations were to be seen in part as a technical agreement aiming to ensure that Iran does not develop a nuclear military programme and facilitates IAEA's monitoring its compliance⁶³. However, while a technical agreement on uranium enrichment and research and development programmes proved to be feasible⁶⁴, the factor which was lacking was mutual political trust: internal divisions in Iran and among the international community, the aversion of Khamenei and the ultra-radical factions of the Iranian system to foreign encroachment, and the opposition of rival regional powers caused these opportunities to fail many times. The JCPOA was therefore primarily a political deal⁶⁵: despite public denials, the scope of the implications was actually broader than just uranium enrichment limitations, as the core issues did have to do with security and the distribution of power in the Middle East.

6. *Back to diplomacy: the JCPOA and its implications*

The Islamic Republic's management of the foreign aspects of its nuclear policy has been driven by Tehran's security concerns:

⁶⁰ Cf. nuclear data about Iran by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, at <http://www.nti.org/country-profiles/iran/nuclear>.

⁶¹ *Nuclear Power in Iran*, World Nuclear Association, May 2015 and *Update on Iran's total near 20 percent enriched uranium stock: nearly enough for a bomb, if further enriched*, Institute for Science and International Security, ISIS Report, 11 March 2014.

⁶² The five UN Security Council's permanent members plus Germany: cf. the JCPOA text at <http://media.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim//Uploaded/Document/1394/04/23/13940423150500379569694.pdf> as well as UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015), adopted on 20 July 2015, available at www.un.org/en/sc/inc/pages/pdf/pow/RES2231E.pdf

⁶³ S.H. MOUSAVIAN, *How much nuclear power does Iran need?*, in "al-Monitor", 21 February 2014.

⁶⁴ See for example November 2004 in Paris under Khatami and October 2009 in Vienna and Geneva: cf. *Il programma nucleare iraniano*, Treccani, Atlante Geopolitico 2015.

⁶⁵ S. WALT, *Deal or no deal? Actually that's not the right question*, in "Foreign Policy", 12 April 2015.

no deal which does not take into account security threats could ever be reached⁶⁶. Iran always claimed that military nuclear proliferation would have violated the principles of the Islamic revolution, a questionable claim considering the secrets, omissions, and dual use technology used by Iran. Irrespective of its nuclear narrative, from an Iranian perspective uranium enrichment and the ability to develop a military nuclear option was an understandable ambition justified by its legitimate sovereignty rights, national pride, deterrence against regime change rhetoric, bargaining power in a broader region full of nuclear powers, as well as by the actual necessity to diversify energy resources⁶⁷. A rational player, however, would never use this potential capability. Indeed, the Iranian regime has been well aware of its vulnerability in case of a confrontation with nuclear powers or of an external pre-emptive attack. US encirclement and regional challenges are threats to be faced with neither nuclear weapons nor even direct confrontation, but rather with asymmetric warfare that Iranian forces fully master. Even worse, a nuclearization of the Gulf region can trigger a domino effect damaging Iran's security interests. Therefore, Khamenei himself approved Rouhani's pragmatic choice to put aside Ahmadinejad's confrontational stance, go beyond the inflexible positions of the previous negotiators, and still aim at increasing Iran's regional influence through an exchange: nuclear restraint in exchange for the end of isolation. This could allow Tehran to recover part of its legitimacy threatened by the exclusion from vital financial, cultural, and political networks under the sanctions regime, without renouncing the resort to nuclear power for electricity generation and research.

During the last round of negotiations, time, focus and trust turned out to be the ingredients for success. An incremental process, mostly carried out behind the scenes and based on interim deals, leveraged an even tiny common interest behind distant public positions to create the necessary political space to build trust and test everyone's commitment. Also the decision to limit the terms of the agreement to Iran's nuclear programme, without involving other regional or domestic issues, led to a situation in which both parties could make concessions with-

⁶⁶ However, distancing itself from other thorny issues such as human rights violations or terrorism support was necessary to open the negotiations: cf. B. FRIEDMAN, *The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Negotiations with Iran*, in "Foreign Policy Research Institute, FPRI", April 2015.

⁶⁷ R. PARSI, *Iran: A revolutionary republic in transition*, cit., p. 19.

out losing face at home. Finally, facilitated by the multilateral context and the 2013-2015 international environment upset by shared threats, Iran and the US managed to overcome their chronic lack of mutual political trust. Indeed, a successful outcome was possible because all the actors involved in the negotiations had an interest in the stabilisation of the relations between Iran and the international community⁶⁸. Iran's strategic objectives of economic and security enhancement had been challenged by past economic mismanagement and tougher sanctions. They prevented Iran from securing economic growth and, because of the arms embargo, also from increasing military capabilities. This round of negotiations started secretly in Oman at the end of Ahmadinejad's mandate with Khamenei's approval, but reached the highest political level only when the Iranian presidency was taken over by a former negotiator more open to dialogue and compromise. This trust was reciprocated by the countries negotiating with Iran. Russia and China apart, which despite profiting from an isolated Iran had always advocated the removal of the sanctions, a key role was played by the US administration and the European Union.

Overcoming almost forty years of confrontation, the Obama administration ended up being a strenuous supporter of the JCPOA. President Obama pragmatically conceived the nuclear deal in the framework of his pivot to Asia and consequent disengagement from the Middle East⁶⁹. Past measures created to put pressure on Iran turned out to be counter-productive: sanctions failed to prevent Iran from supporting terrorist groups and emboldened hardliners to the detriment of reformists. Instead, Iran and the US have some common interests in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking and in the creation

⁶⁸ Previous attempts had been carried out more out of necessity than actual conviction and coordination had a sub-optimal payoff: whoever had given up would have played the chicken, so everyone was interested in keeping the game in progress lingering until something changed the payoff matrix, either significant domestic changes or the threat of an external military attack. The international and domestic environment of 2013-2015, conducive to high-level dialogue, was the change long hoped for: cf. A.B. TABRIZI, R.H. SANTINI, *A slow chicken game: Iran and the P5+1 nuclear talks*, Aspenia Online, 27 June 2012.

⁶⁹ Motivated also by greater energy self-sufficiency, President Obama's Middle Eastern strategy declared in Cairo in 2009 expressed the goal objective to establish a self-regulated regional balance of power between the Gulf states and Iran, for which the settlement of disputes between the US and Iran was a necessary precondition: cf. *Remarks by the President at Cairo University, 06-04-09*, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Cairo, 4 June 2009.

of a self-regulated regional balance of power, which would reduce US entrapment⁷⁰. Therefore, drawing lessons from the past, the US should be aware that the ongoing internal discussions about new barriers to economic engagement with Iran, such as the Iran Sanctions Act renewal, would push Iran closer to China and Russia, prevent positive spill-over effects in more sensitive areas, and lose Iran's cooperation in regional crises in such a way that they would jeopardise the very US regional objectives.

A more constructive approach was adopted by the European Union. After playing the role of mediator during the negotiations and keeping united internal divergent views within the EU, the EU had a great interest in resuming the bilateral billions-worth trade lost because of the sanctions⁷¹ and in developing a comprehensive agenda for bilateral cooperation⁷². The decision to send a EU liaison team ahead of the creation of a EU delegation in Tehran and the double-track approach on human rights to exchange mutual concerns are in line with the fourth priority of the June 2016's EU Global Strategy⁷³. In order to promote regional multilateralism and cooperation, the EU encouraged cooperative regional order by pursuing dialogue and a balanced engagement with Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council alike.

Of course, not everybody shared this view: opposition to the deal and, above all, its geopolitical consequences led to opposition in the West, above all in the US Congress⁷⁴. Furthermore, some regional competitors became concerned about losing regional influence and feared increased Iranian support for militias abroad⁷⁵. Iranian hardliners in

⁷⁰ Cf. T. Friedman, *Iran and the Obama doctrine*, in "The New York Times", 5 April 2015.

⁷¹ Also eyeing the possibility to have Iran as a EU supplier in its objective of energy diversification, by joining the Southern gas corridor: cf. *Trading with Iran* in the European Commission – Directorate General for Trade website available at <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/iran> and http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113392.pdf.

⁷² The "dialogue of the 4 C's": comprehensive, cooperative, critical if needed, constructive always" promoted during EU high-level visit to Tehran in April 2016: cf. https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/iran/2281/iran-and-the-eu_en.

⁷³ Cf. EU's Global Strategy, p. 35, https://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

⁷⁴ Cf. <http://www.cotton.senate.gov/content/cotton-and-46-fellow-senators-send-open-letter-leaders-islamic-republic-iran> on the letter drafted by Senator Cotton and signed by 47 US Republican senators.

⁷⁵ Like the Gulf monarchies and Israel: cf. F. G. GAUSE III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War*, Brookings Institution, 8 July 2013.

turn were ideologically opposed to US engagement out of the fear of losing the benefits enjoyed during the sanctions⁷⁶.

7. *The routes of Rouhani's diplomacy*

It was argued that Rouhani's foreign policy has turned to a more diplomatic attitude, beyond the sole nuclear negotiations. However, no regional order can be safeguarded without credible military power and capabilities. Hence, despite his aversion to militarism, also Rouhani's vision of Iran's recovery in the form of revived influence, projection of power and strategic depth in the region entailed the development of credible defensive military capabilities⁷⁷. While US encirclement and the proliferation of jihadism in the region⁷⁸ gave Iran a just claim to enlarge its defence budget and weaponry, the ongoing arms embargo still jeopardizes that very ambition as it has prevented Iran from importing advanced arms supplies and hi-tech equipment that is not able to produce domestically⁷⁹. This resulted in obsolescent weapons and vehicles, as well as significantly lower military expenditures and imports compared to the other countries in the region⁸⁰. However, since Iran's security strategy is mainly based on asymmetric warfare and

⁷⁶ Also some reformists disputed the agreement because of its limitations with regard to human and other political rights: cf. P. ABDOLMOHAMMADI, *Dossier nucleare iraniano: il fronte del no in Iran, tra laici e conservatori*, ISPI Commentary, 20 March 2015.

⁷⁷ The Iranian military apparatus reflects the structural complexity of the regime, considering that with the revolution the regular army, the Artesh, is flanked by the paramilitary body of the IRGC equipped with a budget 3.5 times bigger than the one allocated to the regular army. That is despite the fact that the IRGC is in terms of numbers much smaller than the Artesh (roughly two-thirds smaller): cf. *The Military Balance 2013*, IISS, pp. 359-360.

⁷⁸ Some jihadist groups (Jundallah and its offshoot Jaish al-Adl) can be found also in Iran's less developed southern province of Sistan-Baluchistan: cf. *The Military Balance 2013*, cit., p. 563.

⁷⁹ Self-reliance and indigenous defence capabilities are key principles of Iran's military doctrine, yet the Shah and the Ayatollahs alike were forced to some extent to rely on foreign military know-how, training and technology: cf. *The Military Balance 2013*, cit., p. 358.

⁸⁰ With \$12.7 billions in 2012 it remains around 1/4 of Saudi Arabia's. Moreover, Iran's 2.3% of GDP invested in military expenditure in 2012 is one of the lowest in the region: cf. SIPRI Military Expenditure and Arms Transfers databases and A. CORDESMAN, *The Arab-US Strategic Partnership and the Changing Security Balance in the Gulf*, CSIS, 13 July 2015, pp. 133-134.

proxies⁸¹, such conventional military gap should not be overstated when measuring Iran's ability to actually exercise regional leverage. Finally, with the JCPOA allowing Iran to import military defensive systems like Russia's S-300 missiles, diverging views between hardliners and pragmatists on strategic matters have emerged: the former are advocating a military build-up while the latter oppose militarism⁸².

Military capabilities aside, Iran has a more powerful weapon to use in order to increase its leverage throughout the region: its geostrategic, natural, and political capital. The rationale behind it was clarified by Zarif himself, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Rouhani's team⁸³: the cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy returned to be pragmatism coupled with constructive engagement. Belonging to Rafsanjani's pragmatist school of thought, Rouhani and Zarif, initially with Khamenei's endorsement, built their foreign policies on the belief that in an interdependent world only cooperative and collective actions can overcome the deleterious paralysis generated by rivalry, confrontation and unilateral policies. Chairing the Non-Aligned Movement group in 2012-2016 and strongly supporting multilateralism, Rouhani's Iran has been promoting a revisionist strategy aimed at jointly solving common problems in the region and beyond: states' interests should be achieved through a balanced mix of competition and cooperation in a regional equilibrium free from external powers' interference and handed over to regional actors. Iran's geostrategic, natural, and political capital exposes Iran's potential for a bigger leading role in the framing of such a regional order⁸⁴. Considering ongoing hostility and previous failed attempts of critical and comprehensive dialogue, Rouhani's *modus operandi* pointed to transparency as a starting point to confute existing false presumptions and inaccurate perceptions which limited Iran's expansion of bilateral ties and participation in multi-

⁸¹ Militias sharing security concerns rather than ideology. Palestinian Sunni groups, Syria's Alawites and Yemen's Houthis do not share the same Iranian vision of religious authority: cf. N. PEDDE, *L'Iran contro tutti*, in "La radice quadrata del caos", in "Limes", July 2015.

⁸² To know more about the different schools of thought within the Iranian establishment about this issue cf. *Rafsanjani stirs up a hornet's nest in Iran*, in "Gulf News", 16 September 2016.

⁸³ J. ZARIF, *What Iran Really Wants. Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era*, in "Foreign Affairs", May/June 2014.

⁸⁴ B. FRIEDMAN, *The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Negotiations with Iran*, cit..

lateral fora to promote stability and security⁸⁵. However, Rouhani's attempt to overcome the international community's hostility would have been fruitless without an international environment conducive to it: a US administration resolutely available to dialogue, but also the radicalization of the Middle Eastern region after the rise of *Da'esh*, civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the worsening of relations between Russia and the West. All these events had an impact on security, in its broader meaning, and Iran's diplomatic team skillfully leveraged such numerous shared challenges during negotiations, thus creating space for a compromise⁸⁶. An Iran finally legitimized to become part of the solution, in the same way as it was during the 2001 Bonn conference on post-Taliban Afghanistan and before becoming part of the so-called the "axis of evil", could benefit from such a compromise⁸⁷.

Empowered by such an environment, Rouhani translated his vision into tangible actions by engaging with new and old partners. Rather than investing in symbolic ties to counter US policies and isolation as it was the case with Ahmadinejad's Latin American foreign policy, Rouhani prioritized engagement with partners instrumental in satisfying Iran's economic interests, namely those in the region and in the West. Therefore, numerous projects for enhanced cooperation in the security, energy, and trade fields have been discussed with Caspian basin's neighbours, although a solution to the legal dispute on the basin's juridical status is essential to unlock all its potential. The international environment affected especially Iran's relation with the basin's most powerful neighbour, Russia. The Ukrainian crisis, the resulting growing tensions with the Western powers, and the Syrian military partnership pushed Moscow to enhance its post-Cold War military⁸⁸ and commercial ties with Iran, a tactical rather than ideological means to

⁸⁵ Including the proposal for a collective pact for security in the Persian Gulf, and Rouhani's wave for a World Against Violence and Extremism and free of nuclear weapons: cf. H.E. G. KHOSHROO, *World Against Violence and Extremism*, in "Iran Review", 24 December 2013; M. ALI SHABANI, *Broaden the Talks with Iran*, in "The New York Times", 27 April 2015.

⁸⁶ J. ZARIF, *A nuclear deal, then a choice to co-operate on extremism*, in "Financial Times", 8 July 2015.

⁸⁷ D. KAYE, *The Middle East After Vienna. Here's What Will Happen If the Iran Deal Falls Through*, in "Foreign Affairs", 7 July 2015.

⁸⁸ Trend Indicator Values of arms exports to Iran (1970-2014), SIPRI Arms Transfers Database.

break each other's isolation⁸⁹. The crisis also pushed Russia to establish a mutually beneficial energy sector partnership with Iran. While the two countries cooperate in the nuclear sector, they are competitors in gas exports to Asia and possibly to Europe in the years ahead. In this context, much depends on Iran's relations with Turkey, a transit hub linking the Gulf to the Mediterranean. Despite divergent positions on the Arab Springs and Syrian civil war, Turkey has long been an important commercial partner of Iran and bilateral cooperation agreements on trade and energy just increased during Rouhani's presidency, whose goal, showed also by the reaction to the failed coup d'état of July 2016, is to maintain the status quo and, as a consequence, their profitable trade relationship.

Looking eastwards, the removal of sanctions is gradually helping many Asian countries, led by China, to finalize trade and energy partnerships involving Iran, previously put on hold by the fear of US and EU penalties. India's moves in developing the Iranian port of Chabahar and in participating in the North-South Transport Corridor signal also a broader strategic interest⁹⁰ which is analogous to China's concern about Iran's inclusion in its One Belt One Road⁹¹'s economic corridor which provides Beijing with access to the Indian Ocean and new trade routes which bypass the maritime bottlenecks of Hormuz and Malacca. Aware of such interests, Iran has been trying to secure its full membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, but at the same time Rouhani's numerous visits to Central Asian landlocked states presented Iran as an alternative to Chinese or Russian over-reliance and a bridge towards international markets⁹².

⁸⁹ N. KOZHANOV, *Understanding the Revitalization of Russian-Iranian Relations*, Carnegie Endowment Moscow Center, 5 May 2015, p. 19. Iran's market replaced the EU's for Russian embargoed products.

⁹⁰ Aimed at countering China's presence in Gwadar, Pakistan, and a gateway for trade towards central Asia. The INSTC transport route project was established in 2000 by Russia, Iran, and India to promote road, rail, and naval transport from the Indian Ocean to the north of Europe through the Persian Gulf and the Caspian basin: cf. http://www.instc-org.ir/Pages/Home_Page.aspx.

⁹¹ It is a development framework through which China wants to connect trade in Central Asia and Eastern Europe, by investing in a land and a maritime route, backed by the new financial institution AIIB, of which Iran was one of the first partners: cf. *Prospects and challenges on China's 'one belt, one road': a risk assessment report*, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015.

⁹² A. VATANKA, *Does Iran have a 'bridge' to Central Asia?*, in "al-Monitor", 18 March 2015.

Less relevant for commercial ties but much more for political purposes is Iran's projection towards the Levant. Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, and the new Shia-led government in Iraq remain fundamental allies for Iran's strategic depth. This explained Rouhani's approval to Khamenei's deployment of paramilitary forces in Syria and Iraq to support local militias⁹³ against those who challenge the stability of Tehran-allied official governments. Such military deployment contrasted with Rouhani's call for political solutions but made up for the initial exclusion of Tehran from negotiations and Iran's reluctance to compromise on its "external provinces"⁹⁴. Something not different from Saudi Arabia's stance with regard to Yemen. Its strategic position over the Bab al-Mandeb strait and the porosity of its shared borders have made a priority for the Saudis to have an allied government in Sana'a which can check the Houthis' insurgency, keep unified a fragile terrorism-ridden country, and safeguard Saudi interests in that key trade route. The decision to intervene militarily in March 2015 heading a "Sunni" coalition was motivated formally to restore the legitimate president Hadi and more tacitly to check Iran's expansion of influence⁹⁵. Rouhani's desire to open a dialogue on the security of the Persian Gulf, calling on cooperation based on non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual respect, however, has so far clashed with reality. In addition to theological differences, the possibility that the Islamic revolution could expand Iran's influence in the region threatening Saudi Arabian supremacy was a constant concern to Riyadh. Such concerns have led to a destabilization of numerous regional theatres, animated by proxy countries funded either by Iran or Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. During Rouhani's presidency, despite his focus on economic recovery and warnings against regional over-expansion, no significant improvements have taken place on that front. Indeed, quite the opposite has happened as the confrontation has

⁹³ Iran did not limit its influence to the battlefield, but for many years its agents have also been infiltrating the police, influential state agencies, and political parties, in order to maintain some leverage even in case of removal of their allied rulers. Iran's political influence was clearly showcased in approving Mr. Abadi after deposing Iraqi prime minister Maliki: cf. *Haider al-Abadi: A new era for Iraq?*, BBC News, 9 September 2014.

⁹⁴ Some Iranian authorities defined Syria as Iran's 35th province, stressing the huge security implications in case of the fall of this inevitable foothold for Iran's projection and defense of interests in the Mashreq: cf. N. BAHÉLI, *Le mosse dell'Iran nella guerra di Siria*, in "Limes", 2014.

⁹⁵ *Proxies and paranoia*, in "The Economist", 25 July 2015.

become even more intense, by leveraging more and more the over-politicized sectarian dimension⁹⁶.

In the Arabian Peninsula, however, there is also space for coordination, mostly driven by business opportunities. Qatar, Oman, and even the United Arab Emirates⁹⁷ are reluctant to jeopardize lucrative trade and energy relationships with Iran, be they the exploitation of the South Pars/North Dome gas field, financial transactions, or underground pipeline projects. Going the extra mile, Oman's co-management of the Strait of Hormuz, the off-shore gas and oil fields of Hengam, and military exercises dealing with maritime security and anti-piracy also display an interest in tackling regional threats collectively⁹⁸.

8. *The way ahead. Diplomatic returns of Rouhani's foreign policy: a paradigm for regional crises*

One year on, IAEA's reports confirm that Iran has committed itself to the implementation of the deal, but an enduring hostile climate risks foiling the goals achieved so far. In this article, little was argued that the years of Rouhani's presidency and the above-mentioned landmark deal have been absolute game changers in Iran's fulfillment of its strategic objectives and regional stability. International reintegration cannot take place overnight and much more efforts are required to build trust among its opponents. As a consequence, sustained engagement is vital not to lose momentum, because the previous alternative, framed

⁹⁶ It was the case of al-Nimr execution, the assault on the Saudi diplomatic seats in Iran, the exclusion from the 2016 Hajj following the 2015 stampede, and also the Yemeni civil war itself, which despite being caused by domestic tribal, economic, and administrative issues, was portrayed as a mainly sectarian conflict: cf. *Yemen: terra di scontro tra Arabia e Iran?*, ISPI, 26 March 2015.

⁹⁷ Despite the pro-Saudi stance of Abu Dhabi and the ongoing territorial dispute of the islands Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb: cf. *The nuclear deal's other winner*, in "The Economist", 25 July 2015.

⁹⁸ About proposals for establishing collective regional security in the Gulf since 1970s, cf. J. JONES, N. RIDOUT, *History of Modern Oman*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 184. On Oman's cultural traits cf. V. HOFFMAN, *The Essentials of Ibadi Islam*, New York, Syracuse University Press, 2012, p. 13. It is true that Oman's cultural traits render it different from other GCC countries (e.g. detached from sectarianism). But the security of trade routes in the Persian Gulf affects all the bordering countries collectively and not only Oman.

on a policy of confrontation, did not pay off. Domestically, the poorest suffered the most from isolation, whereas abroad in all the regional crises the mere use of force, unilateral military ventures, the resort to sectarian narratives, and non-inclusive negotiations proved ineffective to establish enduring stability.

Rouhani tried to highlight the merits of constructive interaction with Iran. The nuclear negotiations showcased that a win-win approach to handle regional issues through multilateral political solutions and diplomacy turned out to be an effective way of defending national interests. Upon taking office Rouhani replaced Ahmadinejad's aggressive approach and policies with a policy of pragmatic dialogue with anyone willing to take part in it, aware that the so-called regional rivals share more common socio-economic challenges than sources of discord in which it is better to invest instead of diverting money to double-edged militarism. These recent years' regional challenges such as terrorism, population growth, high youth unemployment, fiscal deficits, domestic political unrest and also environmental concerns⁹⁹, are shared by all those regional countries characterized by non-diversified economies and social contracts that limit political rights¹⁰⁰. As they can be overcome successfully only with policy coordination which goes beyond the region's contrasted ideological framework, they provide a golden opportunity to at least explore an alternative way to handle regional affairs which can settle long-time disputes and cooperate for the security and development of the region; something to be achieved by replacing arms races and war of words with regional collective actions and political dialogue.

As far as Iran is concerned, it would be important that the next President, be it Rouhani or somebody else, maintains the same approach to reap the benefits of these years' momentum and, from the outside, it is necessary to increase the costs of defection by welcoming the country into regional and international organisations¹⁰¹ and by

⁹⁹ L. AL-KHATTEEB, *Gulf oil economies must wake up or face decades of decline*, in "Middle East Economic Survey", 14 August 2015. This point on "dissatisfaction inside their own countries" threatening regional countries was also made by President Obama in an interview released to T. FRIEDMAN, *Iran and the Obama doctrine*, cit..

¹⁰⁰ Despite the constraints on free political competition, the Islamic Republic, with its elective institutions, provides more political rights than any other country in the region and also enjoys a more diversified economy than those of the Gulf: cf. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/iran>.

¹⁰¹ According to the theory of international regimes, institutions play a role in altering the payoffs of partnerships, by increasing the costs of defection and decreasing those

leveraging the multiple assets the country has to offer: human capital, energy resources, and a position as a gateway for strategic routes. This will make the country more accountable, because it is these assets that lead to responsible behaviour.

Riassunto - L'articolo propone un'analisi critica della presidenza Rouhani in vista delle elezioni presidenziali iraniane del 2017, esaminando il suo tentativo di ristabilire il ruolo di potenza regionale della Repubblica Islamica logoratosi negli anni delle sanzioni nucleari. L'articolo sostiene che le misure adottate dall'amministrazione Rouhani sono state determinanti per il graduale reintegro dell'Iran nei circuiti politici ed economici globali. A questo proposito viene valutato

l'impatto dei provvedimenti di politica estera di Rouhani – incluso l'accordo sul nucleare (JCPOA nell'acronimo inglese) – sulla capacità del paese di consolidare il proprio potere economico e il quadro di sicurezza regionale. L'analisi rivela come queste misure abbiano provocato opportunità e sfide allo stesso tempo: Rouhani ha mostrato i meriti del proprio approccio diplomatico e costruttivo, ma un impegno duraturo è fondamentale per estenderne i benefici.

of cooperation, so that Iran's admission to regional or international organisations should increase Iran's accountability: cf. R.O. KEOHANE, *After Hegemony*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984.

ARMS CONTROL DIPLOMACY AND THE NEW START TREATY: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

by Daria Shumilova

Introduction

The New START Treaty¹ was signed between the United States and Russia on April 8, 2010 after eight rounds of talks held in both Moscow and Geneva by states' representatives as well as official meetings and negotiations between both presidents. The new Treaty replaced the previous START I which expired in December 2009. It also supersedes the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) of 2002². It entered into force on February 5, 2011 after it was approved for ratification both by the Senate and the Russian Parliament and the instruments for ratification were exchanged by the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov. Reduction requirements must be met 7 years after its entering into force (EIF) and then, ten years after EIF, the Treaty expires if is not prolonged for additional five years according to the mutual consent of both parties. The Treaty has become one of the most important milestones in the "reset diplomacy" between the United States and Russia since both countries showed their common interest towards arms control and nuclear security. It has also introduced the most significant reductions in the history of strategic offensive arms limitations (74% less than provided by START

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¹ The official title of the New START is the *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*.

² The SORT Treaty was to remain in force until December 31, 2012, unless replaced by a subsequent treaty; this provision is also stated in the New START Treaty (Article XIV [4]).

I and 30% less than SORT limits)³. At the same time the Treaty left many issues unresolved and created a basis for a possible conflict in the future: aspects connected with US global missile defense, tactical nuclear weapons and strategic conventional weapons were not covered by the New START. Consequently, there is a following question: was the New START a breakthrough in US-Russian diplomatic relations or a possible dead-end of arms control diplomacy?

1. *Background, negotiations and ratification*

During Bush administration negotiations regarding the replacement of START I Treaty were very slow and without any substantial progress, especially after George W. Bush announced his plans for the European missile defense in Poland and Czech Republic. However, when a new Democrat, Barack Obama, took office in 2009 he proposed a brand new agenda for his foreign policy, especially in nuclear arms control sphere.

On April 5, 2009, Obama delivered his famous Prague speech about the future world free of nuclear weapons and the US role in achieving this ultimate goal: “America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons”. He also reaffirmed that the United States and Russia agreed on starting negotiations on a new strategic arms reduction Treaty earlier in London⁴. This London meeting was described to be very positive and productive⁵, leaders from both countries reached a good level of mutual understanding and agreed on a “fresh start” of their relationship.

At the same time, already at this first meeting the contentious issue of the European missile defense system appeared; though both leaders agreed on the following statement: “new possibilities for mutual international co-operation in the field of missile defense, taking into account joint assessments of missile challenges and threats, aimed at enhancing the security of our countries, and that of our allies and partners”⁶, it was clear that the question is far from being resolved.

³ *Key Facts about the New START Treaty*, The White House Fact Sheet, 26.03.2016.

⁴ I. TRAYNOR, *Barack Obama launches doctrine for nuclear-free world*, in “The Guardian”, 05.04.2009.

⁵ J. BORGER, *Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev promise nuclear arsenal deal by the end of year*, in “The Guardian”, 01.04.2009.

⁶ J. BORGER, *Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev promise nuclear arsenal deal by the end of year*, cit..

Official New START negotiations began shortly after the Prague speech. In the beginning, the US administration officials sought to conclude a final agreement by December 2009, before the expiration of the START I Treaty. They hoped for quick Senate ratification of the Treaty, after which the Administration could focus its efforts on ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)⁷. However, it took a whole year of eight rounds of negotiations between the parties both in Moscow and Geneva:

- 1st round: May 2009, Moscow;
- 2nd – 8th rounds: June – November 2009, Geneva.

Delegations were led by the State Department Assistant Secretary, Rose Gottemoeller, from the US side and the Director of Security and Disarmament at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Anatoly Antonov, from the Russian side.

On July 6, 2009 both leaders announced and signed a “Joint Understanding on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms”. This was an important milestone in negotiations since the document listed parties’ intention to reduce nuclear warheads to 1,500-1,675 units and delivery weapons to 500-1,100 units.

During the additional round of talks in Geneva in February 2010, serious differences emerged between the parties regarding verification system, specifically numerical limits to verification regarding encryption of telemetry and production monitoring. These differences led to another prolongation of talks until the compromise was finally found.

In March 2010, a month before the signing of the final text of the Treaty, the negotiation process was halted again from the Russian side: the Russian delegation demanded the provision of unilateral withdrawal from the Treaty if the US missile defense threatened its nuclear deterrence capabilities. European missile defense system deployed near Russian borders, in the view of Russian military officials, would undermine its strategic security and the whole balance of power with the United States. The very concept of nuclear deterrence is based on retaliatory capabilities of both countries: they should be equal so that in case of a conflict neither side would have an incentive to strike first. One of the key elements is the correlation between offensive and

⁷ S. PIFER, *New START at Three... and What Next*, by “The Brookings Institution”, 04.02.2014.

defensive forces: the latter should not be deployed massively in order not to diminish offensive capabilities. Finally, it was agreed to include a provision about the relation between offensive and defensive forces in the Treaty. The Russian side also made a unilateral statement regarding the US missile defense and Russia's possible withdrawal⁸.

On March 26, 2010, both presidents announced that they managed to come to a final agreement on the Treaty, which meant that the process was almost finished.

Obama and Medvedev signed the New START Treaty in Prague on April 8, 2010 and then the text of the Treaty together with the Protocols, Annexes and unilateral statements was submitted to the Senate and to the Russian State Duma (the lower chamber of the Russian parliament) on May, 13 and May, 26 respectively.

Both the US Senate and the State Duma conducted numerous hearings regarding the effectiveness of the Treaty and its utility for each side in the next eight months. The Treaty created a lot of criticism in both countries. In the United States, the core of the Treaty opposition was centered around Republican leaders: the Minority Leader, Mitch McConnell and the Whip, Jon Kyl. Other Republicans such as Sarah Palin and Mitt Romney also supported them. They criticized both the process (short deadlines for ratification, indiscretion of talks) and substance (stockpile reductions, threats for the US missile defense, tactical weapons issues)⁹. In Russia, opposition was less diverse, yet it still existed: the main opponents of ratification were Konstantin Kosachev, the Chairman of the Defense Committee, and Sergey Mironov, the Chairman of the upper Chamber of the Russian Parliament. Their main concerns were the US missile defense and restrictions for Russian arsenals. However, after these long debates, the US Senate gave its consent for ratification (71-26) on December 22, 2010. It paved the way for the Russian ratification: Russian Parliament gave its consent (350-58) on December 24.

This lengthy ratification process of the New START was finished in the beginning of 2011. On January 28, 2011, Dmitry Medvedev signed the ratification resolution passed by the Russian Parliament and finished Russian ratification process. President Obama signed ratification

⁸ S. N. KILE, *Making a new START in Russian-US nuclear arms control*, by "Stockholm International Peace Research Institute", 25.06.2009.

⁹ T. Z. COLLINA, *Senate Approves New START*, in "Arms Control Today", Vol. 41, No. 1, 2011, p. 41.

documents completing the US ratification process on February 2, 2011. The New START entered into force when Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, and US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, exchanged ratification instruments in Munich, Germany, on February 5, 2011¹⁰.

It should be emphasized that the personal factor played a very significant role in the negotiation process: new presidents of both countries showed their commitment towards cooperation and mutual understanding thus representing a true “reset” of bilateral relations. They felt the need to be more attentive to each other’s interests and concerns and to find common ground. Obama and Medvedev established good personal relations¹¹; moreover, their images both inside their countries and on international arena as young leaders with new political agenda and new solutions for new time found population support of both countries.

2. *Treaty structure; arms reductions and verification mechanism*

The main objective of the Treaty was to create a more effective mechanism of strategic offensive arms reductions and impose higher limits on strategic nuclear arsenals of both countries. At the same time, the new Treaty had to be more flexible than a 500 pages START I.

The New START is composed of three different parts (“tiers”) with an increasing level of detail. The first “tier” is the official text of the Treaty itself, which is composed of preamble and 16 articles. The preamble of the Treaty is also very important to mention since it includes a part about missile defense, which is regarded differently by the United States and Russia. The second “tier” is composed by the Protocol to the Treaty, which contains additional provisions related to rights and obligations under the Treaty. The third one is the Technical Annexes to the Protocol with all necessary technical information related to the following agreement¹². All the three parts of the New START Treaty

¹⁰ D. H. JOYNER, *Introductory Note to the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty*, in “International Legal Materials”, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2011, p. 341.

¹¹ S. RYABKOV, *The View from Moscow*, in “Journal of International Affairs”, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2010, p. 208.

¹² *New START at a Glance*, Fact Sheets & Briefs, by “Arms Control Association”, 15.10.2010.

are equally legally binding and were to be submitted for ratification consent together¹³.

The most important provisions of the Treaty are:

- Article II: setting of the main limits: warheads and launchers
- Article III: counting rules

The most important part of the New START introduces deeper cuts that are legally binding for both the United States and Russia (Table 1): according to Article II, they reduce the number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads and bombs in their arsenals to 1,550 warheads.

Table 1 - *New START limits*

<i>Type</i>	<i>Limit</i>
Deployed ICBMs, SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers	700
Warheads on deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, nuclear warheads counted for deployed heavy bombers	1550
Deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers	800

Source: *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, Article II (1 (a) – (c)), April, 8, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>

It is important to mention that, according to counting rules (Article III), each heavy bomber is counted as one warhead. Such a rule can create several ambiguities: for example, though US heavy bomber B-52 can carry up to 20 nuclear bombs, it is still counted as one warhead. Some opponents of the Treaty, for example Lawrence J. Korb, even argue that such a situation can be used by Russia to escape nuclear warheads limits¹⁴. As for launchers limits, the number of deployed ICBMs, SLBMs¹⁵ launchers and heavy bombers carrying nuclear bombs is limited to 700 units, while both deployed and non-deployed launchers should comprise no more than 800 units. The limit of 800 was

¹³ *Key Facts about the New START Treaty*, cit..

¹⁴ A. COHEN, L. J. KORB, J. H. SOKOLSKI, M. H. HALPERIN, G. BRUNO (interviewer), *Debating the New START Treaty*, by “Council on Foreign Relations”, 22.07.2010.

¹⁵ ICBM – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile; SLBM – Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile.

set to prevent either party from maintaining large numbers of non-deployed launchers. The Treaty contains a certain degree of flexibility regarding the structure of strategic nuclear forces (Article II[2]): “each side has the flexibility to structure its nuclear forces as it wishes”¹⁶. Treaty limits must be achieved seven years after EIF, which means that both countries still have two years to comply with the obligations.

◦ Articles VI, IX, X, XI: verification and monitoring mechanisms

New START verification mechanism consists partly of previous rules of START I as well as of new provisions. Like the previous Treaty, it contains detailed technical information and definitions of all weapons and delivery systems mentioned in the New START, the usage of National Technical Means of Verification (NTM)¹⁷ to gather information about each side’s forces and military activities, the development and maintenance of a database on numbers, types and locations of limited units and mutual inspections for data confirmations. At the same time, the new verification regime is less expensive and more flexible than START I regime: it is focused, in particular, on maintaining transparency and cooperation between countries¹⁸. Under the new Treaty, both sides still rely on NTM as the main means of verification as well as telemetry data¹⁹ exchange up to 5 times per year in order to provide more transparency. Data exchange between parties includes not only technical characteristics of their strategic forces but also their exact locations; it should be made 45 days after EIF. The Treaty also includes an obligation to display openly strategic forces during exhibitions (Article XI [4]): “purpose of such exhibitions shall be to demonstrate distinguishing features and to confirm technical characteristics

¹⁶ *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

¹⁷ *National Technical Monitoring System*; national monitoring system, e.g. satellite photography, high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft or unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), that is used to control and verify the compliance with treaties’ provisions; it was introduced for the first time in the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union.

¹⁸ A. F. WOOLF, *The New START Treaty: Central Limits and Key Provisions*, by “Congressional Research Service”, 13.04.2016, p. 13.

¹⁹ *Telemetry data* (according to the New START); data that is generated during missile tests and then is broadcast to the other side as a means of monitoring.

of new types...”²⁰. Exhibitions timetable is also provided by the Treaty: for instance, the exhibition of the new US bomber B-1B is planned to occur one year after EIF. Another aspect of verification system is the distinction between “Type One” and “Type Two” inspections that can be conducted 60 days after EIF: the former occur at ICBM, submarine and air bases with deployed and non-deployed launchers and the latter at facilities with non-deployed or converted launchers. Each party can conduct up to 10 “Type One” inspections and eight “Type Two” inspections all of which are short-notice ones. With such a system of monitoring and inspections it is easier to deter a possible buildup of strategic offensive forces beyond Treaty limits²¹.

- Article XII: the establishment of the Bilateral Consultative Commission to “promote the objectives and implementation of the provisions of the Treaty”²²
- Preamble, Article V, Unilateral Statement: ballistic missile defense

The Treaty itself does not impose any constraint on the US missile defense system development; however, missile defense is mentioned in its preamble: “Recognizing the existence of the interrelationship between strategic offensive arms and strategic defensive arms, that this interrelationship will become more important as strategic nuclear arms are reduced, and that current strategic defensive arms do not undermine the viability and effectiveness of the strategic offensive arms of the Parties”²³. This statement shows both the willingness of the first Obama administration to have a comprehensive dialogue with Moscow but, at the same time, to pursue American vital security interests.

The New START, at the same time, contains several provisions related to missile defense although they do not directly constrain it. For instance, Article III contains the following provision which excludes missile defense from the Treaty: “A missile of a type developed and

²⁰ *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

²¹ A. F. WOOLF, *The New START Treaty: Central Limits and Key Provisions*, cit, p. 14.

²² *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

²³ *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

tested solely to intercept and counter objects not located on the surface of the Earth shall not be considered to be a ballistic missile to which the provisions of this Treaty apply”²⁴. Article V, however, does pose an indirect constraint on the development of missile defense by restricting the conversion of existing offensive systems into defensive: “Each Party shall not convert and shall not use ICBM launchers and SLBM launchers for placement of missile defense interceptors therein”²⁵.

◦ Article XIV: duration and withdrawal from the Treaty

The Treaty remains in force for 10 years after EIF if it is not superseded by another agreement. It can also be prolonged for additional five years according to mutual consent of both parties. Each party can also withdraw from the Treaty in case of extraordinary circumstances that would undermine Parties’ supreme national interests. The Russian side used this provision to refer to the US missile defense. On April 8, 2010 the Russian prime minister made an official statement regarding missile defense issue and New START Treaty: “The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms signed in Prague on April 8, 2010, can operate and be viable only if the United States of America refrains from developing its missile defense capabilities quantitatively or qualitatively”²⁶.

3. *The New START flaws*

Although the New START was a significant achievement of the “re-set diplomacy”, it also contains several flaws that could undermine its importance and create additional problems. The main disadvantages of the Treaty mentioned by researchers and experts are the following:

1. No significant breakthrough. Since one of the goals of arms reductions is the possible total elimination of nuclear weapons in the world in the future, i.e. “global zero”, it is particularly important that arms control

²⁴ *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

²⁵ *Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 08.04.2010.

²⁶ *Statement of the Russian Federation Concerning Missile Defense*, 08.04.2010.

- negotiations go beyond Cold War concepts of nuclear deterrence: in this sense, the New START does little to change the situation;
2. Exclusion of missile defense from the Treaty. As described earlier, missile defense issue was one of the most serious points of disagreement between the United States and Russia; the Treaty was concluded without any comprehensive agreement on this issue. Currently, missile defense is not controlled or restricted by any legally binding Treaty and can be freely developed to significant levels that would destabilize nuclear balance;
 3. No mention of tactical nuclear weapons. The topic of tactical nuclear weapons is particularly vulnerable for Russia because of China's superiority position in conventional tactical weapons: thus, China is not interested in negotiations regarding their reductions. For the United States this topic is of significant importance in terms of the European security; however, for the USA itself Russian tactical weapons do not pose any strategic threat. Therefore, it was decided not to include this issue in the Treaty in order to make an agreement, though it is evident that tactical weapons should also be covered by further treaties and agreements and the United States are particularly interested in this;
 4. No altering of launch-ready alert placements. Approximately 1/3 of the US and Russian arsenals is constantly on "launch-ready alert" which means that they are constantly ready to be launched: "A massive salvo can commence just a few minutes after the combat order is received by the crews on duty"²⁷. This system is extremely vulnerable because of false alerts, mistakes and nuclear terrorism, when nuclear weapons can be stolen while being transported from one facility to another²⁸;
 5. "Overkill" problem of nuclear arsenals and possible deeper cuts. One of the recent reports published by the "Global Zero Initiative" suggests that, based on computer modelling, for effective nuclear deterrence it is currently sufficient to have 1,000 nuclear warheads (instead of 1,500) and 500 launchers (instead of 800)²⁹. "Deterren-

²⁷ B. BLAIR, V. ESIN, P. ZOLOTAREV, M. MCKINZIE, V. YARYNICH, *Smaller and Safer: A New Plan for Nuclear Postures*, in "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 89, No. 5, 2010, p. 11.

²⁸ B. BLAIR, V. ESIN, P. ZOLOTAREV, M. MCKINZIE, V. YARYNICH, *Smaller and Safer: A New Plan for Nuclear Postures*, cit., p. 11.

²⁹ B. BLAIR, V. ESIN, P. ZOLOTAREV, M. MCKINZIE, V. YARYNICH, *Smaller and Safer: A New Plan for Nuclear Postures*, cit., p. 10.

ce today would remain stable even if retaliation against only ten cities were assured. So arsenals can safely be reduced much further than the New START level”³⁰. Unfortunately, owing to the current state of US-Russian affairs this is almost impossible;

6. Bilateral character of the Treaty. Most current arms control and reduction Treaties (except for the NPT and CTBT) are bilateral though there are more than two nuclear powers in the world, even if the United States and Russia both possess more than 90% of world nuclear arsenals. No negotiations about deeper cuts are possible if they remain bilateral: neither Russia nor the USA would agree on significant reductions in a situation in which China builds-up nuclear weapons.

4. *The Future of the New START*

The future of arms control and the New START Treaty in particular depends on several conditions:

1. Compliance with Treaty provisions. This is one of the most important aspects in arms control. As of April, 2016, both parties pursued their obligations under the Treaty. The report on the aggregate numbers of strategic offensive weapons published by the United States on the 1st April states that “numbers of the US deployed nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles continue to fall, whereas Russian stockpile has increased by 87 since the January 2016 report”³¹. Treaty limits should be achieved by 2018, seven years after its EIF and, as it can be seen, both countries move towards these limits. However, there are serious concerns regarding the future compliance with the Treaty. Diplomatic relations between countries have severed a lot during last years which leads to the second condition:
2. Trust-building, confidence and transparency. This is the aspect that was hampered most by the new “cooling” of US-Russian relations: honestly speaking, “reset diplomacy” failed even if produced some positive results such as New START or Iran cooperation. No

³⁰ B. BLAIR, V. ESIN, P. ZOLOTAREV, M. MCKINZIE, V. YARYNICH, *Smaller and Safer: A New Plan for Nuclear Postures*, cit., p. 10.

³¹ *Overview of the New START Treaty by NTI* (Nuclear Threat Initiative); NTI: a non-profit American organization dealing with issues of global security, arms control and non-proliferation. It exists to strengthen global security by reducing the spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

arms control regime can exist without a substantial level of trust between parties. This was the objective of both American and Russian leaders when they signed the New START Treaty with effective measures of verification and control: make nuclear policies of the United States and Russia more predictable and transparent. The current state of affairs which is described by many experts as “a new Cold War” does not provide a stable and profound basis for such trust: diplomatic relations are centered around mutual criticisms and accusations regarding Ukrainian crisis and NATO enlargement. There is currently no agenda for any substantial arms control talks: “there needs to be an improvement in the overall political relationship between Washington and Moscow”³²;

3. “Good faith”. This aspect covers the attitude towards compliance with the Treaty. Since the New START Treaty does not cover missile defense, tactical weapons and rail-mobile ICBM systems, it is legally not prohibited to develop them. However, as Cicerone said: “nec si non obstat propterea etiam permittitur”, which means that the fact that something is not prohibited does not mean that it is allowed. Both parties should understand that using Treaty flaws to indirectly violate its provisions hampers not only its future but also the very confidence-building process of bilateral relations. For instance, American missile defense system, though said to be against possible threats from Iran, is also said to be a possible threat to Russian national security. Even if it is not possible, Russia side is still concerned by the presence of such missile defense systems proximate to its borders. Russia, at the same time, is currently developing a new rail-mobile ICBM system that would be able to carry up to six ICBMs in response to European missile defense³³. Such actions further undermine the already fragile trust between the countries.

However, the promising fact is that both the United States and Russia seem to understand that arms control is an issue of mutual interest and significance and that the compliance with the New START provisions

³² S. PIFER, *Modest Expectations*, in “The Cipher Brief”, 06.04.2016 (Steven Pifer is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution; his main field of academic research is arms control and US - Russian relations).

³³ V. LITOVKIN, *Russia to revive missile trains as U.S. launches European defense system*, in “Russia Beyond the Headlines”, 17.05.2016.

is one of its key elements³⁴. Even now, when bilateral relations between both sides are at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War, there is a hope that there can be a successful future for arms control.

Conclusions

Idealist view of arms control is a “global zero” reduction: however, in the present moment such objective is almost impossible to achieve. “Global zero” requires an absolutely different framework in the relations between the United States and Russia since currently neither side is ready to drop the mutual deterrence in favor of total elimination of nuclear weapons. New START Treaty, though containing in itself many flaws and disadvantages, is still a legally binding arms control Treaty that sets exact limits to deployed strategic warheads and deployed and non-deployed launchers. Both parties pursue their obligations even in the absence of any enforcement measures. However, to promote arms reductions further and overcome the New START flaws, there should be negotiations for a new subsequent Treaty which is almost impossible at the present moment. Answering the research question, posed in the beginning, the New START Treaty cannot be considered either a total success or failure given its weak and strong aspects. In any case, it is definitely a good example of mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nuclear powers.

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³⁴ S. PIFER, *Modest Expectations*, cit..

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- Remarks by the President Obama at the Brandenburg Gate*, Berlin, Germany, 19.06.2013, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary.
- Overview of the New START Treaty by NTI (Nuclear Threat Initiative).*

Riassunto - L'articolo analizza le prospettive del Trattato New START sulla riduzione delle armi nucleari tra Stati Uniti e Russia, firmato l'8 Aprile 2010 in sostituzione del precedente START I scaduto nel dicembre 2009. Il Trattato è entrato in vigore il 5 febbraio 2011 dopo essere stato ratificato dal Senato Americano e dal Parlamento Russo, e dopo lo scambio degli strumenti necessari alla ratifica tra il Segretario di Stato americano Hillary Clinton e il Ministro degli Affari Esteri russo Sergei Lavrov. E' previsto che le riduzioni richieste siano soddisfatte sette anni dopo l'entrata in vigore del Trattato e che dopo dieci anni questo scada, salvo un ulteriore prolungamento di cinque anni. Il Trattato è diventato una delle

pietre miliari della *reset diplomacy* tra gli Stati Uniti e la Russia. Ha anche introdotto le riduzioni più significative della storia per quanto riguarda le limitazioni delle armi strategiche offensive (il 74% in meno di quelle previste da START I e il 30% in meno rispetto ai limiti di SORT). Allo stesso tempo, il Trattato ha lasciato irrisolte molte questioni e ha creato le basi per possibili conflitti in futuro: il sistema della difesa missilistica globale degli Stati Uniti, le armi nucleari tattiche e le armi strategiche convenzionali non sono stati infatti coperti dal nuovo Trattato. E' quindi legittimo chiedersi se il Trattato New START sia stato un progresso significativo nelle relazioni diplomatiche russo-americane.

REPUBBLICHE EX-SOVIETICHE DELL'ASIA CENTRALE: GEOPOLITICA ED ECONOMIA

PRESENTAZIONE

di **Fernando Orlandi**

Nel corso degli ultimi anni la Biblioteca Archivio del Centro Studi sulla Storia dell'Europa Orientale (CSSEO), in collaborazione con il Centro Studi sull'Azerbaijan e il Centro Studi sul Caspio, ha organizzato alcuni convegni e seminari di studio sull'Asia centrale e la regione del Caspio¹. Grazie anche all'iniziativa della rivista "Il Politico", è sorta l'idea di raccogliere e pubblicare una serie di contributi sulle repubbliche ex-sovietiche dell'Asia centrale.

La conoscenza e lo studio dell'Asia centrale non sono particolarmente sviluppati nel nostro paese. Non si tratta, comunque, di una situazione soltanto italiana. Quanto normalmente poco si conosca dell'Asia centrale sovietica e post-sovietica è testimoniato infatti da un recente infortunio del "New York Times". Giusto nel gennaio 2015, infatti, un articolo di quel giornale faceva riferimento a un inesistente "Kyrzbekistan", che trovò un rapido account su Twitter e un posto nelle carte geografiche della regione immediatamente ridisegnate². Insomma, il sesto degli "stan".

Fino al 1991, anno dello scioglimento dell'Unione Sovietica, davvero pochi studiosi italiani avevano indirizzato la propria attenzio-

Presidente della Biblioteca Archivio del CSSEO, Levico Terme.

¹ In particolare, tra i più recenti: *Sguardi sulla regione del Caspio e l'Asia centrale* (Levico Terme, 8-9 luglio 2016); *L'Azerbaijan a 25 anni dall'indipendenza* (Bergamo, 14 novembre 2016) e *Geopolitica dell'energia. La regione del Caspio* (Levico Terme, 12-13 dicembre 2016).

² https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/08/sports/on-el-capitan-dawn-wall-in-yosemite-and-beyond-climber-tommy-caldwells-drive-pushes-him-toward-the-impossible.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=second-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=0; e anche: <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-01-09/kyrgyzbekistan-isnt-funny>.

ne all'Asia centrale sovietica e quindi ai cinque "stan" (Kazakistan, Kirgizistan, Tagikistan, Turkmenistan e Uzbekistan)³. Contro la loro volontà, nel 1992 queste repubbliche si trovarono a essere indipendenti, in una difficilissima congiuntura socio-economica successiva agli sconvolgimenti della perestroika di Mikhail Gorbachev e al lassismo e alla corruzione che avevano avuto il sopravvento negli anni Settanta-Ottanta (valga per tutti lo scandalo del cotone uzbeko). Per altro i cinque nuovi stati centroasiatici non erano attrezzati per vivere autonomamente, vuoi dal punto di vista della sicurezza, vuoi da quello economico.

Dalla metà degli anni Novanta alcuni degli "stan" sono stati al centro dell'attenzione in ragione delle preziose ricchezze energetiche di cui dispongono (in particolare Kazakistan e Turkmenistan). Ma queste ricchezze non si sono tradotte in stabilità e sviluppo sociale. Stati che si sono impegnati in avveniristici progetti edilizi oggi subiscono la sferzata conseguente al crollo del prezzo degli idrocarburi, mentre la crisi strutturale di una economia russa malata si riverbera su di loro: valute svalutate quindi, malcontento sociale, carsico diffondersi dell'islamismo radicale, sebbene in misura decisamente inferiore rispetto al pericolo denunciato. La battaglia contro l'islamismo radicale è infatti spesso la "foglia di fico" utile a nascondere la repressione degli oppositori e della società. A tutto si aggiunge il problema delle successioni, soprattutto quella di Nursultan Nazarbaev in Kazakistan.

Quei paesi conobbero una colonizzazione in epoca zarista, poi la guerra civile e la sovietizzazione. Con la collettivizzazione e la sedentarizzazione dei nomadi vissero tragedie quale la carestia del Kazakistan, che decimò la popolazione di quella repubblica⁴. L'Asia centrale, come la Siberia, restò luogo di deportazione, proseguendo l'Unione Sovietica la pratica zarista. Nel dopoguerra questi territori videro un nuovo insediamento di popolazioni slave (che in alcuni casi alterò profondamente i rapporti tra i vari gruppi etnici) e poi (in Kazakistan) l'avventura khrushcheviana delle "terre vergini".

³ Fanno eccezione alcuni lavori di Giovanni Bensi, tra cui *Allah contro Gorbaciov*, Gardolo di Trento, Luigi Reverdito, 1988, e di Marco Buttino, che nel 1991 organizzò a Cortona un importante convegno internazionale, i cui atti sono ora disponibili in M. BUTTINO (ed.), *In a Collapsing Empire*, Annali [della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli], anno ventesimo, 1992, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1993.

⁴ Su questa vicenda uno studioso italiano ha pubblicato, usando materiali d'archivio, una monografia di altissimo livello: cfr. N. PIANCIOLA, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Roma, Viella, 2009.

Nei contributi presentati in questo fascicolo ci si concentra soprattutto sul presente. In due di essi si tratteggiano vicende e prospettive di altrettanti “stan” dal 1991 ai giorni nostri (Lorena Di Placido sul Kazakistan e Fabio Indeo sul Turkmenistan), mentre gli altri offrono sguardi prospettici più generali sull’Asia centrale (Oleksiy Bondarenko sulla Russia e il “Russkii mir”, Jos Boonstra sulla strategia dell’Unione Europea, Emanuele Giordana sull’Afghanistan e Laura Rachele Galeotti su ruolo della Cina in Asia centrale). Ulteriori contributi saranno pubblicati su successivi fascicoli de “Il Politico”.

**‘RUSSKIJ MIR’, BETWEEN DIASPORA
AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY.
RUSSIA’S Foothold IN CENTRAL ASIA**

by **Oleksiy Bondarenko**

Introduction

After the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, the search for a new collective identity within the borders of the new Russian Federation collided with the multicultural and multiethnic reality of the Federation. Yet, the imperial experience of past centuries (the tsarist empire and the Soviet Union) was a serious hedge in limiting the room for a quick development of ideological references able to foster shared vision of state and society and country’s position in the new international system¹. Starting from the early nineties, one of several answers to the dissolution of the physical and ideal space previously entangled in the soviet ideology has been promoted by the broad concept of ‘Russkij Mir’ (Russian World). Given the vague burdens of the notion, it’s all but easy to trace a clear-cut definition of ‘Russian World’. Indeed, in its broad meaning the concept extends beyond the county’s geographical burdens embracing, beside the citizens of the Federation, the whole Russian *diaspora* and the population of new independent states risen from the ashes of the Soviet Union.

The meaning of ‘world’ in Russian context corresponds to some extent to the notion of ‘shared civilizational space’, claiming common religious, historical, cultural and linguistic values. In other words, beyond the definition of a core domestic ideological platform, the ‘Russian World’ notion

Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale (OPI).

¹ On the problems of self identification in post-Soviet Russia, the imperial legacies and international posture in the nineties, see D.TRENIN, *Post Imperium. A Eurasian story*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011.

forges a new conceptual framework for new relations between the center (Russia) and the periphery (post-soviet space) based on a common past and vague spiritual affinity². Indeed, the notion lays the foundations of a powerful ideological reference in addressing the Russian ‘post-imperial syndrome’³ and plays an important role in defining a new, post-imperial, foreign policy toward the neighborhood. Further, in claiming a special relationship with the diaspora, the concept offers a broad cultural repertoire by which the Kremlin could articulate its vision of the surrounding geopolitical space and define its ties with it. In an effort to explain the fluid structure of the ‘Russian World’ doctrine and its links with public diplomacy and foreign policy, several scholars agree in tracing the parallel with other similar post-imperial concepts as that of Francophonie or British Commonwealth. In all these cases, a particularistic vision of the world, or at least of the former empire, is assessed and promoted through references to a fuzzy cultural and linguistic heritage, still able to justify political and economic interest of the center in the former colonies⁴.

1. *Russkij Mir: origin, cornerstones and the ‘Russian question’*

Any effort to understand the influence of ‘Russian World’ concept on country’s foreign policy and its relations with the central Asian republics must begin by briefly exploring the genesis of the notion and its links with other instruments in the foreign policy realm⁵.

Although conceived during the late tsarist period by Count Sergei Uvarov⁶, the concept of ‘Russkij Mir’ has been reevaluated starting

² See E. OSTROVSKII, P. SHCHEDROVITSKII, *Rossii: strana, kotoroi ne bylo. Sozdat’ ‘imidzh’ Rossii segodnia oznachaet postroit’ novoiu sistemu sviazei mezhdru russkimi*, in “Russkii Arkhipelag” 1999, http://www.archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history99-00/she-drovicky-possia-no/, accessed 29 June 2016.

³ See D. TRENIN, *Post Imperium. A Eurasian story*, cit.

⁴ See for instance V. TISHKOV, *Russkii mir: smysl i strategii*, in “Strategiia Rossii,” n. 7, July 2007, http://sr.fondedin.ru/new/fullnews_arch_to.php?subaction=showfull&id=1185274651&archive=1185275035, accessed 28 June 2016; D. TRENIN, *Post Imperium. A Eurasian story*, cit.; V. TISHKOV, *The Russian World. Changing Meanings and Strategies*, Carnegie Papers n.95, August 2008.

⁵ See M. LIGHT, *In search of an identity: Russian foreign policy and the end of ideology*, in “Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics”, vol. 19, n. 3, 2003, pp. 42-59.

⁶ See M. LARUELLE, *The “Russian World”. Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*, Washington. The Center on Global Interests (CGI). 2015.

from the early nineties by an uneven group of scholars and politicians. Throughout that period an impressive contribution to the development of the contemporary framework of 'Russian World' was added by figures like Gleb Pavlovskij, Pëtr Schedrovitskij and Sergej Chernyšëv. Thanks to their versatile personalities and important links with the political circles close to the Kremlin, the theoretical approach to the question melted with marketing techniques introduced to Russia precisely by one of the Pavlovskij's firms, the 'Foundation for Effective Policy'⁷. Indeed, the Foundation was called to cooperate with several political figures as a consulting firm, developing their image and strategies during local and national political campaigns.

If the Pavlovskij's firm was the first step in the successful creation of the 'Russian World brand' and its commercialization, other 'think tanks' revived a more philosophical approach to the question. 'Russian Institute', for instance, laid the foundations for a new nation-wide debate on post-soviet Russian identity. The main goal of the Institute was that of creating a broad consensus around contemporary trends in domestic and foreign policy, identifying new priorities in post-imperial social and cultural context⁸. Finally, as Pëtr Schedrovitskij put it bluntly in his famous article, the 'Russian World' born in the 1990s is in itself a reemergence of an old identity of Russia and of its reconciliation with its past throughout a "new system of relations between Russians in the context of global cultural policy"⁹.

Unsurprisingly, the first coherent conceptualization of 'Russkij Mir' was elaborated in 1998, when the 'Foundation for Effective Policy' had been charged to provide a broad strategy for Kremlin's CIS policy. Exactly at that time the trajectory of the 'Russian World' notion intersected with the sensitive issue of 'compatriots' or, borrowing from the soviet dissident and novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'the Russian question' (Russkij vapros)¹⁰.

⁷ M. LARUELLE, *The "Russian World". Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination*, cit., pp. 4-5.

⁸ See G. PAVLOVSKIJ, S. CHERNISHEV, *K vozobnovleniiu russkogo*, in "Russkij Institut", 27 June 1996, http://www.archipelag.ru/ru_mir/history/history95-97/chernishov-pepiska/, accessed 29 June 2016.

⁹ See E. OSTROVSKIJ, P. SCHEDROVITSKIJ, *Rossia: strana, kotoroi ne bylo. Sozdat' 'imidzh' Rossii segodnia oznachaet postroit' novoiu sistemu sviazi mezhdu russkimi*, cit.

¹⁰ See A. I. SOLZHENITSYN, Y. SOLZHENITSYN, *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. See also: E. KRIZA,

The Solzhenitsyn's narrative about the fate of the Russian diaspora and the problem of its reconciliation with the motherland was politically embodied in the early nineties by the 'Congress of Russian Communities' (CRC) and later by the political party 'Rodina' (Fatherland). The movement, led by a still influential politician Dmitri Rogozin, developed an original position on the *diaspora* question and, despite its marginal role in the Russian political arena, successfully lobbied concrete political measures, moving it away from the domain of radical nationalism¹¹.

The Putin's presidency, indeed, marked a new period in Kremlin's policy toward the issue, by implementing a new institutional framework and adopting the 'Russkij Mir' concept in his official rhetoric. It's not by chance that the notion was used for the first time in an official Kremlin's statement during the Putin's speech in front of the 'World Congress of Compatriots Living Abroad' in 2001¹². A new political and ideological framework was born embodying a fluid nature of Russian foreign policy narratives.

2. *Russkij Mir as Public diplomacy in the post-soviet space*

After the shaky decade of the 1990s, Russian foreign policy gained new substance throughout the 2000s¹³. Indeed, the foreign policy strategy focused on the former soviet republics with the main goal of establishing strong political and economic relations aimed at maintaining Russian influence in the region¹⁴. The concept of 'Russkiy Mir' turned out to be a powerful instrument in order to assure Russian cultural grip on the 'Near Abroad', but it was during the second half of the decade that it

A. ROGATCHEVSKIJ, *Alexander Solzhenitsyn: cold war icon, gulag author, Russian nationalist? A study of the Western reception of his literary writings, historical interpretations, and political ideas*, Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2014.

¹¹ See M. LARUELLE, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹² See V. PUTIN, "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii V. V. Putina na Kongresse sootchestvennikov", 11 October 2001, http://old.nasledie.ru/politvnt/19_44/article.php?art=24, accessed 24 June 2016.

¹³ For a more detailed account of Russian foreign policy trajectories during the nineties see: J. MANKOFF, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

¹⁴ See "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", 28 June 2000, <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>, accessed 11 May 2016.

gained an important role in Kremlin's strategies. This was largely due to the impressive impact of 'colored revolutions' that changed the political environment in Georgia and Ukraine between the 2003 and 2005¹⁵. The lesson learned by the Kremlin was crucial for the following evolution of country's relations with its neighbors. In particular, after the Ukrainian 'orange revolution' Putin's inner circle realized the importance of new 'political technologies' and the ability to coopt allies through persuasion and attraction, rather than by political or military coercion. The concept of 'Soft Power'¹⁶ gained an important role in Russian foreign policy, while the 'Russian World' became one of its main vectors.

Nonetheless, Russian policy toward the 'Near Abroad' became more structured under the supervision of several agencies. The 'Presidential Directorate for Interregional and Cultural Relations', for example, has been placed in charge of conceiving new policy's vectors toward the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Furthermore, through the RosZarubeszhTsentr agency (later RosSotrudnichestvo), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has begun to promote and coordinate efforts aimed at the diffusion and consolidation of Russian language, cultural heritage and several partisan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the post-soviet space (for instance, RusAid¹⁷ and Russkij Mir Foundation¹⁸)¹⁹.

The growing influence of such organizations at a regional level went simultaneously with the new priority given to the consolidation of Russian-language media realm, which remains an important source of information in several post-soviet republics. Not surprisingly, as we will see regarding the Central Asian case, language legislation and media regulation became one of the main concerns of local governments in their attempt to limit Russian influence in the region.

¹⁵ See S. SAARI, *Russia's Post-Orange Revolution Strategies to Increase its Influence in the former Soviet republics: Public Diplomacy po russki*, in "Europe-Asia Studies", vol. 66, n. 1, 2014, pp. 50-66.

¹⁶ For a more detailed account on 'Soft Power' concept see: J. S. NYE, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go it Alone*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹⁷ See <http://rusaid.ru/>, accessed 26 August 2016.

¹⁸ See <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/fund/>, accessed 26 August 2016.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion about Russian think tanks and organizations and their links to the Kremlin see M. LARUELLE, *Inside and around the Kremlin's black box the new nationalist think tanks in Russia*, Stockholm, Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2009, http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2009_laruelle_inside-and-around-the-kremlins-black-box.pdf, accessed 9 September 2014.

3. *Russkij Mir and Central Asia. The burdens of history*

Although Central Asia is not the main concern in Russian foreign policy, its geographic position, economic resources (oil, gas and other raw materials) and historical ties with Moscow are still very important in Kremlin's strategy in post-soviet space. Further, even though Russia is no longer the only player in the region, it's still one of the most influential actors at least from a political and cultural point of view. Indeed, the region as a whole is home for about 6 millions Russians (9% of the population)²⁰, and soviet historical and cultural heritage is still an important component in mutual relations. Considering the outcomes of the Ukrainian crisis and the deterioration of relations with other post-soviet republics (Baltics states and Georgia, for instance), it appears that Central Asia remains the 'last soviet ecumene', crucial in Kremlin's claim for a full-fledged 'regional power' status. Russian policy toward Central Asia, indeed, is highly connected with its ability to shape the regional population's and political elite's orientation by the means of public diplomacy and cultural influence. Therefore, despite the decline of Russian population and language in last two decades, 'Russkij Mir' (as a vector of Soft Power) is still a key instrument in preserving Moscow's influence in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, Central Asia as a region ceased to be the Russian exclusive backyard. Soon after the soviet breakdown new actors gained weight in bilateral relations with five independent republics. Whereas throughout the nineties Turkey and Saudi Arabia played the card of religious and cultural affinity, Iran strengthened bilateral relations with Turkmenistan due to the geographical proximity and common economic interests in the Caspian region. Moreover, China took advantage of its impressive economic leap to gain a dominant position in Central Asia in both bilateral and multilateral relations. The European Union and the United States are two other important actors with many political and economic assets in the region²¹.

Another blow for the Russian imprint came from the local process of 'de-sovietization' and 're-islamization' that took place over the last two decades. Indeed, even though the process was particularly

²⁰ Source https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_cas.html, accessed 02 July 2016.

²¹ See M. B. OLCOTT, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.

uneven, the Russian population in Central Asia has known an extraordinary drop throughout the nineties. For instance, the percentage of Slavs in Uzbekistan dropped from 8.3% of the county's population in 1989 to 3% in 1999, while in Kazakhstan at least one and a half millions of Russians left the country in the same period (from 37% to 30% of the population). The same applies to other three republics, with the particular case of Tajikistan where the civil war (1992-1997) had a significant influence on the emigration²².

Finally, in order to understand the new Kremlin's approach toward Central Asia it's worth noting that the region no longer forms a coherent political block as a whole. National goals and foreign policy priorities gained momentum with independence, limiting mutual interests and interaction among central Asian countries. Their unwillingness in taking joint efforts from the political point of view and, in some cases, intra-regional ethnic rivalry (for instance between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), emphasized the unsolved problems of the soviet period between neighbors that contributed to the fragmentation of regional political landscape²³.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that Central Asia ceased to be perceived as a unitary region in Kremlin's political strategy. The previous policy of maximization of influence has left ground for a new, more flexible, approach. New challenges and the uncertain regional and local dynamics require, instead, the development of new political, economic and cultural instruments in order to deal individually with central Asian republics.

4. *Russian interests in Central Asia*

The main interests of the Russian Federation in dealing with Central Asian independent republics are developed around four issues: security, politics, economy and cultural influence. Further, the regional goals are intertwined between foreign and domestic policy considerations. As highlighted for instance in both 'Foreign Policy Concept

²² For an in-depth examination of the emigration flow in the 1990s see S. PEYROUSE, *The Russian Minority in Central Asia: Migration, Politics, and Language*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Occasional paper, no. 297, 2008.

²³ See A. V. MALASHENKO, *The Fight for Influence: Russia in Central Asia*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013.

2013' and 'National Security Strategy 2015', the ambiguity between 'foreign' and 'domestic' in dealing with the region is due basically to the geographic proximity and a still high level of industrial and economic interdependence²⁴.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the main regional players. Whereas personal links between the Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev and Vladimir Putin have an important role in regulating political dialogue between two neighbors, the multivector policy of Islam Karimov has drastically reduced Russian influence in Uzbekistan. Even though there could be new political opportunities for Russia after the recent death of Karimov, it seems likely that the new Uzbek leader won't dramatically change the previous approach.

On the other hand, if Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain still too weak in order to have a completely independent foreign policy, the isolationist approach of Turkmenistan has been the main hedge in recent political and economic relations with Moscow. Indeed, Russia is aware of being no longer the unique regional power and its regional goals are now pragmatically subordinated to such reality.

4.1 Security

The main topics on Kremlin's security agenda are the trans-regional drugs smuggling, the proliferation of radical Islamism in the region and its links with terrorist organizations in the Caucasus and the prevention of the migration flows toward the Russian Federation. Central Asian stability and the freeze of regional disagreements over borders delimitations and water resources in the Fergana Valley as well as inter-ethnic tensions are crucial in Russian security strategy. Yet, all these concerns are tightly intertwined with the future of the Afghanistan²⁵.

The cornerstones of Kremlin's security policy are the military cooperation and its economic leverage. An intense military cooper-

²⁴ See "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", 12 February 2013, http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D, accessed 12 May 2016; and "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation", 31 December 2015, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/acts/files/0001201512310038.pdf>, accessed 12 May 2016.

²⁵ See N. KASSENOVA, *Relations Between Afghanistan and Central Asian States After 2014. Incentives, Constraints and Prospects*, in "Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)", May 2014.

ation on bilateral and multilateral basis (Collective Security Treaty Organization-CSTO²⁶) allows Russia to maintain several military facilities in Central Asia. The Baikonur complex²⁷, which lease has been extended until 2050, is only one of several military facilities leased by Moscow in Kazakhstan. Other important military bases are dislocated in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in exchange for loans and debt relief. For instance, after the withdrawal of US forces from the Transit Center at Manas in July 2014, the soviet-era Kant air base near Bishkek remains the only one to host foreign Air Forces in Kyrgyzstan²⁸. In exchange for training and modernization of the local army, Russia is allowed to maintain its 201^o Armored Division in Tajikistan until 2042. The division is dislocated in several facilities in the country and consists of more than 6000 soldiers. Despite the ongoing restructuring process with a planned reduction of Russian military personnel that have provoked widespread speculations about Kremlin's disengagement in Tajikistan, the 201^o Division is doomed to remain the biggest Russian military dislocation outside the Federation's borders²⁹.

Russia remains an important military partner for Uzbekistan. The soviet-era interdependence and strong relations between the high-ranking military establishment are still crucial in formal and informal security ties between Moscow and Tashkent, despite the Uzbek reluctance on multilateral cooperation within the CSTO framework³⁰. As we can see, in a complex regional security dynamics only Turkmenistan, with its 750-kilometer-long border with Afghanistan, has theoretically no military ties with Russia.

²⁶ Of the five Central Asian republics three are full members of the organization (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). See: http://www.odkb.gov.ru/start/index_aengl.htm, accessed 18 May 2016.

²⁷ <https://ria.ru/spravka/20121211/914287081.html>, accessed 7 August 2016.

²⁸ See E. F. TROITSKIY, *Central Asian Regional Security Complex: The Impact of Russian and US Policies*, in "Global Society", vol. 29, n. 1, pp. 2-22.

²⁹ See R. N. McDERMOTT, *Russia recalibrates 201st base in Tajikistan*, in "Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analytical Articles", <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13335-russia-recalibrate-201st-base-in-tajikistan.html>, accessed 20 March 2016.

³⁰ A reluctant member of CSTO, Uzbekistan, finally suspended its membership in the organization in 2012 proving its mistrust regarding the Russian overwhelming supremacy inside the multilateral framework and its own ambition to carry out an independent security and foreign policy.

4.2 Politics

Directly linked with security are Russian political considerations. Maintaining influence and restraining the regional penetration of other actors remain the Moscow's main political goals. The consolidation of bilateral relations and multilateral regional integration projects are, indeed, both priority objectives in Russian agenda. Apart from the weak Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) framework, several other regional organizations play an important role in Russian multilateral strategy. As we have already seen, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), besides providing the ground for military cooperation offers an important system for political coordination with local military-industrial complexes. The regional character of the organization and Moscow's overwhelming military capabilities allow Russia to bust its position in Central Asia pursuing a coordinated military and political response to the main regional security challenges.

Another convenient forum at the regional level is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established in 2001³¹. Created by China, Russia and four central Asian republics (with the exception of Turkmenistan) with the task of promoting stability and cooperation in the region, the organization recently opened its doors to several other countries that gained the status of observers or dialogue partners during the last decade. Despite its institutional ambivalence and the Chinese leading role, the SCO appears for Moscow an important forum in advancing its regional political agenda and balancing Chinese growing influence. At the same time, the organization provides a common discussion platform between Moscow and Beijing as well, allowing their cooperation in order to balance the presence of other political and economic actors³².

Finally, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) have an important regional dimension as well. Even though the Moscow's Eurasian project have suffered several significant setbacks, permanently loosing a powerful economic actor as Ukraine, it remains an important regional po-

³¹ For SCO history and mission see http://en.sco-russia.ru/about_sco/, accessed 12 June 2016.

³² For an in-depth discussion about the SCO regional role and Russian and Chinese perspective, see: M. FREDHOLM, B. N. SCHLYTER, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Geopolitics: New Directions, Perspectives, and Challenges*. Copenhagen, NIAS Press, 2013.

litical variable. As an outcome of the evolution of previous integrative projects (Eurasian Economic Community, Customs Union, Common Economic Space) the EEU was established on January 1^o 2015 with a double task³³. First, the Union is an economic project. The creation of a common economic market, the integration of its members under the Russian umbrella and the limitation of Chinese economic supremacy in bilateral relations have been the main goals. Economic aspects are, however, strictly related to the political dimension. Indeed, in addition to three founding members (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan), other actors as Kyrgyzstan and Armenia have recently joined the organization, while Tajikistan is supposed to enter the next year³⁴. In other words, Russia has tried to attract potential members offering a bargaining chip in terms of new potential investments and visa-free regime. Not surprisingly, the Eurasian Union acquired a more prominent regional orientation, attracting small regional actors that seem to have little choice but to accept to participate in the multilateral framework. By contrast, more independent regional players remain reluctant to bind their interests to Moscow³⁵.

4.3 *Economy and energy*

Given the high degree of structural interdependence, Russia conserves a significant array of economic interests in Central Asia. Although the soviet-era supremacy is a matter of the past, Moscow maintains several assets in some important fields as the military-industrial, mining, transport, telecommunication and energy. For instance, Russia is the main Kazakh partner in the civil nuclear industry, as well as the leading actor in Uzbek chemical sector or Kyrgyz textile industry. In spite of all these considerations, trade between Moscow and Central Asia has experienced a dramatic downfall over the last two decades, further worsened by the ongoing economic crisis and the ruble devaluation. Indeed, Russia's economic policy and influence has been

³³ See the official web site of the organization: <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about>, accessed 23 August 2016.

³⁴ See <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/tajikistan-the-urasian-economic-unions-next-member/>, accessed 15 September 2016.

³⁵ For a full-fledged analysis of the EEU and its regional dimension see P. DUTKIEWICZ, R. SAKWA, (eds.), *Eurasian Integration: The View from Within*, London, Routledge, 2014.

challenged by China, Europe and other new regional actors (Turkey, Iran, Gulf countries and South Korea) and Moscow is no longer the first Central Asian trading partner³⁶.

The core of Russian interest in Central Asia remains the energy field. In the wake of the diversification process in the region and the new global dynamics, Russia's strategy has changed accordingly. Even though Moscow has lost its monopoly on the Central Asian hydrocarbons in favor of Beijing, it still maintains the hegemony on oil and gas pipelines toward Europe. Furthermore, Russia and its energy companies can still rely on the 'acquired advantage' in the fields of infrastructural interdependence and know how.

Kazakhstan, with its long common border and largest oil deposits of the region, is the Russia's main energy partner. For instance, the 90% of Lukoil's foreign assets are located in Kazakhstan, accounting for approximately 10% of the total country's production³⁷. The hydrocarbons products from Tengiz, Kashagan and Karachaganak fields reach the European market through the Russian port of Novorossiysk thanks to the 'Caspian Pipeline Consortium'. Yet, Russian state-owned oil and gas companies detain several assets in other Central Asian republics as Uzbekistan, potentially the second gas producer in the region (following Turkmenistan) and Kyrgyzstan³⁸.

Finally, keeping in mind the transformation of the global market and new domestic dynamics it seems that Russia is now less dependent on Central Asian hydrocarbons³⁹. As emphasized by the recent dispute and the suspension of gas imports from Turkmenistan, the main Russian goal for the foreseeable future is to prevent Central Asian hydrocarbons going to Europe bypassing Russia⁴⁰. As in the case of security and political issues, Moscow's strategy, indeed, shifted from the 'maximization of influence' toward a 'balance of interests'. In such

³⁶ For a long-term economic analysis see M. LARUELLE, S. PEYROUSE, *Globalizing Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Challenges of Economic Development*, London, M.E. Sharpe, 2013.

³⁷ <http://lukoil-overseas.ru/projects/kazakhstan/>, accessed 16 May 2016.

³⁸ U.S. ENERGY INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION (EIA), *Uzbekistan*, July 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=UZB>, accessed 3 August 2016.

³⁹ See J. HENDERSON, T. MITROVA, *The Political and Commercial Dynamics of Russia's Gas Export Strategy*, In "Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (OIES)", September 2015.

⁴⁰ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/russias-gazprom-stops-buying-gas-from-turkmenistan/>, accessed 15 May 2016.

a context, China looks like an unavoidable competitor, but the focus of the Russian energy strategy remains the European Union. Unable to restrict the consolidation of energy links between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and China with the recent construction of the ‘Central Asia–China gas pipeline’ and the ‘Kazakhstan–China oil pipeline’, Russia is still eager to prevent regional hydrocarbons from flowing to Europe, by obstructing the realization of projects aimed to bypass the Caspian Sea⁴¹.

5. *Trajectories of Russkij Mir. The decline of Russian language in Central Asia*

How are the above mentioned considerations interconnected in the context of the general Russian policy approach toward the region? What is the essential common denominator in the Kremlin’s vision of Central Asia? To answer these questions we should analyze the Moscow’s cultural interests in the region through the lens of ‘Soft Power’s’ dual nature. In other words, ‘Soft Power’ becomes both the means to achieve foreign policy objectives and an objective in itself, the strengthening of which is doomed to remain at the top of the Kremlin’s agenda. Accordingly, the ‘Russkij Mir’ concept could act as the *trait d’union* of this dual nature of ‘Soft Power’ connecting the ‘means’ with the ‘goals’ in advancing Russian foreign and cultural policy. Indeed, despite the quick transformation of the regional landscape through the process of ‘de-sovietization’ and ‘re-islamization’, Russia remains one of the ‘cultural leaders’ in Central Asia. The language, for instance, remains the core vector of Kremlin’s cultural policy toward Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, two countries with a significant Russian minority, as well as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan that share an important labor migration flows toward Russia. Russian state-sponsored organizations, aid programs and Russian-language media are strongly operational in such a context, with the main goal of promoting and consolidating the Kremlin’s vision of the world. This linkage is undoubtedly strengthened by shared values of the post-soviet nomenklatura. Kremlin is not worried about the nature of regional political regimes and their

⁴¹ For an overview of the Russian gas strategy see O. BONDARENKO, *Il futuro del gas in Russia e in Asia Centrale. Alla ricerca di una nuova strategia*, in “Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale (OPI)”, Research Paper n. 48, Milano, ottobre 2016.

troubled path to democracy. Instead, the priority is put on regional stability, Central Asian leadership's continuity and ability to provide a relatively working state apparatus in order to restrict internal and intra-regional conflicts. Local governments are also an active part of this process. It might be argued, as maintained by some scholars, that to some extent Central Asian leadership is "also seeking cooperation with their Russian counterpart" in order to consolidate "their controlled civil societies" insulating them from more 'dangerous' western 'Soft power'⁴².

But, even though the Russian language could still be considered as a 'global language' – considering its global spread, the total number of Russian speakers, its official language status in several countries, its role of 'lingua franca' – some recent studies emphasize its declining status among the world's leading languages⁴³. This process appears strictly related to the loss of its transmissive role of the soviet ideology and to the de-russification throughout the post-soviet space. In Central Asia, for instance, the Russian language spread is declining simultaneously with the emigration of Russians and a new approach of each country toward the 'language question'.

5.1 *Kazakhstan*

The Russian language has still an important role in everyday formal and informal communication. Indeed, according to the last available national census, the Russians account for a 23,7% of the total population. Under the provision of the Constitution, the Russian language has the 'official status' and the majority of the population know Russian (85%) while the Kazakh language use is less popular (62%) in particular among the aged population. About 20% of country's schools adopt Russian as the language of instruction. Furthermore, Russian is still dominant in the higher education⁴⁴. The same could be said

⁴² See for example M.LARUELLE, *Russia and Central Asia*, in "European National Policies Series (EUCAM)", n. 17, September 2014.

⁴³ A. L. AREFYEV, *Russkij jazyk na rubezhe XX–XXI vekov*, Moscow: Tsentr social'nogo prognozirovanija i marketinga, 2012.

⁴⁴ See THE AGENCY ON STATISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, *Results of the 2009 National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, Analytical Report, Astana 2011. According more updated demographic estimates the share of the Russian population is declined to 21,5%. The data is available at the Committee on Statistics of

about the information space, where the Russian language prevails in both newspapers and television. An important role in such a context is carried out by the spread of local branches of Russian agencies as RosSotrudnichestvo and Russkij Mir Foundation.

Despite these indicators, the ‘Russian World’ projection in Kazakhstan is shrinking. If compared with the data of 1989, Russian population has sharply declined (from 37%) while the Kazakh is growing. Furthermore, considering the birth rate imbalance, the Russians are now the more aged portion of the population. Moreover, con beyond the demographic considerations, the international situation has reinvigorated Astana’s concerns about the ‘Russkij Mir’. This, for example, had the effect of slowing down the Eurasian integration project and the political integration with Moscow. Indeed, while maintaining a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multi-cultural character, in last few years the government has been promoting an important historic and linguistic revival of the Kazakh culture⁴⁵. In 2012 Astana announced its plans to abandon the Cyrillic alphabet in favor of the Latin idiom from 2025, while in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis the government adopted an amendment of the law on telecommunications in order to restrict Russian channels in the country’s cable networks and, consequently, the Russian ‘Soft Power’ in Kazakhstan⁴⁶.

5.2 *Kyrgyzstan*

Even in Kyrgyzstan the Constitution still provides an official status to the Russian language, despite a recent amendment imposing that all official documents must be produced in Kyrgyz. Even though, according to recent estimates, Russians account for only 7,7% of the population, more than 50% of residents of Kyrgyzstan speak Russian⁴⁷. The 21% of local schools use a mixed language system and

the Ministry of National Economic of the Republic of Kazakhstan’s web site: <http://www.stat.gov.kz>.

⁴⁵ <http://astanatimes.com/2015/08/kazakh-historical-documentary-presented-in-washington/>, accessed 12 September 2016.

⁴⁶ <https://jamestown.org/program/nazarbayev-blocks-russian-tv-in-kazakhstan/#!>, accessed 12 June 2016.

⁴⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>, accessed 12 June 2016.

an additional 9% use Russian as the main language of instruction⁴⁸. Furthermore, due to a massive presence of local branches of Russian universities, the Russian language has the dominant role in higher instruction system.

Although a recent law requires that the 50% of TV and Radio programs must be produced in Kyrgyz, Russian remains an important language in information and media realm. An important role in supporting several other organizations and institutions that cooperate with Russian language media and diaspora is provided by RosSotrudnichestvo as well as by the Russkij Mir Foundation, which has several centres in the main cities of the country (Bishkek, Osh, Kant)⁴⁹.

Nonetheless, political instability and the growing domestic role played by the nationalists pose a serious constraint on the future role of 'Russkij Mir' in the country. Indeed, Kyrgyzstan is the Central Asian republic that saw the highest degree of emigration of the Russian population in last decade. Furthermore, the ongoing process of urbanization is threatening the dominant role of Russians even in major cities, the historic strongholds of the 'Russian World'.

5.3 Tajikistan

'Russkij Mir' experienced a major deadlock in Tajikistan. The Tajik now is the only language used to deal with the public administration and from 2010 no obligation bind the legislator to use the Russian language in legal acts. Even though Russian is still considered the 'language for inter-ethnic communication', its legal status is declining simultaneously with the Russian population in the country. If the first emigration flow was caused by the civil war (1992-1997), the precarious economic situation and growing nationalist demands of the last ten years haven't reversed the expatriation process. According to some estimates, Russians account today for only a marginal 0,5% of the total population⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ See W. GÓRECKI, *Ever further from Moscow. Russia's stance on Central Asia*, in "OSW Studies", n. 48, Warsaw, April 2014.

⁴⁹ <http://www.russkiimir.ru/rucenter/catalogue.php>, accessed 15 September 2016.

⁵⁰ A. Shustov, *Russkij Mir Srednej Azii Szhimaetsya*, http://www.ng.ru/courier/2016-02-01/11_asia.html, accessed 23 May 2016.

Considering such general situation, why the Russian language is still the first language in the country's Universities? Yet, why it remains one of the main subjects in Tajik education system? The explanation lies probably in the economic weakness of the poorest Central Asian republic. The language is considered very important in maintaining economic and political links with Moscow, but above all is the essential instrument in facilitating the labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia. According to the World Bank data, the remittances of expatriate workers account for more than 47% of Tajikistan's total GDP and about 90% are seasonal or permanent workers in Russia⁵¹. Indeed, the main Moscow's leverage on Dushanbe is an economic one. Being the Tajikistan's main trade partner and security provider, allows Russia to preserve some linguistic links despite the declining role of the Russian population and Russian-language media in the country.

5.4 *Uzbekistan*

The exclusion of the Russian language from the Uzbekistan's public arena started after the country's independence, but decreased over the last few years simultaneously with the foreign policy oscillation. About 8% of general education schools and main universities have Russian as the main language of education. Several branches of Russian universities are deeply rooted in Uzbekistan. Although the Russian population drastically dropped after the collapse of the Soviet Union (there are no exact data because the last official census was taken in 1989), from 8% to a scarce 1-3%, and the Constitution doesn't provide any other language with a special status, Russian still plays a significant role in information and media realm despite several legal limitations. For instance, even the government agencies' official web sites generally have a Russian version.

In general, however, the 'Russkij Mir' in Uzbekistan appears in contraction. Even if Moscow is still a point of reference for the aged population in the main cities, its attractive role is declining especially for the new generation. Indeed, simultaneously with its multi-vec-

⁵¹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/02/Migrants-from-developing-countries-to-send-home-414-billion-in-earnings-in-2013>, accessed 28 November 2015.

tor foreign policy and strong opposition to any Moscow-led regional integration project, Tashkent adopted its own cultural policy aimed at limiting the Russian influence. For instance, the Russian alphabet was abandoned in 1992 and a massive process of ‘de-communization’ cleaned everyday life from many soviet symbols and references (as the Great Patriotic War). Russia remains an important political and economic partner with a high degree of infrastructural interdependence and “common values and codes of conduct” shared with Tashkent leadership, but its overwhelming cultural influence is definitely matter of the past.

5.5 Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is the most autonomous regional player from the economic, political and cultural points of view. Indeed, the ‘Russkij Mir’ here is less influential than anywhere else in Central Asia. The success of the ‘turkmenization’ policy launched by the first president, Saparmurat Niyazov, and carried on by his successor Gurbanguly Bardymukhamedov, together with the restrictive policy on the nationality issue, have drastically reduced the role of the Russian language, culture and population in the country. Russian was eradicated from the public sector and education system, as well as strongly limited in media and information realm. Probably a Russian-speaker would still have no problem in being understood in Ashgabat or other major cities, but more broadly the ‘Russkij Mir’ influence in Turkmenistan, a part from the soviet-style architectures, is almost void⁵².

Conclusion

Overall, one can state that Russian influence and interests in Central Asia are under constant revision and re-articulation. Although historically Moscow has been the dominant actor in the region, after the collapse of the Soviet Union its political, cultural and economic influence has suffered several deadlocks. To be sure, over the last few

⁵² See W. GÓRECKI, *Ever further from Moscow. Russia’s stance on Central Asia*, cit..

years the Kremlin seems to have realized that, in order to maintain an active role in Central Asia despite new actors and the changing geopolitical reality, a new set of cultural, political and economic instrument is necessary. Furthermore, the region can be no longer seen as a unitary actor, and Russia needs a new approach in order to deal with five republics and their self-perception, interests and concerns. In this new environment, in advancing its interests Russia can still count on its cultural influence, the 'Russian World' projection, but it must adapt it to a quickly evolving context and new problems. As we have seen, the 'Russkij Mir' power shrunk simultaneously with the decline of the Russian population in Central Asian republics and with the local leadership's growing concern about their sovereignty (especially after the Crimea annexation).

Another cornerstone of the power projection of the 'Russkij Mir' is the local leadership's longevity. In the last twenty years, despite several problems, Russian and local leaders shared a socio-cultural affinity, outcome of soviet codes of conduct and general vision of the world. It's hardly foreseeable how these relations are doomed to change when a new generation of politicians will conquer the leadership. Although Russian cultural products are still dominant in countries with a high number of Russians and Russian-speakers or with considerable labor migration, the growing availability of western media and cultural products and even of Islamic culture, is threatening the dominant role that the 'Russkij Mir' enjoyed during the XX century.

Finally, the debris of the ongoing economic crisis risks to hurt the Russian influence in the region. On one hand, Moscow lacks the instruments to envisage the advantages, for the local population and political leadership, assured by the strict economic cooperation on bilateral and multilateral levels. Russia is no longer the only economic partner and assistance provider. On the other hand, the domestic economic crisis forced Russian authorities to regulate the labor migration from Caucasus and Central Asia, limiting the tools of influence in some republics heavily dependent on labor diaspora as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

However, as it has been predicted by several western analysts during the nineties, Russian role in Central Asia has undergone several changes. Russia remains an important regional player and, despite several problems, has yet the slim advantage of its distinctive 'Soft Power' based on a common past and on the powerful tool of

Russian language. Preserve the narrowing ‘Russkij Mir’ should be the main goal for the future foreign policy strategy toward the region.

Riassunto - Partendo dall’analisi del contraddittorio e ampio concetto di *RusskijMir* (Mondo Russo), l’articolo si propone di indagare le dinamiche d’interazione tra la Russia e le repubbliche centroasiatiche. Pur cessando di essere percepita come regione di esclusivo dominio politico-economico della Federazione Russa, infatti, l’Asia Centrale rimane un quadrante geostrategico molto importante per le ambizioni del Cremlino in politica estera. L’articolo identifica nel potente strumento della diaspora russa, e più in generale nella sua residua influenza culturale sulla regione, uno dei principali elementi intorno ai quali si è strutturata negli ultimi anni la strategia politica di Mosca nei confronti delle cinque repubbliche centroasiatiche. Eredità del passato sovietico, l’ambito culturale è divenuto elemento cruciale che permette alla Russia di mantenere un’importante influenza in Asia Centrale promuovendo nel contempo i propri interessi economico-energetici, politici e di sicurezza. Attraverso l’analisi del complesso legame tra *public diplomacy* e aspetti economici e militari, l’articolo procede a delineare la gerarchia degli interessi e la complessa interazione con i *partner* regionali. Il punto centrale dell’analisi sta nella consapevolezza che Mosca non rappresenta più l’unico attore regionale e che la sua strategia è conseguentemente calibrata per far fronte sia alla presenza di altre potenze con ambizioni re-

gionali (Cina, Iran, Arabia Saudita, Turchia) sia ai mutamenti della congiuntura politica internazionale. L’Asia Centrale, inoltre, non rappresenta più un attore unitario e l’interazione politica deve tener conto non solo della gerarchia degli interessi, ma anche della complessità delle dinamiche tra le singole repubbliche centroasiatiche. L’evoluzione di strutture organizzative multilaterali su base regionale, pur ben lungi dall’essere strutture sovranazionali a se stanti, viene considerata uno degli strumenti volti a limitare i conflitti tra i singoli attori, armonizzando l’ambiente regionale e facilitando l’interazione su base bilaterale. L’analisi dell’influenza della lingua come principale strumento di trasmissione dell’impronta culturale russa permette infine di delineare la sua complessa posizione in Asia Centrale. Affermare uno stretto legame tra il vettore culturale e quello politico, infatti, aiuta a focalizzare l’attenzione sui principali interessi russi nei paesi della regione dove la presenza del ‘Mondo Russo’ è più marcata. Nonostante le politiche di de-sovietizzazione e de-russificazione adottate dai regimi locali e il declino della popolazione russa a partire dalla disgregazione dell’Unione Sovietica, infatti, è ancora possibile identificare un forte legame tra lingua e legami politici. Proprio per questo, pur con significative variazioni a livello regionale, la Russia appare ancora come un attore importante in Asia Centrale.

CHINA'S ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA

di Laura Rachele Galeotti

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has strengthened its relations with the five Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan¹ and became one of the most important actors in the region. While initially the main focus for Beijing was to settle the Soviet legacy of border disputes, its links with the region have later revealed a need to protect security and commercial interests in this strategic area. Since 1992, Beijing has created political, economic and diplomatic relations with Central Asian states, and in the last 10 years its trade with the region has improved enormously². Important investments in energy, natural extraction and construction, such as the expansion of road connections between Kyrgyzstan and China, the development of new roads in Tajikistan, the Central Asia gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China and the oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China, have produced many expectations. In 2013 the People's Republic of China has proposed to build an economic belt along the Silk Road, a trans-Eurasian project, spanning from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, in order, among others, to promote trade and improve road connectivity. Moreover,

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¹ For more historical background and political contextualization see E. RUMER, D. TRENIN, H. ZHAO, *Central Asia. Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2007; T.S. EDER, *China-Russia Relations in Central Asia, Energy Policy, Beijing's News Assertiveness and 21st Century Geopolitics*, Wien, Springer, 2014.

² W.Y. XINHUA, *Xi proposed a "New Silk Road" with Central Asia*, in "China Daily", 8 September 2013.

China is also very motivated to create and maintain security and stability in this area, first to protect its own investments and then to counter the spillover effects that insecurity might have within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Additionally, China has experienced a deeper cultural engagement in the post-Soviet Central Asian states; in 2010, for example, the SCO Network University was launched as a new platform for cooperation in education and cultural exchanges and Confucius Institutes have offered language courses and cultural programs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Therefore, if China's economic, political, diplomatic and cultural footprint in the Central Asia continues to expand, questions on energy demand, border issues, separatism and the prominence of its relations with the Five "Stans" remain a concern. This article studies China's economic penetration into Central Asia, giving an overview of the political, economic and security dimensions and it shows that China's influence has grown rapidly and it has established strategic partnership in order to reinforce its influence in Russia's post-Soviet periphery.

1. *China's diplomacy and the Strategy of "Peaceful Rise"*

To better understand China's engagement in Central Asia and its role in the Five Republics, it is necessary to analyse the main principles that support its diplomacy, focusing at least in the official discourse as formulated, in 1954, in the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence": respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence³. Over the years, Chinese policy statements have underlined the distinctiveness of China's approach as a responsible nation that respects other countries' sovereignty and highlight how foreign policy question derives from the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence". China's strategy to never seek supremacy nor want to impose its will on other countries, peaceful negotiations, dialogue, mutual understanding and non-interference have become the most efficient formula to address and solve problems. Additionally, China has adopted three specific guiding themes which stress: "Pres-

³ For further information see Z. BIJIAN, J. MENOD, M. CHATTERJI, J. S. NYE, W. JIANMIN, *China's Peaceful Rise and New Role of Asia*, in "Les cahiers du débat", Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique, 2005.

ervation, Prosperity and Power”⁴ in order to be able to benefit from the international political and economic system. This resulted in the development of China’s so-called ‘Peaceful Rise’ policy, which was accompanied by promoting cooperation, integration, multilateralism in its geographical neighbourhood. On many occasions Beijing repeated that its rapid economic development and the strengthening of its military capability is not a threat, but an opportunity for its partners, in what could be described a “win-win situation”⁵. For Zheng Bijian, the inventor of the term “Peaceful Rise” and the former vice-president of the Central Party School in Beijing, “the essence of China’s strategy of Peaceful Rise involves independently building socialism with Chinese characteristics, while participating in rather than detaching from economic globalization”⁶. While for former Chinese President Hu Jintao “the very purpose of China’s foreign policy is to maintain world peace and promote common development through good neighbourly relationships, practicing a policy of bringing harmony, security and prosperity and strengthening of mutual trust and cooperation between Asia countries”⁷. Beijing has promoted multipolarity⁸ and equal treatment of all countries, emphasizing that each government alone has the right to manage matters related to domestic, political and economic issues, including internal conflicts. And it is evident that the central idea behind the Five Principles, as introduced by China, is that one state has no right to interfere in the internal affairs of another state⁹.

⁴ For more information see F.L. WANG, *Preservation, prosperity and power: what minorities China’s foreign policy*, in “Journal of Contemporary China”, vol.45, n. 14, 2005, pp. 669-694; Y. DENG, *China’s Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008; D.M. LAMPTON, *Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money and Minds*, Berkeley, Berkeley University Press, 2008.

⁵ B. MARIANI, *China’s role and interests in Central Asia*, in “Safeworld. Preventing violent conflict, Building safer lives”, 2013, pp. 3-17.

⁶ Z. BIJIAN, *A new path for China’s peaceful rise and the future of Asia*, in “China’s Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zhaeng Bijain 1997-2204”, 3 November 2003, pp.13-17.

⁷ The “Harmonious Society concept” is promulgated by former President Hu and development and security become closely linked; cf. J. HU, *Full text of Hu Jintao’s speech at the BFA annual conference*, in “People’s Daily”, 24 April 2004.

⁸ See L. JAKOBSEN, D. KNOX, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, in “SIPRI Policy Paper”, n°26, Stockholm, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2010, J.F. COOPER, *China’s Foreign Aid and Investment Diplomacy. History and Practice in Asia, 1950s-Present*, vol. II, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁹ Issues such as Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang could be specific cases in China’s history; see G. BOVINGDON, *Autonomy in Xinjiang: Han Nationalist Imperatives and Uyghur Discontent*, Washington, East-West Center Washington, 2004.

Considering the Five Central Asian Republics, there is a range of pragmatic interests that involve China in Central Asia, and analysts and scholars do not always concur how best to rationalize and conceptualize Beijing's approach in this area. For some scholars, China has taken advantage of the retreat of Russian power in order to increase its influence in the area; others have proposed that China's interests in the region focus on the security and development of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Another issue has underlined the gradually interdependent relations between China and the former Turchestan¹⁰, which are similar to imperial China's relationships with its bordering states¹¹: Beijing is charged with the task to provide the Five Republics with economic and political good, in return for stability and loyalty to China. China's diplomacy has sought to place its strategy of "Peaceful Rise" also in the Five "Stans", because there were few obstacles for the expansion of its political, economic and security influence. But two different points of views can be identified in the current debate. For some analysts¹² Beijing has a "Great Strategy in Central Asia", where new regionalism, vassal relations and geopolitical manoeuvring become central and strategic elements. According to this interpretation, China's new regionalism is able to introduce a new security concept, which enhances the role of Beijing¹³; vassal relationships are defined by an absolute dependence on Chinese presence¹⁴, and geopolitical manoeuvring can show local power, especially in domestic matters if

¹⁰ During the history Turchestan has never indicated such as a single state but a large region in Central Asia, where Turkish and Persian people lived together. For further information see A. YALÇINKAYA, *The frontiers of Turkestan*, in "Central Asian Survey", n. 3, 1997, pp. 431-438; W. BARTHOLD, *Turkistan*, in "First Enciclopedia of Islām 1913-1936", New York, 1987, pp. 895-899; V. MINORSKY, *Tūrān*, in "First Enciclopedia of Islām", 1913-1936, New York, 1987, pp.878-884.

¹¹ M. CLARKE, *China and Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, in E. KAVALSKI, "The New Central Asia. The Regional Impact of International Actors", Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co, 2010, p.119.

¹² C. CHUNG, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, in "China Quarterly", n. 3, 2004, pp. 989-1009.

¹³ L. FAWCETT, *Exploring regional domains: a comparative history of regionalism*, in "International Affairs", n.3, 2004, p. 433.

¹⁴ It is important to briefly clarify the concept of vassal (or vassalization) and note that, according to John K. Fairbank's exposition, imperial China structured its relations with no Chinese through hierarchical ordering of culturally superior to inferior, but scholars such as Joseph Fletcher and James Millwark have demonstrated that this model was not in use. At the core of the Chinese world the great harmony would be achieved by cultural attraction.

we consider the control of the Muslim communities along the western borders. Stability in Xinjiang, for example, gives China security and strategic benefits that serve both the consolidation and the expansion of Chinese power in Central Asia. Through promoting economic development China wants to stabilise Central Asia states, and Xinjiang becomes a natural bridge¹⁵. In addition, China wants its Central Asian neighbours, which have the largest Uyghur population of any other countries except China, to take a more active part in the fight against Muslim separatism in Xinjinag¹⁶. For another group of scholars¹⁷ Beijing has “No Great Strategy in Central Asia”, because Central Asia does not lie at the forefront of China’s main international, economic and security interests. Instead Chinese policy focuses on other important zone of interests, such as United States, Taiwan, Japan, Korean peninsula and India. Consequently, claims that Beijing is pursuing a “Great Strategy in Central Asia” aimed at control and dominance are overstated. Moreover, China has neither the capacity nor the intention to become a hegemon in the post-Soviet Republics. However “there is a confluence of all the activities of these multifactor actors, which, regardless of what Beijing wants or doesn’t want, means that China is nonetheless the most consequential actor in the region”¹⁸.

2. *From Shanghai Five Forum to Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

The so-called Shanghai Five Forum (S-5), composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, was a group created in 1996 to facilitate diplomatic issues, boarder de-militarisation, troop reduction and confidence-building measures along their borders. Initially, its agenda was focused on military and security matters, issues that China was reluctant to engage in. Later on the organization and its

¹⁵ The recent history of Xinjiang has made China vigilant against the potential infiltration of radical Islamism and Turkic nationalism into the Turkic-Muslim population region; cf. D.C. GLADNEY, *Islam in China: Accommodation or Separatism?* in “The China Quarterly”, n. 174, Religion in China Today, 2003, pp. 451-467; L. CRAIG HARRIS, *Xinjiang, Central Asia and the Implication for China’s Policy in the Islamic World*, in “The China Quarterly”, n. 133, 1993, pp. 111-129.

¹⁶ J. DOYON, *Strengthening the SCO in The New Great Game in Central Asia*, in “China Analysis”, European Council on Foreign Relations, September, 2001.

¹⁷ B. MARIANI, *China’s role and interests in Central Asia*, cit., pp. 3-17.

¹⁸ B. MARIANI, *China’s role and interests in Central Asia*, cit., p. 6.

policy focus were subject to change. On 26 April 1996, this group has signed the “Agreement of Confidence Building in the Military Sphere in the Border Areas”, an agreement including fourteen pacts on border issues and military confidence-building measures. These settlements have emphasized the need to maintain the multilateral nature of security dialogues in the region, demonstrating Beijing’s determination to address its vulnerability along its Western frontier¹⁹. From the very first beginning the S-5 summit was used to pressure the leaders of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to announce that they were opposed to any form of separatist activities, and committed to cooperate with China to contain pro-independent Uyghur activities. Over the period 1996 to 2000, Central Asia was characterized by the rise of Islamic radicalism and the surge of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In 1998, the vice-chairman of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region declared that the area has been overwhelmed by violence. China has become increasingly concerned about the development of relations between Muslim radicals and Central Asia Islamist groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir²⁰ and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan²¹. Beijing responded with repression and campaigns against separatism. The second summit in Moscow (24 April 1997), has produced another agreement on troop reduction in border areas, while the third summit in Almaty (3 July 1998) mentioned questions related to separatism and extremism. On that occasion the statement has declared that member states “would not allow their territories to be used for the activities undermining the national sovereignty, security, and social order of any

¹⁹ M. LANTEIGNE, *In media res: the development of the Shanghai cooperation Organizations a security community*, in “Pacific Affairs”, vol. 4, n. 79, 2006, p. 608.

²⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir was founded by Taqiuddin an-Nabhani, an Islamic scholar, in 1953. For further information see A. KHAMIDOV, *Countering the Call: The US, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Religious Extremism in Central Asia*, Washington, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, 2003; Z. BARAN, *Hizb ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency*, Washington, The Nixon Center, 2004; HIZB UT-TAHRIR, *Dangerous Concepts to Attack Islam and Consolidate the Western Culture*, London, al-Khilafah Publications, 1997; E. KARAGIANNIS, *Political Islam in Uzbekistan: Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*, in “Europe-Asia Studies”, vol. 58, n. 2, 2006, pp. 261-280.

²¹ Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is a militant Islamic group, created in 1998 by a young mullah, Tahir Yuldashev. For further information see M. FREDHOLM, *Islamic Extremism as a Political Force. A Comparative Study of Central Asian Islamic Extremist Movements*, in “Asia Cultures and Modernity”, n. 12, 2006, pp. 19-30; B. BABAJANOV, K. MALIKOV, A. NAZAROV, *Islam in the Ferghana Valley; Between National Identity and Islamic Alternative in Ferghana Valley*, in “The Heart of Central Asia”, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2011, pp. 317-321.

of the five countries”²², and a new security concept, concerning common interests, peaceful dialogue, common security and discouragement of formal and hierarchical alliances was introduced. The meeting in Bishkek (24 August 1999) focused on Islamist movements, drug, weapon trafficking and transnational terrorism and both China and Russia, have increased their diplomatic activities to persuade the Five Republics to develop a regional response to those threats. Between 4 and 5 July 2000 the members signed a joint declaration condemning the Taliban regime and increasing collective efforts to counter the three evils: separatism, terrorism and extremism. On 14 June 2001, as a consequence of the positive cooperation, Uzbekistan has joined the Shanghai Five, leading to the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which today includes six members states (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and four observers (Mongolia, Iran, India and Pakistan). The grouping was perceived by China as a means through which not only to secure Western frontier, but also to further its strategic (political and economic) benefits. The Al-Qaida terrorist attack (11 September 2001) and US invasion of Afghanistan have had repercussions in all Central Asian states and have influenced SCO process too. In fact, in 2001 and in 2002 four Republics (all the states except Turkmenistan) have signed military cooperation and base access agreements with the US. In the same period Uzbekistan has benefited from increased US interest in the region and has received aid worth \$150 million, signing the US-Uzbek “Strategy Partnership”. In 2002 Russia and China have proposed to improve SCO’s anti-terrorism competences but these efforts made limited headway and the lack of concrete practical actions led some observers to consider the SCO an increasingly irrelevant organization weakened by the penetration of US military troops into Central Asia²³. In 2003, all of the SCO states (except Uzbekistan) have conducted “Cooperation-2003” joint military exercises on Chinese and Kazakh soil and this was the first joint military exercise which China had taken part in. In March 2005, in Kyrgyzstan the Tulip Revolution have toppled

²² M. CLARKE, *China and Shanghai Cooperation Organization: The Dynamics of “New Regionalism”, “vassalization”, and Geopolitics in Central Asia*, in E. KAVALSKI, “The New Central Asia, The Regional Impact of International Actors”, Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co., p. 126.

²³ S. BLANK, *China’s defeats in Central Asia*, in “Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst”, 14 August 2002.

long-standing President Akayev and two months later, in Uzbekistan, 4000 people have rioted in a wave of violent unrest in Andijan, which was immediately suppressed by the Uzbek army. These events drastically changed the Central Asian perception of Washington's promotion of human rights and democracy. Consequently, not only China's emphasis on common interests such as stability and the fight against terrorism but also China's position on non-interference in the internal affairs of other states were endorsed by the region's remaining authoritarian leaders. The development of the SCO demonstrates China's endeavour to increase its regional relationships in order to reduce US primacy, while gaining support for the SCO and China.

3. *Economic engagement in the Five Republics*

For twenty-five years China had difficulties balancing its relations with the former Soviet Republics, but recently China has invested more resources to further intensify its economic ties with the five "Stans" in the region. Beijing's economic relations with the "Stans" is focussed on achieving three goals²⁴. Firstly, it wants to continue developing trade relations, against the background of the relevance of Xinxiang. Secondly, it is interested in the supply of oil, gas and uranium from Central Asia. Thirdly, it wants to turn the region into a transport belt for exports of Chinese goods to the West. Over the past three decades, Beijing has achieved economic growth amounting to an average annual GDP growth between 7 and 8%²⁵, in turn leading to the need of increasing energy markets and the country's energy infrastructure. From 2008 to 2013 China has shown an exponential growth in its energy demand and the total production of primary energy resources increased from 2.47 billion to 3.4 billion tons of coal²⁶. According to the IMF, in 2000 China has started with a \$1 billion investment in Central Asia and, over the last fifteen years, has spent up to \$50 billion in investments, trade and infrastructure

²⁴ A. JAROSIEWICZ, K. STRACHOTA, *China vs. Central Asia. The achievement of the past two decades*, in "OSW Studies", n. 45, Warsaw, 2013, p. 32.

²⁵ In the second quarter of 2016, the Chinese economy has registered an annual 6.7 per cent.

²⁶ Z. WANG, *Securing Energy Flows from Central Asia to China and the Relevance of the Energy Charter Treaty to China*, Brussels, Energy Charter Secretariat Knowledge Centre, 2015, p. 9.

such as highways, pipeline and railways. China is determined to secure Central Asia as its own zone of economic interest, in order to promote and control regional stability and facilitate its Silk Road Economic Belt initiative. In the years ahead, Chinese oil and gas consumption will increase, in turn leading to the increase of investments in hydroelectric and nuclear projects. However, while the Chinese Five-Year Plan (2010-2015) have targeted oil imports meeting no more than 61% of demand by the end of 2015, it is foreseen that actual import dependence will be over 66%, and China's primary oil demand will rise to 12.2 bpd by 2020, as demand is expected to grow faster than domestic crude supply²⁷. Consequently, it is evident that Central Asia is an important area, where China has to play a decisively (economic and political) strategic role.

In the energy market, over the last two decades and after a long testing period, China-Central Asian relations have reached a stable phase, characterized by the following: increase of energy cooperation including, the construction of pipeline construction and petrochemical cooperation; differentiate the ownership and contractual structures, involving joint venture and production sharing agreements; develop multilateral forms of cooperation; aim at obtaining more partnerships with the West for reasons related to risk-diversification especially for Chinese state-owned enterprises. It is obvious that energy cooperation between Beijing and the Five Republics depends on four elements: their economic potential, the level of their resources, their role as transit countries and their internal stability. Kazakhstan has 3.9% of the total world oil reserves²⁸ and by 2020 its crude oil production is estimated to amount 120 million tons annually. Uzbekistan has close to 600 million barrels of proven reserves, above all located in the Bukhara and Khiva region. Turkmenistan has less than 600 million barrels, but as regards natural gas Ashgabat plays a dominant role as the sixth largest natural gas reserve holder in the world. Turkmenistan has also proven natural gas reserves of approximately 265 trillion cubic feet²⁹.

From China's point of view, Kazakhstan is the most important country in the region. Astana has an enormous economic potential due

²⁷ AA.VV., *Oil and Gas Security, Emergency response of IEA countries, People's Republic of China*, in "International Energy Agency", Paris, 2012, p. 5.

²⁸ AA.VV., *BP statistical Review of World Energy*, June 2016, p.6.

²⁹ AA.VV., *Country analysis of Turkmenistan overview*, in "Energy Information Agency" website.

to its natural resources, geographic proximity, political stability and well-developed transport infrastructure. In this country China is an important economic and political partner together with Russia. Their bilateral relationships have assumed an important role through the establishment of an all-round strategic partnership and Beijing has sought to assume a leading role in cultivating and developing the energy industry, controlling Kazakhstan's oil, natural gas, minerals and other energy resources. Astana's economy is highly reliant on Beijing investment and, over the years, China National Petroleum Corporation bought PetroKazakhstan for \$4.2 billion³⁰ and developed the Atyrau-Alashankou pipeline. Kazakh Company, KazMunayGaz, represents one of the major sources of oil for the Dushanzi refinery in Xinjiang, and in 2013 the China National Petroleum Corporation and KazMunayGaz signed an agreement on capacity expansion of the China-Kazakhstan crude oil pipeline, aimed to be completed in 2018³¹. Yerlan Karin, the director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies, a government-run think tank, stated that at the beginning of 2016 there were 668 Chinese companies operating in Kazakhstan, 35% more than in 2013. Furthermore, China has invested more than \$10 billion in Kazakhstan over the last five years³².

For Turkmenistan, China is the most important political partner and Ashgabat is seen by China as the most important supplier of gas. In 2008, both countries signed the "Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee" agreement for the construction of a 1,830 km gas pipeline, a direct connection of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. During the Chinese President's visit in September 2013, the two countries agreed to expand the gas pipeline, in order to increase the annual export of China to 65 billion cubic metres per year by 2016³³. However, the strategic cooperation with Beijing has failed to counterweigh the financial losses resulting from the decrease of gas exports to Russia and the need to assign part of the revenues gained from gas to

³⁰ C. MELVIN, *Chinese Foreign Policy: a Chronology April-June 2009*, London, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom Research & Assessment Branch, 2010, p. 15.

³¹ Z. WANG, *Securing Energy Flows from Central Asia to China and the Relevance of the Energy Charter Treaty to China*, Brussels, Energy Charter Secretariat Knowledge Centre, 2015, p. 20.

³² S. SNOW, *Central Asia's Lukewarm pivot to China*, in "The Diplomatic", 16 August 2016.

³³ R. MAKHMUDOV, *Xi Tour demonstrates a microcosm of Central Asian cooperation*, in "Global Times", 18 September 2013.

the payment of Chinese companies engaged in Turkmenistan. According to some analysts, in fact, Turkmenistan's diversification toward China is merely an illusion and a trap, because Russia's patronage over Central Asia will be replaced by China's patronage.

Uzbekistan offers an important corridor for Turkmen gas and is the most promising outlet for Beijing goods, because it has the largest population. However, China has a particular relationship with Tashkent. This "Stan" was the last in the region to establish relations with China, and it was the last to have accepted loans offered by Beijing. Only recently Tashkent accepted investments from Beijing, which has become the second-biggest trading partner in a short time. In 2012, Beijing had 35 direct investment projects in Uzbekistan, with nearly \$4bn invested and the bilateral trade volume reached \$2.87bn, rising 50 times since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1992³⁴. Moreover, according to the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, 347 Uzbek companies operate jointly with Chinese investors. It is noteworthy that Uzbekistan is, among the Five Republics, the country most actively engaged in developing economic cooperation with East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Japan and Malaysia. Uzbekistan has also been actively developed political and military cooperation with NATO and the US in the framework of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan is politically a very unstable country, which experienced two revolutions in 2005 and 2010. It is important to note that the first revolution was against the Chinese businesses omnipresent in the country. China, however, has remained calm and has reinforced its presence in the Kyrgyz economy. Kyrgyzstan is strategically important, because it is located at the intersection of interests in Central Asia and represents a fundamental gate for oil from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Bishkek can play the role of the area's centre for trade of Chinese goods owing to its WTO membership and a stable domestic political climate. Beijing aims at establishing the development of an important roads network, linking China and Uzbekistan³⁵. Tajikistan is the smaller country among the "Five Stans", whose Persian population is linguistically and ethnically different from the other Turkic neighbours. It can be an important transit country for the transport of Chinese goods and a bridge for

³⁴ Z. JING, *Ambassador talks China-Uzbekistan milestone*, in "China.org.cn", 21 January 2012.

³⁵ F. MASHRAB, *Bishkek Puts Brakes on China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway*, in "Eurasia Daily Monitor", vol. 12, n. 199, 3 November 2015.

exports of goods to other Central Asian Republics and further to Iran and Middle East. In May 2013, China and Tajikistan signed a strategic partnership agreement, aimed at strengthening bilateral economic cooperation in energy, infrastructure and other areas. Moreover, even more importantly, a new agreement to speed up the construction of Line D of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline has been signed³⁶.

Conclusions

Since the 1980s, economic growth has been the central element of Beijing's policy agenda and Deng Xiaoping has defined economic rise as the "central task" for its nation over the next 100 years. The need to achieve wealth and prosperity is seen as a key to achieve the century-old dream of revitalizing the Chinese civilization and realize the ideals of a rich nation with a strong military force. As a consequence, China's involvement in Central Asia is aimed at increasing Beijing's influence in the region. Achieving stability while securing the supply of oil, gas and uranium are, the central elements of Chinese involvement in Central Asia. Political and economic stability in Central Asia, in turn, is aimed at safeguarding stability in China's Xinjiang province, accompanied by stable links between Central Asia and Xinjiang. Stable relations between China and Central Asia, in turn, increase Chinese role and influence on the region's security.

One of the most important reasons behind cooperation between the post-Soviet Republics and China include a Central Asian desire to become less dependent on Russia and increase China's profile as an actor in global politics and security. In fact, China's increasing economic presence poses a challenge to Russia and the West in their competition for access to Central Asian natural resources. Indeed, Chinese companies' presence in the Central Asian energy sector is perceived as threatening to Russian business in the region. Through economic cooperation Beijing wants to reinforce its influence in the area and keep a balance between Russian and Western positions. However, China continues to conduct policies according to the "principle of non-interference" while seeking to avoid conflict with Russia. Central Asian countries are well aware of their geostrategic importance in the region, which is reflected

³⁶ K. ANDRIJAUSKAS, China's economic penetration into Post-Soviet Central Asia and Eastern Europe, in "Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review", n. 30, 2013, pp. 113-131.

in China's "One Belt One Road" policy strategy, intended to re-install the former ancient Silk Road. The former Soviet Republics offer investment opportunities for a Chinese economy looking to outsource overcapacities. China looks outward for its natural supplies and tries to decrease its reliance on domestic coal by investing in alternative energy. However, this will require closer cooperation between China and its Western neighbours. Rapid growth in energy cooperation between Beijing and the Central Asia has been achieved in terms of volume, ranging from the extraction of petroleum and uranium resource to more downstream area such as refining, pipeline operations and electricity transmission. Energy infrastructure projects and pipelines have achieved positive results in recent years, but there are some potential risks such as the divergence in the allocation of new transits in the pipeline route. However, the protection stipulated in existing bilateral and intergovernmental agreements or in cooperative system under the SCO seems insufficient to ensure stable energy flows.

China has implemented its interests in the region, and one element of success is the fact that nearly all newly-established routes, used for the transport of materials and resources from Central Asia, are running in the eastern direction. Nowadays, China is becoming the most important beneficiary of natural gas from Central Asia, meaning that the Five Republic' dependence on China will rise continuously.

In a global scenario, the Five Republics treated China as a convenient counterbalance in their dealing with the US and Russia and it is evident that China is an important financial and political alternative, but the singular nature of China and its policy in Central Asia offers them no other choice but to maintain cautious policies toward Beijing. Central Asian countries are unable to reduce their economic cooperation with China and this means that China has gained an important tool for influencing every state in the region.

Riassunto - Dopo il collasso della potenza sovietica, Pechino ha consolidato i rapporti diplomatici con le cinque repubbliche centro-asiatiche, determinando un incremento esponenziale delle relazioni commerciali. Nel 2013 è stato avviato il progetto di una "cintura" economica lungo la via della seta, un ambizioso piano eurasiatico in grado di collegare le sponde dell'Oceano Pacifico con quelle del Mar Baltico per favorire lo sviluppo economico e massimiz-

zare le comunicazioni tra Cina ed Europa. In uno scenario globale, quello che Pechino offre alle cinque repubbliche centro-asiatiche è una conveniente alternativa ai mercati statunitensi e russi, ma tale scelta non ha solo implicazioni di carattere finanziario, ma chiare ripercussioni politiche. Il Partito comunista cinese è deciso ha preservare una politica conservatrice, garantendo i principi di non interferenza in una soluzione dove apparentemente tutti vincono.

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S CENTRAL ASIA STRATEGY

by Jos Boonstra

*Introduction*¹

Since 2007 the EU's policy towards Central Asia took shape through a broad Strategy that sought to build ties with a largely uncharted region for EU external policy. Over the last decade, the EU has successfully established several institutionalised mechanisms for strengthening relations and working with Central Asian governments, including an increased presence on the ground via EU delegations in Central Asian capitals. Despite this, the EU's engagement in Central Asia is one of limited to no impact. The region has become more unstable; forecast gas deliveries from the region to Europe have so far not materialised; trade is minimal with the exception of EU-Kazakhstan links; democracy is seen by the Central Asian regimes as a threat to their survival; corruption severely undermines economic development and siphons off much of the development aid; and the human rights situation has been backsliding.

While some global and regional actors have laid out a broad policy vision for Central Asia – the 'New Silk Road' and the United

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¹ This article builds on two earlier EUCAM policy briefs: J. BOONSTRA, T. TSERTSVADZE, *Implementation and Review of the European Union. Central Asia Strategy: Recommendations for EU action*, European Parliament, In-depth Analyses, January 2016, http://www.eucentralasia.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Working_Papers/Implementation-EU-Central-Asia-Strategy-Recommendations-2015.pdf; and J. BOONSTRA, *Reviewing the EU's approach to Central Asia*, EUCAM Policy Brief, No. 34, February 2015, http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_ictcontent/EUCAM-PB-34-Reviewing-EU-policies-in-Central-Asia-EN_01.pdf. For more EUCAM research see: www.eucentralasia.eu.

States-Central Asia (C5+1) format by the United States (US); and the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ (as part of the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative) by China – the EU devised a detailed strategy in 2007 outlining seven priorities ranging from democracy promotion to education and from security to energy and trade interests². The EU’s Central Asia Strategy is more than a policy expression in which just a few objectives are outlined, but less than an extensive and detailed strategy that would ideally be accompanied by an action plan and measurable benchmarks. The latter seems unlikely to come about in great detail while the EU is also unlikely to severely scale back to just a statement or vision. Nonetheless, the EU is planning to revise the Strategy in 2017.

A new Strategy will likely become a balancing act between several EU policies and interests. It will likely include the new buzzword of ‘resilience’, highlighted in the EU Global Strategy of 2016 as it states that “The wider strategic perspective emerging in the EU is reflected in the new Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy that addresses European interests in security and resilient states and societies from ‘the east stretching into Central Asia, and to the south down to Central Africa’³. This will raise questions if the EU will emphasize support to countries’ resilience through pushing for reform and engaging with societies at large or if it will mostly support incumbent authoritarian governments to keep their grip on power.

This article argues that the EU should scale down its rhetoric ambitions in Central Asia while outlining a few areas where the EU is well positioned and capable of fostering stronger practical ties with the region.

1. *Strategic engagement with Central Asia*

The current EU Central Asia Strategy is ambitious, given that member state activities indicate only a minimal interest in the region. It is an area that is not a geopolitical priority for Europe. The EU will need

² *The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership*, Brussels, 31 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2010113%202007%20INIT>.

³ *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy*, p. 9, https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/about/eugs_review_web_4.pdf.

to carefully balance limited interests and resources with a few achievable long-term objectives. In 2012, the EU's review of its Central Asia Strategy was heavily focused on the impact of Afghanistan on Central Asia. Today, the situation in Afghanistan is less central to European policy-makers than the impact of the crisis in Ukraine and EU-Russia relations on Central Asia. The later developments led to the EU urging in its March 2016 Council Conclusions for 'Strengthened relations with the EU's Eastern Partners and other neighbours, in particular in Central Asia'⁴ as one of five guiding principles of policies towards Russia. It remains to be seen if Brussels can hurdle member states in practice around a view of Central Asia's increased importance to the EU. Overall the EU policies towards the region would be well-served if they concentrate on long-term priorities, rather than focusing on contemporaneous geopolitical issues alone.

Russian influence on its neighbours will remain substantial. The fact that the five Central Asian republics are nowadays still regarded by many 'outsiders', including the EU, as one coherent region based on Soviet borders gives Russia an advantage in approaching the region while leaning on a Soviet heritage (Russian language, contacts nurtured and mechanisms that survived). However, the priority for Russia and the EU is currently Eastern Europe and Syria, not Central Asia which remains on the periphery of the divisions between Moscow and the EU. Russian-inspired initiatives to limit the space for civil society, to criminalise LGBT communities and to curtail political pluralism has further taken root in all Central Asian countries. The alternative the EU can offer to these countries is help in reforms based on democracy, rule of law and good governance. Accepting cooperation with the EU that includes a reform agenda would likely bring long term benefits to Central Asian countries and societies, which are also keen on an alternative to Russia's policies (and China's economic influence). But in the current political context it is unlikely that Central Asian leaders will embrace the EU normative reform agenda.

The main EU diplomatic go-to-person in the region has been the EU Special Representatives (EUSR) since 2005. Abolishing this position in March 2014 was a mistake (regardless of the budgetary and institutional considerations underlying the decision). EUSRs have been the face of Europe in Central Asia and have had a positive impact on the otherwise

⁴ EU Foreign Affairs Council, Meeting nr 3457, Brussels, 14 March 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2016/03/14/>.

limited visibility of the EU in the region. EU foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, has remedied this shortcoming by reviving this EUSR position and appointing Peter Burian as the new EUSR for Central Asia.

The EU has sought to institutionalise a ‘High-Level Security Dialogue’, but the first meeting in Brussels in June 2013 fell far short of that stated ambition. Some Central Asian governments sent only ambassador-level officials. A second gathering planned for May 2014 in Tajikistan was cancelled owing to a lack of Central Asian interest. The main reason for the EU embarking on this initiative was to address Central Asian security challenges while offering the opportunity to partners to outline their concerns over Afghanistan’s future. The EU had another go at this mechanism in March 2015 in Tajikistan where a broad range of security matters and cooperation was discussed at deputy foreign ministry level while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan only sent ‘representatives’. The third gathering that was held in Brussels in May 2016 at deputy foreign affairs minister level showed a continuation of talks on issues such as counter-terrorism and border management. The European External Action Service (EEAS) – which is responsible for continuing this process – could consider involving member states at a high level to attract Central Asian attention. Also a ‘high-level security dialogue’ will need to be followed through on a lower practical bureaucratic and possibly civil society level, possibly through concrete and concise joint projects.

One subject that could be considered for this Dialogue agenda is the fact that many young people from Central Asia and Europe have left for Syria to join the Islamic State (IS). While Europe and Central Asia have very different domestic settings, the motivations of people from both regions fighting for IS have some parallels. The danger that fighters returning from Syria to Central Asia and Europe could commit terrorist acts at home is a threat that both regions face, as the attacks in Paris and Brussels have sadly demonstrated. Another area that the EU and Central Asian partners could focus on is conflict prevention mechanisms to see off potential problems in the future (a series of border incidents between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan took place over the last years while tensions over hydroelectric power between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remain worrisome).

Although the EU has little influence in Central Asia, adherence to democratic principles should be the centrepiece of engagement. These countries will only become more reliable partners when they develop and respect the rule of law and democratic governance. For the

EU, democracy should be a *sine qua non*. Central Asian regimes see democracy as a threat to their existence and are more comfortable with Russia's model of authoritarian governance. The EU should use a pragmatic combination of aid, conditionality and political engagement in seeking change in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with Kazakhstan and the latter's wish to play a leading international role should also be used to encourage Astana to reverse democratic backsliding. In the closed dictatorships of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the EU lacks leverage, but Brussels should condition engagement with these regimes on concrete deliverables on their part.

Human rights should remain a major focus for the EU in Central Asia. The Human Rights Dialogues created by the EU have modest added value mainly as a complementary tool of 'persuasion' (in addition to the UN mechanisms) and with respect to improving the situation of specific (prosecuted) human rights activists. Meanwhile, the 'Civil Society Seminars' still have some potential to establish a 'healthy' dialogue between civil society actors, the government and European actors in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. So far, they have resulted for instance in a modest contribution on anti-torture legislation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The only civil society seminar with Uzbekistan in 2008 did not live up to its expectations on either side, and has not been repeated. In Turkmenistan, as in Uzbekistan, lack of independent civil society and governments' repressive policies make such a dialogue redundant. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has played a substantial role in providing funding to human rights organisations in the region, together with the Non-State Actors and Local Authorities (NSA/LA) mechanism. However, most funding has gone to experienced organisations that know the game of meeting bureaucratic requirements in obtaining EU funding. This has largely left young and less experienced civil society actors in the cold. Support for a new generation of human rights defenders should be among the many priorities on human rights in the region.

The EU (preferably through the EUSR) should regularly exchange information and discuss development cooperation in Central Asia with other powers, such as the US, China, Turkey, Japan and Russia, although the scope for dialogue with Moscow will depend on the evolution of broader EU-Russia relations. On the ground in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan donor coordination is especially important; it will be vital to involve China in this.

Beijing has pledged \$40 billion to fund OBOR that includes a Silk Road Economic Belt (largely aimed at linking China via Central Asia to Europe) and a Maritime Silk Road (directed at China's littoral neighbours to the south). These donations will partly benefit Central Asia – primarily aimed at infrastructure development – and dwarf EU assistance (€1 billion over a 7 year time span) or any Russian engagement. EU-Chinese cooperation on Central Asian development, for instance by combining European know-how and Chinese funding, would seem logical. Still, prospects for this to happen seem bleak since, for example, European firms will find it difficult to buy into Chinese commercial operations in Central Asia. China might have some interest in European rule of law activities and anti-corruption programmes as Chinese investment and business in Central Asia are negatively impacted by lawlessness and corruption.

The options for concrete cooperation in infrastructure and energy projects (outside regional and UN organisations) will remain limited, not only between China and the EU, but even between the US and the EU. For the EU and China, the *modus operandi* is too different to find a match. In the case of EU-US cooperation these actors do not regard Central Asia as a priority which limits the will for concrete cooperation.

2. Bilateral relations

The EU's main focus in Central Asia should be on bilateral relations, rather than regional approaches (which, as an integrated bloc, the EU tends to adopt). The Central Asian states have become more diversified and expect to build their own bilateral relations with Europe. Engagement and assistance to each country will need to be further tailored to ensure that cooperation is in the best interest of both parties. This should also include an increased effort by the EU to engage with Central Asia's marginalised civil society organisations through, for example, funding projects, supporting networks, and spurring debates and consultations.

Kazakhstan is the top priority for most EU member states in Central Asia. Half of foreign investment in Kazakhstan is of European origin and about 40 per cent of Kazakh exports go to Europe. In December 2015 the EU and Kazakhstan signed an EPCA, embodying Astana's special relations with Brussels. Attention remains warranted on the coun-

try's lack of democratic reform, poor human rights record reinforced by adopting repressive legislation (amendments to the Criminal and Administrative codes), criminalising the work of independent civil society and limiting media and political pluralism. Kazakhstan's fear of being locked into the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and its economic downturn due to low oil-prices gives the EU some leverage, which could be taken up by the European Parliament or member states to persuade Kazakhstan to adopt some concrete reforms.

If tensions between the EU and Russia arise in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is the most likely political 'battleground'. Its recent membership of the EEU places the country more firmly in Russia's orbit: somewhat of a peculiarity as one of Moscow's loyal allies in the region, it is also the most democratic country having, for instance, organised free and fair elections in October 2015. But the recent democratic gains are fragile and under threat. Whereas in EU eyes Kyrgyzstan was foremost an opportunity for democratisation, the immediate future seems more geared towards Kyrgyz geopolitical choices between powerful neighbours and Western actors. The EU (and other democracy supporters) will be challenged in obtaining results from Bishkek. Lingering ethnic tensions following the 2010 violence between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek populations in the south of the country remain a matter that needs monitoring.

Tajikistan also plans to join the EEU but is unstable and vulnerable to influences from Russia and China (and to a lesser extent Iran). The Tajik regime led by President Emomali Rahmon has over the last few years crippled the opposition and more recently has been repressive towards civil society actors. For the EU, getting development assistance right – by being tough on the conditions for giving aid, including checks on implementation – will be essential as corruption is rife (and impeding economic development) and EU border management assistance programmes are hampered by the country's elites that are involved in the lucrative opiates trade.

Turkmenistan is the only republic in Central Asia where the EU does not yet have a fully-fledged delegation. The reason for this seems to be budgetary, which is strange as energy remains officially a priority for the EU in Central Asia, and Turkmenistan is the only new opportunity for gas imports (opportunities in Kazakhstan's oil industry are already being exploited by Europe). However, it might be explained by the fact that gas imports from Turkmenistan are not expected any time soon. Currently Turkmenistan exports most of its gas to China,

in the absence of any progress in building a Trans-Caspian pipeline to Azerbaijan and from there a connection across the Caucasus and Turkey to the EU. As only a few EU member states are represented in Ashgabat, it would make sense for the EU to have a delegation in order to engage and monitor developments in this geo-politically challenged country, bordering Afghanistan and Iran as well as the Caspian Sea. Meanwhile the conclusion of a bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU is also pending as a result of the European Parliament's concerns over human rights in Turkmenistan. A EU delegation might help the EU better monitor the extremely troublesome human rights situation on the ground.

EU relations with Uzbekistan have not really developed since the lifting of all sanctions in 2009 and the establishment of a delegation in Tashkent in 2011. The regime has been difficult to work with, while European trade and other interests are very limited. This non-aligned and most populous Central Asian country is, however, crucial for regional stability. Long-time President Islam Karimov died in September 2016 and was replaced by Prime-Minister Shavkat Miriyoyev who is likely to continue Karimov's policies of balancing interests in Central Asia and keeping a harsh grip on Uzbek society. The new leadership configuration does not seem to offer a genuine opening for reforms or increased EU activities for that matter. EU development funding is currently fully geared towards rural development. Although the sector needs support, the EU will need to explain what it expects to achieve through this support, given Uzbekistan's poor reform record and ongoing forced labour in the cotton fields.

3. The EU's regional approach

EU regional cooperation initiatives will need to be carefully focused and more flexible. As regional lines become ever more blurred (to what extent is Central Asia still a unified region?) and the current five 'Stans' are not eager to be rounded up by the EU in joint formats, the focus should be on cooperation with two, three or more countries that are willing and able to work on a particular area. This could also involve other countries in the wider region such as Afghanistan, Azerbaijan or Mongolia.

The EU's three regional programmes – rule of law, water and environment, education – for Central Asia should be evaluated in-depth.

If useful, they should be expanded, if not, they should be scrapped. The rule of law is an odd subject to take up in a regional format with Central Asian governments, but is at least possible to address, whereas local regimes are not open to discuss democracy as such. Still, rule of law reforms in Central Asia remain superficial at best and lack practical follow-through. All in all, these reforms do not arrive from a regional understanding or action. The initiative's platform has though created a useful database of European rule of law projects in Central Asia. It is doubtful, however, whether the broader initiative (run by France and Germany) will actually coordinate, foster and track meaningful reform.

The same can be said about the water and environment initiative led by Italy and Romania. This is a subject important to all Central Asian republics. However, sensitivities and tensions among the countries of the region make progress difficult. Moreover, most international donor programmes increasingly seek a national rather than a regional approach; the former will likely bear more practical results at this stage. There seems to be an understanding that these regional water management problems can only be tackled if the involved countries have their own 'house' better in order. This does not mean that regional talks are not useful but that concrete progress in support should start bottom-up.

Until 2015 no member state has been willing to take on the education initiative. This was disappointing, as it is this sector that deserves most attention, though not necessarily on a regional basis. Latvia with the help of Poland has remedied this by taking over the coordination of the initiative although a broader effort would be needed to really make an impact. If the EU wants to contribute to the development of Central Asia, to become more visible, act strategically over the long-term, and counter Russian influence, it should invest heavily in higher education (and where funds allow, also in technical vocational and secondary education). However, such an investment (largely consisting of Central Asian students having the opportunity to study in Europe) will only be useful if programmes are able to tackle or circumvent the risk of brain-drain and unequal access (of the elites only) to higher education.

The Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) is the EU's flagship security programme in the region. The programme's implementation has been transferred from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to a group of EU member states (Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Portugal). The parallel EU Central Asia Drug

Action Programme (CADAP) is meanwhile implemented by GIZ, the German development agency. This is a positive development as the EU's Central Asia policy will need more member state involvement. There is now also an opportunity to think through EU border management support, hence the minimal allocation of only €5 million for BOMCA's ninth phase over the coming three years. The EU will need to decide if the programme will focus on border areas between the five Central Asian republics (some republics barely participate) or on the 'external' Tajikistan-Afghanistan border where many other donors are also active (while being affected by Tajikistan's unwillingness to undergo wholesale reform of border security). Central Asian recipients have always sought support in the form of equipment while the EU prefers border guard training. Next steps could involve a stronger focus on migration issues and border monitoring.

4. *Development assistance*

From 2007 to 2013 the EU's development assistance to Central Asia amounted to roughly €750 million, of which one-third was allocated to regional programmes and two-thirds to bilateral initiatives. From 2014 to 2020, the EU plans to spend about €1 billion in Central Asia. The EU has learned from the first seven year-cycle of Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) spending (paralleling the political Strategy), in which it spread its modest funds over a long list of priorities and areas. In the new cycle, the main recipients have three sectors to which funds will be allocated: Kyrgyzstan (rule of law, education and rural development) and Tajikistan (health, education and rural development). Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will have one each: rural development and education, respectively. Kazakhstan no longer receives bilateral aid as it is considered an upper middle-income country, while aid to Turkmenistan will likely be phased out in 2017 when the country is set to reach upper middle-income status.

The region is not a priority for the EU and earlier development aid has been heavily affected by recipients' unwillingness to engage in democratic reform and tackle endemic corruption. Meanwhile the practice of sectoral budget support in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has continued, even though this is avoided by most other international donors. The EU, however, continues the practice – with increased funding – which has advantages but also serious risks. Over the coming

years, monitoring of its implementation will be essential for the EU's development approach to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Central Asia watchers also wondered about the steep rise in allocations to Uzbekistan (€168 million from 2014 to 2020). Uzbekistan had received little under the former funding cycle, and is mentioned by the few active donors as extremely difficult to work with. Nonetheless, the EU has more than doubled the budget for Uzbekistan without any justification that increased funds will have a significant impact. Building new ties with the Miriyoyev leadership, a hands-on approach and close monitoring are warranted to ensure that support to Uzbekistan's rural sector has the desired effect.

5. *Conclusions: a way forward*

The EU should focus on a few key areas where it can obtain concrete results. A revision of the document seems to be in the making soon as an October 2016 EU-Central Asia ministerial meeting highlighted: "All participants agreed that the upcoming revision of the Central Asia strategy in 2017 will allow cooperation between the European Union and Central Asia to become more result-oriented, combining the bilateral approach that reflects the specificities of each of the five Central Asian countries with a regional dimension that puts emphasis on economic growth and stability"⁵. Regardless of its shape, the following six elements could serve as input for such a new strategy:

5.1 *Increased use of conditionality*

The EU's leverage in Central Asia is modest. However, Central Asian leaderships like to boast close relations with Brussels and European power centres as counterweights to Beijing and Moscow. Ties with democratic European leaders and the EU structures can help the regimes bolster their sovereignty and independence towards the outside world but also make it possible to present themselves as equal and respected democratic partners internally to their own populations.

⁵ European Union-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting, 4 October 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/11048/european-union---central-asia-ministerial-meeting-4-october-2016_en

Relations with important countries are often reported nationally with some pomp and circumstance stressing the importance of a particular Central Asian state for the EU or the US. Hence the EU will need to assess and set conditions with great care in its political engagement with the Central Asian regimes to assure they are of mutual benefit in terms of development and reform.

5.2 Focus on bilateral relations and review regional initiatives

As the EU already acknowledges, it prefers to adopt a ‘bilateral’ approach as it seeks to forge deeper ties with the countries of the region. As long as regional cooperation is not a home-grown phenomenon, the EU can do little to rally unwilling countries around subjects they either view differently or are not interested in. Consequently, current regional initiatives should be further evaluated and adapted or scrapped as necessary. Regional cooperation should also become more flexible working with just a few Central Asian partners or adding neighbouring countries to joint projects. Clearly the EU is increasingly focusing on bilateral relations with partners in seeking concrete benefits. This goes likely at the expense of regional initiatives for which the EU is famous in promoting as it is itself built on ongoing integration. The EU should continue and be ready to facilitate dialogue or perform a mediating role on sensitive regional topics (such as water management) as it is still regarded as a fairly neutral actor with great experience. Nonetheless a maturing EU external policy is more likely to seek bilateral ties as a basis for engagement instead of regional undertakings⁶.

5.3 Get member states further involved

Over the last decade most EU member states have left relations with Central Asia to EU structures via the Strategy. Kazakhstan is the exception because national economic interests prevail there and member states have installed their own embassies. The EU could use increased

⁶ This is a development that was taken up in the Council Conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia but also in the Review of the European neighbourhood, Brussels, 18 November 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf

member state support to strengthen capacity as well as leverage. An increased member state involvement will help create knowledge and interest in Central Asia by member states in turn hopefully leading to a boost of activities with the region. This would not come down to an intergovernmental management of EU aid and activities but to a division of labour under a joint EU flag: it is not about the allocation of resources and decision of what direction to take but about the actual implementation of EU programmes that the EU alone does not have the capacity for on the ground. Several member states have been involved in regional initiatives in recent years and this should be encouraged. Member states should increasingly lead and coordinate national or regional projects on behalf of the EU (just as the EU represents member states with few embassies in Central Asian republics). Germany initiated the EU Strategy in 2007, some member states have stepped up in recent years (Finland and Latvia come to mind) but now other states also need to take on aspects of EU development assistance and interest in the region. Europe as a whole through EU member states and partners (Norway, Switzerland, etc.) need to be visible in Central Asia, not just EU institutions that of course represent Europe to a large degree.

5.4 Security and conflict prevention

The Strategy is largely based on the idea of security and stability through engagement. The EU lacks a hard security posture in Central Asia. In case of crisis it is highly unlikely that member states will agree to act via the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP); interest in the region is too low for that and geopolitically the EU or any other actor will not easily step into a volatile region that is located in-between Russia and China. The EU's contribution lies in soft security and diplomacy: the EUSR position is important for the EU to play a diplomatic security role: this for instance helped the EU to react to the ethnic violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Brussels will need to further fine-tune and possibly expand its soft security input. One way to achieve this is through the institutionalised Security Dialogues that will require more high-level participation from both sides and a more structured working agenda at a lower level. Another would be concrete projects: a new BOMCA programme incorporating lessons learned from past experiences; and projects that focus on conflict prevention. The latter, in particular, could prove essential as the region's

security and stability threats are mounting (potential violent leadership changes; negative consequences of labour migration; poverty; ethnic, religious and social tensions; terrorism and tensions between neighbouring countries over territory or resources). Here the EU could team-up with international NGOs and possibly with the UN in Turkmenistan and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

5.5 Support democratisation where possible and support civil society where needed

Promoting democracy is difficult in Central Asia. Possibly with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, there is little that the EU can do to support democratisation directly through working with governments as they resist reform and there is a risk that those funds would be siphoned off by corrupt bureaucracies. Consequently support for democracy should focus on the grassroots. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the EU ideally would deliver increased support through flexible funding mechanisms, including small grants, emergency support, and training schemes. For Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan where there are hardly any independent NGOs the support should target individual activists, lawyers, or exiled groups. However, the EU needs to decide whether it is capable of dispersing and monitoring many small grants directly to civil society organisations with limited absorption capacity or channel funds through other actors (international organisations or EU member states). Increased funding for Central Asia's weak civil society is desperately needed as the pressures on NGO workers and activists is mounting and international donors seem to be leaving the region. The fact that the European Endowment for Democracy has expanded its efforts to Central Asia in 2015 is good news and should be supported.

5.6 Human rights as a bottom-line and at the core of the relationship

Speaking out in defence of human rights should not contradict promoting trade interests and strategic gains. If Central Asian countries improve respect for human rights and the rule of law they will be more stable and trustworthy partners to do business with. While the EU should uphold human rights everywhere, it is crucial to do so in

Central Asia where it has little to lose and where human rights have regressed over recent years. The EU is aware of the need to stay focused on deepening the Human Rights Dialogues. These need not be stand-alone events but could be connected to other policy areas (such as energy and security): the EU will need to make more work (in the case of Central Asia at least) of the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy that stresses the importance of human rights and democracy in all EU internal and external policies⁷. The EU should further combine the Dialogues with occasional civil society seminars and an increase in funding for human rights-related projects in all five countries.

5.7 Invest in the future of the region and Europe-Central Asia relations: Education

If the EU really seeks to have a lasting impact on the region it should invest in education. This could be the centrepiece of EU-Central Asia cooperation and the EU's development aid involvement in the region. However, the current regional education initiative and Erasmus programme are not enough. Central Asia's educational system has largely collapsed. The exceptions to this are the small number of new well-funded higher education facilities in Kazakhstan and foreign-funded and private universities in the region. The quality of higher education in Central Asia pales in comparison with other post-Soviet regions of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The post-Soviet heritage and poor state of the education systems will require tailor-made approaches in each of the countries of the region. Meanwhile a focus on education through student exchanges and study grants will help to foster people-to-people contacts between Europe and Central Asia. Over the long-run this could also offer an alternative view to that of Russia in the region's external outlook. If the EU is able to focus its efforts on education, it should also look to investing in basic education and capacity building in vocational education. A major challenge will be combating the pervasive corruption in the educational systems in Central Asia.

⁷ Council Conclusions on the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019 Brussels, 20 July 2015, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10897-2015-INIT/en/pdf>

The EU, despite the Strategy and its pledge of over €1 billion to the region, finds itself in an often seemingly powerless position to influence events in the region. In this sense the priority for the EU should be to focus on a few areas where it could have a meaningful impact. These should be: bilateral partnerships and increased links with civil societies; strengthening the defence of human rights; modest security cooperation and conflict prevention projects; and a more simplified and effective development policy with a heavy emphasis on education.

Riassunto - Nell'ultimo decennio l'Unione Europea ha attivato numerosi meccanismi istituzionali per rafforzare le relazioni con i governi dell'Asia Centrale, rafforzando anche la propria presenza *in loco* tramite proprie delegazioni nelle capitali centroasiatiche. Nonostante ciò, l'impegno dell'Unione nell'area ha ben scarsa influenza. La regione è nel frattempo divenuta instabile, le importazioni di gas in Europa si sono fino a ora rivelate inferiori alle previsioni, le relazioni commerciali sono limitate a eccezione di quelle UE-Kazakhstan, la democrazia è considerata da quei regimi una minaccia alla loro

sopravvivenza, la corruzione compromette lo sviluppo economico e assorbe la gran parte degli aiuti, la situazione dei diritti umani ha fatto passi indietro. L'Unione Europea non dovrebbe né potrebbe competere con Russia e Cina nella regione, ma dovrebbe concentrarsi su poche aree-chiave dove è in grado di ottenere risultati concreti. Oltre ad accordi di cooperazione economica e di sicurezza, dovrebbe realizzare interventi in campo educativo a sostegno dello sviluppo della regione, con crescente attenzione ai diritti umani e al sostegno politico ed economico della società civile.

L'AFGHANISTAN VISTO DALL'ASIA CENTRALE

di Emanuele Giordana

In una carta geografica dell'Asia l'Afghanistan rappresenta una sorta di centro ideale: al confine con l'Iran a Occidente, con il subcontinente indiano a Oriente, frontiera meridionale delle repubbliche centroasiatiche ex sovietiche a Nord. Se effettivamente l'Afghanistan faccia parte dell'Asia Centrale, e cioè di quel mondo che comprende le cinque repubbliche di Kazakistan, Kirghizistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan e Tagikistan, è in realtà una convenzione per alcuni e non per altri. Ne fa parte in un certo senso geograficamente ma in realtà il suo centro di gravità sono i due grandi confinanti che lo circondano a Est, Ovest e Sud: l'Iran e il Pakistan, la fine del Medio Oriente e l'inizio dell'Asia meridionale. Quanto alle cinque repubbliche ex sovietiche, lo sguardo è sicuramente più centrato, seppure con forme e modalità diverse, verso Russia, Cina e Stati Uniti. Il legame col parente meridionale (sicuramente parente per motivi storici, culturali, etnici e linguistici) appare oggi soprattutto o come una sorta di "dovere" (spesso suggerito da altri) o come uno sguardo obbligato dalle preoccupazioni che riguardano due aspetti in particolare: la sicurezza – col corollario di un possibile contagio lungo i confini meridionali – e il narcotraffico. I legami economici sono poca cosa, salvo rare eccezioni (come nel caso del progetto TAPI¹), il flusso transfrontaliero è limitato, le alleanze sono fragili e il sostegno alla partecipazione dell'Afghanistan a

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¹ Acronimo del progetto energetico che coinvolge Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India.

percorsi politici aggregativi (come nel caso del Processo di Istanbul)² appare più come un aspetto di strategia politica generale – spesso su pressione di altri attori – che non un *focus* volto a rafforzare il parente bistrattato dalla guerra. Il quadro delle relazioni tra le cinque repubbliche e Kabul va dunque visto anche all'interno delle pressioni e delle relazioni con i grandi attori non solo regionali ma internazionali: la Russia, *in primis*, la Cina soprattutto per l'aspetto economico, e gli Stati Uniti (in misura assai minore l'Unione Europea). Quanto agli attori regionali, per questi Paesi contano forse più dell'Afghanistan il peso economico e la statura politica di nazioni come Iran e Pakistan.

Che la preoccupazione principale di Astana, Bishkek, Ashkabad, Tashkent e Dushanbe sia soprattutto l'aspetto sicurezza e stabilità lo dimostra anche il fatto che nel 2014, alla vigilia delle presidenziali afgane, i riflettori delle cinque capitali si sono riaccesi – come quelli di tutti gli altri Paesi coinvolti nella guerra afgana a vario titolo – in attesa di eventi da cui ci si aspettavano grandi novità; lo dimostra anche la pubblicazione di numerose monografie e ricerche sui rapporti tra l'Afghanistan e le repubbliche (due in particolare da segnalare³), attenzione che è poi scemata pur se il quadro uscito dalle elezioni afgane è in realtà ancora più instabile del precedente e il conflitto, benché snobbato dai riflettori della cronaca, stia conoscendo una nuova accelerazione, e proprio nel Nord del Paese: il che ha creato, nelle repubbliche frontaliere, un nuovo allarme specie dopo la presa di Kunduz da parte dei Talebani, anche se per pochi giorni, nell'ottobre 2015 e poi ancora nel 2016.

1. *La partita regionale*

Secondo diversi analisti le preoccupazioni che riguardano la sicurezza sono in realtà da leggersi, in molti casi, anche in chiave interna:

² *Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan* (anche noto come *Heart of Asia*). È stato lanciato nel 2011 con l'obiettivo di migliorare il quadro regionale attraverso il dialogo e misure di *confidence building*. L'Uzbekistan non aveva partecipato alla prima conferenza ministeriale di Istanbul nel novembre 2011 ma nel 2012 ha preso parte al secondo incontro svoltosi a Kabul.

³ N. KASSENOVA, *Relations Between Afghanistan and Central Asian States. Incentives, Constraints and Prospects*, Stoccolma, Sipri, 2014; C. BLEUER, S. KAZEMI, *Between Co-operation and Insulation. Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics*, Kabul, Aan, 2014.

più che per il timore di un contagio o per fatti reali che giustifichino una preoccupazione vera per la minaccia di un'espansione dell'islamismo armato, i Paesi centroasiatici avrebbero cioè utilizzato e utilizzerebbero il "pericolo jihadista" anche per contenere le spinte dal basso che possono mettere in difficoltà (come già avvenuto in passato) il sistema di potere locale. Lo stesso per il narcotraffico, attività economica sotto traccia che consente il transito di oppio e oppiacei prodotti in Afghanistan. Riprendendo i due temi (sicurezza e narcotraffico) Bleuer e Kazemi scrivono che: "Il rischio in termini di sicurezza che lega l'Afghanistan alle ex repubbliche sovietiche dell'Asia Centrale viene di frequente altamente esagerato e così il presunto collegamento tra narcotraffico e gruppi radicali islamisti. In realtà in tutta l'Asia Centrale i principali attori del narcotraffico sono impiegati governativi, agenti della sicurezza e personaggi legati alla mafia...". E ancora, scrivono, non esiste "...una grave minaccia alle Repubbliche centroasiatiche da parte di terroristi e insorti del Nord dell'Afghanistan che vengono normalmente reclutati tra gli afgani per agire localmente"⁴. I Talebani afgani del resto, contrariamente ad Al Qaeda o allo Stato islamico, la cui presenza in quest'area è al momento residuale, hanno sempre sottolineato la natura nazionalistica della loro battaglia per l'instaurazione di un Emirato in Afghanistan e solo in Afghanistan. Chiarendo, al primo punto della loro agenda politica, che l'obiettivo primario è la cacciata degli stranieri dal territorio afgano⁵, non certo l'espansione oltreconfine del loro jihad.

Non di meno, è evidente che per i Paesi dell'Asia centrale l'Afghanistan resta un elemento importante e preoccupante in un quadro regionale complesso e da secoli al centro di interessi geostrategici, economici e politici che hanno ripreso fiato dopo la fine del dominio sovietico e il ridimensionamento della presenza russa, come provano soprattutto la politica espansiva di Cina e Stati Uniti⁶. L'Afghanistan

⁴ C. BLEUER, S. KAZEMI, *Between Co-operation and Insulation. Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics* cit. p. 1.

⁵ Per una sintesi delle posizioni ideologiche di Talebani, Stato Islamico e Al Qaeda si veda il recente saggio di G. BATTISTON, *Arcipelago jihad. Lo Stato islamico e il ritorno di al-Qaeda*, Roma, Edizioni dell'asino, 2016. Sul movimento talebano si vedano gli scritti di A. GIUSTOZZI (<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/warstudies/people/visiting/giustozzi.aspx>).

⁶ Sugli attori attorno al conflitto afgano si veda K. BERG HARPVIKEN, S. TADJBAKHSH, *A Rock Between Hard Places. Afghanistan as an Arena of Regional Insecurity*, London/New York, Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2016.

resta infine particolarmente preoccupante per tre delle cinque repubbliche che ne condividono il confine, come ha provato nel 2015 la mobilitazione sia centroasiatica sia russa lungo l'Amu Darya (per via degli accordi sulla difesa delle frontiere), specie per Uzbekistan e Tagikistan a un pugno di chilometri dalla città di Kunduz, presa allora per qualche giorno dalle milizie in turbante e nuovamente sotto tiro dall'ottobre del 2016⁷.

L'Afghanistan è dunque comunque importante nel rapporto con i grandi attori dell'area centroasiatica (più o meno direttamente legati alle vicende della guerra afghana) e il Paese, se non lo è oggi, resta d'altronde uno snodo fondamentale per il transito delle merci (anche se ora l'interscambio con le repubbliche è minimo) e soprattutto delle pipeline. Vista dalle cinque capitali, dunque, Kabul è forse attualmente più motivo di cruccio che risorsa, pur se lo è diventata sia per l'utilizzo in chiave interna dello spauracchio jihadista, sia perché la relazione con l'Afghanistan passa anche per il rapporto con altri attori (dalla Turchia al Pakistan, da Mosca a Washington, da Teheran a Pechino) o organismi internazionali (ONU, NATO, alleanze regionali). Quel che va rilevato è che, non essendoci in realtà una politica comune dei cinque Paesi centroasiatici, ogni nazione agisce per suo conto e percepisce, osserva e agisce in maniera diversa e a volte addirittura opposta.

Vedremo qui le grandi linee su cui si muovono i singoli Paesi e infine dedicheremo uno spazio all'attuale situazione afghana, per ora assolutamente lontana da una stabilizzazione efficace e soprattutto da una indicazione che si stia modificando lo scenario dominato dal conflitto anziché dal negoziato politico con la guerriglia, al netto dei tentativi per ora senza successo, e da cui le repubbliche centroasiatiche sono per ora quasi totalmente escluse.

2. *Tagikistan, il vicino prossimo*

Il Tagikistan, teoricamente il parente più prossimo tra le cinque repubbliche – per affinità storiche, linguistiche e culturali oltre che per un confine comune di oltre 1.300 chilometri – ha con l'Afghanistan

⁷ Kunduz – per via autostradale – dista dalla frontiera tagica poco più di 60 chilometri e da quella uzbeka poco più di 190.

scarsi rapporti economici (benché in ascesa) e un diffuso pregiudizio⁸ sia nei confronti dei rifugiati afgхани nel Paese (circa 2.550 nel 2014) sia nei confronti di una nazione che si ritiene un pericolo costante alla frontiera, per problemi legati alla guerra, a infiltrazioni e alleanze jihadiste o al narcotraffico⁹. Collegate dal grande ponte sull'Amu Darya che unisce la provincia afgחana di Kunduz a quella tagica di Kathion e da altri sei piccoli ponti che portano dal Tagikistan nella provincia orientale afgחana del Badakshan, Dushanbe e Kabul restano lontane anche se esiste un rapporto a volte intenso sul piano culturale per iniziativa della società civile dei due Paesi.

Nonostante un interscambio commerciale ridotto, per Dushanbe l'Afghanistan rappresenta comunque un buon investimento nel settore energetico, soprattutto a partire dal 2012 quando è iniziata l'esportazione verso l'Afghanistan di energia elettrica. Kabul aveva anzi aderito al progetto noto come CASA-1000, che inizialmente avrebbe dovuto portare da Tagikistan e Kirghizistan elettricità in Pakistan e Afghanistan per un totale di 1.300 megawatt (1.000 in Pakistan e 300 in Afghanistan). Kabul si è poi ritirata dal progetto, lanciato ufficialmente nel 2016, a un mese dalla cerimonia di avvio¹⁰ e il Pakistan usufruirà dell'intera fornitura presumibilmente entro il 2018. Ma il futuro potrebbe riservare sorprese.

Il Tagikistan, retto dal 1992 da Emomali Rahmon (che dal 1992 al 1997 ha affrontato una gravissima crisi senza risolvere i problemi alla base della guerra civile¹¹) considera il turbolento vicino un elemento in più di destabilizzazione per un Paese, il suo, che si regge su un fragile equilibrio. Non di meno, nel giugno del 2009, il presidente tagico aveva proposto un incontro nella sua capitale tra afgחani, pachistani e russi per costruire una cooperazione quadrilaterale (*Dushanbe Four*). Di fatto, al netto di diversi incontri, l'iniziativa non ha prodotto grandi

⁸ C. BLEUER, S. KAZEMI, *Between Co-operation and Insulation. Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics*, cit. p. 28.

⁹ Il paradosso è che ci sono stati più rifugiati tagichi in Afghanistan che non il contrario: "Circa 60mila disperati tagichi rifugiati della guerra civile in Tagikistan traversarono il fiume Amu Darya nel 1992" scrive Mehdi Mozaffari (M. MOZAFFARI, *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States: The Southern Belt*, London, Macmillan Press, 1997).

¹⁰ <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1124340/casa-1000-power-project-kabul-abandons-share-islamabad-receive/>

¹¹ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/tajikistan/tajikistan-early-warning-internal-pressures-external>.

risultati se non quello di apparire come un tassello del piano di riavvicinamento di Mosca a Kabul.

3. *Uzbekistan, il vicino in allarme*

L'Uzbekistan e l'Afghanistan – collegate dal tristemente famoso “Ponte dell'Amicizia” riaperto nel 2001 – hanno visto nell'ultima decade la firma di numerosi accordi per dare impulso a un interscambio economico che, sino al 2001, era praticamente inesistente. Ma gli accordi non sembrano per ora registrare un trend particolarmente significativo anche se l'interscambio è aumentato e Tashkent vende a Kabul elettricità diretta soprattutto nel Nord del Paese. Non di meno, la strategia uzbeka, più che quella di favorire il vicino – in realtà osservato con grande preoccupazione – mira semmai a utilizzare l'Afghanistan come area di passaggio in un piano di ristrutturazione delle forniture energetiche che ha come obiettivo altri Paesi. Può essere indicata come una scelta comunque significativa quella della ferrovia Hairatan-Mazar-e-Sharif, un progetto di 75 chilometri di strada ferrata, in gran parte finanziato dall'Asia Development Bank¹², che collega l'importante centro afgano alla frontiera uzbeka e quindi a Termez. Inaugurata nel gennaio del 2012, la ferrovia avrebbe, secondo l'ADB, trasportato in 5 anni 11,7 milioni di tonnellate di beni per un valore di oltre 115 milioni di dollari, favorendo la connessione coi mercati dell'Asia Centrale e della Cina¹³. Il progetto rappresenta la prima fase di un network ferroviario che include Herat e collegamenti con Tagikistan e Pakistan¹⁴.

Sul piano politico va segnalata nel 2008, durante l'incontro nel quadro dell'*Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council* della Nato tenutosi in Romania, la proposta dell'allora presidente Islam Karimov (morto nel settembre 2016) di istituire un '6+3' *Contact Group for Afghanistan* sotto egida ONU che avrebbe incluso Cina, Iran, Pakistan, Tagikistan, Turkmenistan e Uzbekistan accanto a NATO, Russia e Stati Uniti (esclu-

¹² La scheda di progetto sul sito dell'ADB: <https://www.adb.org/projects/42533-022/mai>.

¹³ Le polemiche sul funzionamento della struttura non sono mancate con accuse di corruzione e taglieggiamenti alla frontiera e per l'atteggiamento restrittivo delle autorità uzbeche. Si veda C. BLEUER, S. KAZEMI, *Between Co-operation and Insulation. Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics*, cit. pp. 39-40.

¹⁴ Questo progetto fa parte del *Transport Strategy and Action Plan* concordato nel quadro della *Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation* (CAREC).

dendo sia il governo di Kabul sia la resistenza armata) con l'obiettivo di studiare l'approccio a una risoluzione del conflitto. Proposta poi rilanciata in sede ONU nel dicembre 2013 ma senza seguito.

L'Uzbekistan, assai più di altri partner regionali (con l'eccezione del Turkmenistan), si è mosso negli anni con iniziative anche autonome – spesso di segno opposto – sia col governo o con gruppi anti-talebani (noto il suo appoggio al generale Dostum, attuale vicepresidente afgano) ma anche con la guerriglia diretta allora dal mullah Omar: l'obiettivo era soprattutto quello di fare terra bruciata attorno al Movimento islamico dell'Uzbekistan (MUI), al punto che il governo uzbeko era arrivato a proporre ai Talebani, agli inizi del 2001, persino un riconoscimento dell'Emirato in cambio dell'espulsione dei militanti del MUI¹⁵ dall'Afghanistan. Nel contempo il governo uzbeko si è distinto per una militarizzazione dei suoi confini (non solo afgani ma anche tagichi e kirghisi) considerando l'Afghanistan e i suoi movimenti islamisti una minaccia per la sicurezza del Paese, preoccupazione reiterata formalmente in più occasioni e sostenuta da una preparazione militare e di intelligence (con formazione tecnica fornita dagli Stati Uniti) che non teme confronti con le altre repubbliche.

Sul piano interno il governo uzbeko, più volte denunciato per la brutalità del trattamento riservato agli oppositori¹⁶, utilizza il “rischio afgano”, assai più di quanto accade in altre repubbliche, come elemento in chiave interna volto alla repressione non solo di gruppi islamisti (aderenti al MUI o all'Unione della Jihad islamica¹⁷ o supposti tali) ma in generale di oppositori al regime.

4. *Turkmenistan, il vicino attivo*

Durante l'epoca del governo talebano, il governo del Turkmenistan, pur non avendo ufficialmente riconosciuto il regime, aveva mantenuto rapporti stabili, e in un certo senso cordiali, con l'Emirato di mullah

¹⁵ Creato nel 1998 con l'obiettivo di rovesciare il regime e instaurare una forma di governo conforme alle leggi islamiche, il MUI si è alleato con i Talebani e Al Qaeda. Nel 2015 ha espresso fedeltà al Califfato di Al Bagdadi creando una spaccatura tra i suoi membri, molti dei quali non hanno aderito alla svolta.

¹⁶ Si veda tra l'altro S. KENDZIOR, *Nation in Transit in Uzbekistan*, Freedom House, 2013; A. COOLEY, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012.

¹⁷ Islamic Jihad Union, fondata nel 2002 da una scissione del MUI.

Omar: una scelta volta a preservare il Paese da ritorsioni o infiltrazioni talebane e confermata dalla neutralità al momento dell'invasione delle truppe straniere che nel 2001 combatterono il regime della guerriglia in turbante. Un altro buon motivo era quello di conservare buone relazioni con il Pakistan (che aveva riconosciuto il regime), cliente per le forniture energetiche. Le cose sono cambiate alla morte di Niyazov nel 2006 con l'arrivo dell'attuale presidente Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov che ha aperto agli Stati Uniti e ha autorizzato il sorvolo del Paese da parte dell'aviazione militare americana, cui ha fornito negli anni sostegno logistico e rifornimenti di carburante. Al di là delle dichiarazioni di disponibilità a sostenere ogni possibile strategia di uscita dalla crisi afghana e una discreta attività in campo diplomatico, l'iniziativa forse più rilevante del Turkmenistan è l'ospitalità offerta all'*UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia* ad Ashkabad¹⁸. Non di meno, pur non ritenendo l'Afghanistan un rischio così temibile come altre repubbliche, il Turkmenistan ha rafforzato il proprio sistema di sicurezza lungo la frontiera (744 chilometri) negli ultimi anni.

Dal punto di vista economico il progetto più interessante e che prevede un investimento stimato in circa 7 miliardi di dollari è il già citato TAPI¹⁹. Questo coinvolge Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan e Unione indiana e prevede l'esportazione di oltre 33 miliardi di metri cubi di gas all'anno attraverso circa 1800 chilometri di tubi dal Turkmenistan, via Afghanistan, al Pakistan e all'India (i lavori sono iniziati nel 2015 e dovrebbero concludersi nel 2019). L'Afghanistan dovrebbe goderne per 5 miliardi di metri cubi (lungo l'asse stradale Herat-Kandahar-Quetta) e 14 rispettivamente andrebbero a Pakistan e India. Da segnalare infine il progetto TAT (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tagikistan) che dovrebbe sviluppare oltre 600 chilometri di ferrovia (di cui 400 in territorio afghano) che collegherebbero Atamurat in Turkmenistan a Panji in Tagikistan passando per il Nord dell'Afghanistan e collegandosi alla linea che già porta in Uzbekistan. Il costo stimato varia tra 1,5 e 2 miliardi di dollari. Il 28 novembre 2016 il presidente afghano Ghani e il suo omologo turcmeno Berdymukhammedov hanno inaugurato la tratta da Imam Nazar (Turkmenistan) ad Aqina (Afghanistan), passo in avanti sul progetto TAT.

¹⁸ <http://unrcca.unmissions.org/>.

¹⁹ <https://www.adb.org/projects/44463-013/main>.

5. Kirghizistan, il vicino preoccupato

Con l'avvio del progetto CASA-1000, da cui come abbiamo visto Kabul si è al momento ritirata, il Kirghizistan avrebbe assunto un ruolo rilevante nei confronti dell'Afghanistan e l'accordo avrebbe segnato una svolta in relazioni economiche il cui volume d'affari resta minimo (se si esclude quello illecito legato al narcotraffico e al contrabbando). La presenza di afgiani nel Paese non ha grandi numeri, limitandosi a qualche centinaio di persone che comprendono, oltre ai rifugiati, migranti economici o studenti, molti dei quali sostenuti da borse di studio. La relazione forte con le vicende afgane si deve in realtà alla presenza della base militare americana di Manas (2001-2014) attualmente un Centro di transito dopo che è tornata nelle mani di Bishkek. La base, che serviva alle forze aeree americane come spazio logistico, è stata chiusa anche grazie alle forti pressioni in questo senso di Mosca e Pechino²⁰. Il Kirghizistan ha comunque sempre considerato l'Afghanistan un rischio per la sua sicurezza definendolo addirittura il maggior pericolo esterno per il Paese, una formula reiterata nel *National Security Concept*. È una formula che tende a fare apparire maggiore di quanto non sia il rischio di contagio dall'Afghanistan anziché da alcune aree della Federazione russa²¹. Al netto delle speculazioni sull'utilizzo del "rischio Afghanistan" in chiave interna, va però menzionata un'idea lanciata per la prima volta nel 1998 per la preparazione di una Conferenza di pace internazionale sull'Afghanistan che però non ha mai fatto strada, nonostante nel 2009 il presidente Kurmanbek Bakiyev avesse riproposto l'iniziativa (chiamata appunto "Bishkek Initiative") che intendeva costruire un centro di studi e ricerche sulla sicurezza e la stabilità in Asia centrale (anche quella senza seguito²²). Il Kirghizistan aveva anche lanciato l'idea di una ristrutturazione del proprio debito in cambio di forme di assistenza allo sviluppo in Afghanistan.

²⁰ Nel 2009 il parlamento di Bishkek aveva votato la chiusura della base americana, tenuta però poi in attività grazie a un accordo che prevedeva un notevole aumento per l'affitto dello spazio, passato poi nel 2004 nelle mani dell'esercito nazionale.

²¹ C. BLEUER, S. KAZEMI, *Between Co-operation and Insulation. Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics*, cit. p. 56.

²² N. KASSENOVA, *Relations Between Afghanistan and Central Asian States. Incentives, Constraints and Prospects*, cit. p. 24.

6. *Kazakistan, il vicino lontano*

Pur essendo geograficamente il Paese più lontano tra le cinque repubbliche, il Kazakistan si è comunque distinto per il sostegno all'integrazione regionale e internazionale dell'Afghanistan in più occasioni e in più organismi multilaterali. Ha investito in aiuto allo sviluppo, avviato sforzi per migliorare le relazioni commerciali, offerto sostegno per la formazione locale e nominato un rappresentante speciale per Afghanistan e Pakistan sull'onda di quanto fatto dai maggiori protagonisti stranieri nella guerra afgana. Nel 2012 ha anche lanciato un'iniziativa per la creazione di un Centro con sede in Kazakistan per facilitare una migliore cooperazione tra i Paesi dell'Asia centrale e sostenere l'Afghanistan. Benché gli scettici giudichino questa politica più mirata a rafforzare all'estero l'immagine del Paese che non a immaginare un investimento strategico vero e proprio in Afghanistan, nel 2010 i kazachi hanno dichiarato in sede OSCE (di cui avevano la presidenza) che l'Afghanistan sarebbe stato una delle priorità della politica estera di Astana.

Il governo kazaco, a differenza di altri, non considera comunque l'Afghanistan un rischio per la propria sicurezza nazionale.

7. *Il quadro afghano*

Le elezioni presidenziali del 2014 che, come abbiamo visto, hanno attirato nuovamente l'attenzione sul Paese anche se i riflettori della cronaca si sono poi andati lentamente spegnendo, si sono concluse con un accordo a tavolino che ha prodotto una bizzarra alchimia istituzionale, non prevista dalla Costituzione ma frutto di un disegno pragmatico volto a salvare almeno le apparenze di una tornata elettorale gravata da brogli e reciproche accuse tra i due principali candidati. Ashraf Ghani è diventato presidente della Repubblica e ad Abdullah Abdullah, un uomo legato alla vecchia Alleanza del Nord composta in gran parte da afghani tagichi²³, è stato riservato un ruolo a metà tra il

²³ L'elemento etnico (uzbecchi, turcmeni e tagichi afghani) meriterebbe un approfondimento a parte: non appare però essere un punto chiave, al di là di una certa simpatia reciproca – spesso mortificata dalla diffidenza – che in alcuni casi si è tradotta in vero e proprio sostegno come nel citato caso di Dostum, afghano della comunità uzbeca, che ci è apparso il più rilevante. La preoccupazione per la sicurezza sopravanza il legame etnico.

co-presidente e il primo ministro (*chief executive*). Il parto non è stato privo di difficoltà e il risultato sembra solo averle aumentate: questa sorta di diarchia ha di fatto paralizzato il governo per mesi sia nella nomina dei ministri, sia nell'attribuzione delle cariche secondarie, sia nella scelta dei governatori. Qualsiasi decisione, dalla più grande alla più piccola, è stata oggetto di dibattiti infiniti mal digeriti sia dal parlamento sia dal corpo elettorale che, nei sondaggi, ha visto un enorme calo di consensi verso quel governo di unità nazionale in cui tante speranze erano state riposte.

Questo preoccupante quadro politico è purtroppo sempre accompagnato da una cornice non meno angosciante: UNAMA, la missione ONU a Kabul, nel rendere noto il bilancio complessivo delle vittime civili nel 2015, ha riferito di 11.002 casi²⁴, con un incremento del 4% rispetto al 2014 e un trend impressionante di crescita²⁵. Anche le perdite dell'esercito afgano sono state pesanti e, tra gennaio e agosto 2016, sarebbero stati uccisi 5.523 tra soldati e poliziotti (9.665 i feriti). Cifre cui bisogna aggiungere i caduti tra la guerriglia di cui non ci sono dati certi.

Il quadro economico resta segnato da una crisi iniziata col ritiro della maggior parte dei contingenti militari americani e NATO ed è marcato da un indebolimento della valuta, da una caduta degli investimenti e dalla fine della bolla speculativa nel settore edilizio creatasi nelle principali città²⁶. Secondo l'Agenzia per la droga e il crimine dell'ONU infine, il 2016 vede un incremento del 10% delle aree coltivate col papavero mentre la produzione dovrebbe invece registrare un aumento addirittura del 43%: da 3.300 metri cubi nel 2015 a 4.800 nel 2016²⁷.

Il vero malato è però il processo negoziale che dovrebbe porre fine alla guerra. I due principali attori regionali – i governi di Kabul e Islamabad – continuano ormai dal 2015 a litigare accusandosi reciprocamente in una sorta di gara a dimostrare che i gruppi che si muovono sul poroso confine tra i due Stati trovano, ora in Afghanistan ora soprattutto in Pakistan, il proprio santuario da cui muovere

²⁴ 3.545 i morti, 7.457 i feriti. I rapporti di UNAMA si possono leggere sul sito della missione: <http://unama.unmissions.org/>.

²⁵ Nel 2009 i morti erano stati 2.412.

²⁶ Si veda E. GIORDANA, *Le ombre sul futuro afgano in Afghanistan: exit strategy cercasi* (Dossier), Milano, Ispi, 2016.

²⁷ L'aumento è da 74mila ettari a oltre 81.300. Si veda il rapporto https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/AfghanistanOpiumSurvey2016_ExSum.pdf.

o coordinare gli attentati nel Paese vicino. Questa tensione è andata crescendo nel tempo dall'agosto del 2015 e accuse, ritorsioni, minacce tra i due Paesi hanno conosciuto una nuova stagione con toni anche violenti: Pakistan e Afghanistan si creano inoltre vicendevolmente problemi alla frontiera per il transito delle merci e l'intelligence dei due Paesi, anziché collaborare, nasconde o mistifica le informazioni. In questo quadro il Pakistan ha iniziato l'espulsione di un milione di afgiani sprovvisti di documenti che vivono oltre frontiera da decenni. Le espulsioni (che nel novembre 2016 avevano già raggiunto quota 400mila) hanno messo in difficoltà Kabul che ha già a che fare con oltre un milione di sfollati interni e ha appena firmato un accordo con l'Unione Europea sui rimpatri forzati di afgiani che vivono in Europa, che prevede l'arrivo a Kabul di almeno 80mila persone nei prossimi sei mesi. Quanto al processo negoziale, che nell'estate del 2015 era cominciato faticosamente a Murree in Pakistan sotto l'egida di Islamabad, esso si è poi arenato dopo l'annuncio della morte di mullah Omar sostituito, con diversi problemi interni nel movimento talebano, da mullah Mansur (considerato molto filo pachistano), ucciso poi da un drone americano nel maggio del 2016. La sua morte ha visto una recrudescenza degli attacchi talebani – al cui comando è adesso mullah Akhundzada – volti a vendicare la morte dei due suoi leader. In realtà, ma il condizionale resta d'obbligo, il processo negoziale, o quantomeno le trattative più o meno segrete, continuano sotto traccia. Mentre il governo di Kabul ha già firmato un accordo col gruppo guerrigliero di Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, fonti di stampa hanno rivelato²⁸ che sarebbero avvenuti due incontri a settembre e ottobre a Doha, dove ha sede l'Ufficio politico del movimento guidato da Akhundzada. I talebani hanno smentito ma la notizia è stata poi confermata da Kabul anche se in forma ufficiosa. Vi avrebbe partecipato un diplomatico americano, cosa indirettamente confermata dall'ambasciata statunitense in Afghanistan ma non dai pachistani, il che ha fatto riemergere nuove tensioni anche se in seguito i Talebani hanno inviato una missione "informativa" nel Paese dei puri.

Lungi dall'essere stato risolto, il nodo della guerra rimane il peggior nemico di un processo di integrazione sia a livello regionale in Asia Centrale sia a livello multilaterale, si tratti del Processo di

²⁸ [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/18/taliban-afghanistan-secret-talks-qatar-](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/18/taliban-afghanistan-secret-talks-qatar)

Istanbul²⁹ o di qualsivoglia iniziativa volta a migliorare la cooperazione in questo o quel campo. Al momento il Paese dell'Hindukush non può che restare una preoccupazione, più o meno agitata sia che si tratti di rischi reali sia che si tratti di propaganda a uso interno. La guerra, col suo portato di instabilità e insicurezza, non richiama investimenti, blocca il flusso delle merci ed esporta al massimo colonne di rifugiati (anche se i grandi Paesi di immigrazione restano i due confinanti, Pakistan e Iran). Coinvolte spesso indirettamente nella guerra afghana (o per motivi economico-militari, come nel caso della base di Manas, o per la porosità delle frontiere o per singole iniziative negoziali come nel caso turcmeno o uzbeko), le cinque repubbliche si mantengono a debita distanza in attesa che il caso si risolva e che l'Afghanistan possa tornare ad essere un Paese di transito, cosa che lo renderebbe appetibile soprattutto per il passaggio delle pipeline, ipotesi al momento molto rischiosa. Naturalmente le relazioni esistono e si vanno lentamente rafforzando, a volte anche per spinte o suggerimenti di Paesi terzi, ma l'Afghanistan rimane un luogo da cui è bene mantenere una distanza di sicurezza. L'interesse delle repubbliche è dunque rivolto verso altri Paesi, non esclusi i grandi confinanti dell'Afghanistan, Iran e Pakistan.

Risolto il nodo della guerra, una nuova stagione potrebbe cambiare percezione e visuale e andare incontro a un'attenzione che comunque, e forse più che nel recente passato, Kabul ha dimostrato verso le cinque sorelle del Nord cui comunque la unisce una Storia antica e un desiderio comune di indipendenza che per l'Afghanistan, e in parte anche per le repubbliche, resta una chimera in attesa che finisca l'eterno *Great Game*³⁰ il vero comun denominatore che collega tutti e sei i Paesi.

²⁹ Vi sono state finora sei Conferenze, l'ultima delle quali a Pechino nell'aprile del 2016. La prossima si svolgerà in India. I Paesi membri sono: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Cina, India, Iran, Kazakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Arabia Saudita, Tagikistan, Turchia, Turkmenistan, Eau. Come si nota, manca l'Uzbekistan che pure aveva partecipato all'incontro di Kabul. Sono 17 gli altri attori internazionali che sostengono l'iniziativa.

³⁰ Per raccontare le vicende attuali si utilizza spesso la locuzione "Nuovo Grande Gioco".

Abstract - Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan define a human and political space strongly influenced by its bordering territories: obviously Russia but also Pakistan, Iran and, most importantly, Afghanistan, a country wretched by forty years of war and generally seen as a threat rather than as a resource. However, interactions between the former five soviet republics and Kabul are natural: the Islamic common denominator, the porosity of borders, the presence of shared norms and practices and the existence of communities often speaking the same language, reinforce the existence of such relations. Furthermore, in the light of future infrastructural developments of road networks, railway lines and, possibly, energy vectors, partnerships among the five republics and Afghanistan seem the most obvious outcome. Even if each country

deals with Kabul in its unique way, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan all fear the contagion of war or of jihad and explain the spread of the Islamic tendencies within their territories. Such statement is contested both from inside (the Afghan government refuses to validate the jihadi narrative) and from outside (many observers have highlighted that the “Afghan danger” is better understood as a political tool used to repress possible challenges to the political establishment, rather than as a real and existent threat).

Nevertheless, some positive developments are under way: negotiations regarding a seemingly difficult partnership between Kabul and the five republics is now ongoing and is supported by manifestations of international support, fostering and financing the expansion of bilateral agreements.

DIRETTRICI E ORIENTAMENTI DEL KAZAKHSTAN INDIPENDENTE

di Lorena Di Placido

Introduzione

Grazie a una collocazione geografica che lo pone nel cuore dello spazio eurasiatico, il territorio dell'odierno Kazakhstan ha potuto beneficiare dell'intersezione culturale tra diverse popolazioni e civiltà del mondo antico, nonché degli scambi economici e sociali che, assorbiti nei tempi, ne sono diventati i tratti distintivi.

Dall'inizio del primo millennio a.C., l'Asia Centrale è stata occupata da popolazioni chiamate dai Greci Skythai (Sciti; Saka, nelle fonti persiane) di origine indoeuropea e parlanti un'antica lingua iranica. Di quelle culture sono rimasti come testimonianza materiali di rilievo, dai tumuli funerari (*kurgan*) ai mausolei. A questo periodo viene datata la realizzazione "dell'uomo d'oro", una figura nobile con abiti rivestiti del metallo prezioso, ritrovata nel 1969 nella città di Issyk (Kazakhstan orientale, nei pressi di Almaty) e poi divenuta simbolo dello stato indipendente. Dei primi secoli dell'era cristiana si hanno frammentarie informazioni di importanti movimenti di popolazione. È in questo periodo che si consolidano le rotte carovaniere note come "Via della Seta", che trovano nel territorio dell'attuale Kazakhstan uno dei transiti per mercanti e avventurieri protagonisti dei commerci dell'Occidente con l'Asia. I beni trasportati non si limitavano a oggetti di lusso o artistici, ma erano anche spezie, metalli preziosi, cavalli, schiavi, nonché prodotti immateriali come culti religiosi, mode, idee. Un ruolo particolare, in tale rete viaria e di scambi, lo giocavano i nomadi delle steppe dell'odierno Kazakhstan centrale e settentrionale, che operavano in qualità di intermediari, scorte o guide delle carovane di mercanti e viaggiatori.

Centro Militare di Studi Strategici.

Sul finire del primo millennio dopo Cristo si sono avute massicce migrazioni di popolazioni di lingua turca provenienti da est, che si sono insediate forzando i gruppi residenti a muoversi verso ovest e verso sud¹.

I Kazaki propriamente detti emergono nel 15° secolo e costituiscono un amalgama di tribù turche entrate nella Transoxiana (regione oltre il fiume Oxus, noto come Amu Darya) nell'ottavo secolo e dei Mongoli, giunti nel 13°, guidati da Genghis Khan². L'origine del khanato dei kazaki si ha tra gli anni 1465-1467, da due discendenti di quest'ultimo che si dichiarano indipendenti dal khanato uzbeko. L'aggettivo "kazako" (*qazaq* nella traslitterazione dall'alfabeto arabo, *kazak* in quella dal cirillico, che significa uomo libero e non soggetto alla legge) si consoliderà nei secoli seguenti come etnonimo della popolazione kazaka. Il khanato viene diviso in tre orde (secondo la traduzione in russo e negli idiomi occidentali del termine originale *jüz*), seguendone l'espansione geografica da sud-est verso nord-ovest: Grande Orda (Orda d'oro, Orda Bianca), Orda di Mezzo, Piccola Orda³.

Durante il primo periodo di esistenza del khanato i Kazaki riescono a mantenere una certa stabilità, consentendo alla società di organizzarsi, riflettendo le norme dello stile di vita nomade e le relazioni tra i diversi gruppi che la compongono: la religione islamica permea le tradizioni sociali e le abitudini dei nomadi; nell'istruzione e nella letteratura si usa l'alfabeto arabo; la poetica orale e la musica trovano ampio sviluppo. La struttura politica resta, tuttavia, instabile e il khanato diviene preda dei più strutturati e assertivi vicini. Tra i secoli 17° e 18°, le popolazioni nomadi degli Jungari invadono le steppe kazake, occupandole definitivamente nel 1723. Per ottenere garanzie di sicurezza e indipendenza, i khan kazaki superstiti ottengono assistenza militare dall'impero russo in piena espansione. Il sostegno ai kazaki coincide, tuttavia, con un parallelo processo di colonizzazione attraverso la costruzione di fortezze, lo spostamento di popolazione russa nelle steppe, l'assegnazione di terreni (espropriati alla popolazione kazaka) ai contadini russi e divisioni territoriali secondo la concezione amministrativa russa. Nonostante forme di resistenza da

¹ G.L. BONORA, N. PIANCIOLA, *A Brief Historical Overview*, in G.L. BONORA (a cura), "Guide to Kazakhstan, Sites of Faith-Sites of History", Torino, Umberto Allemandi & C., 2010.

² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kazakh>.

³ G.L. BONORA, N. PIANCIOLA, *A Brief Historical Overview*, cit..

parte kazaka – l’insurrezione della Grande Orda e azioni anticoloniali – nel 1871 il territorio kazako è sotto il controllo dell’Impero zarista e si avvia verso uno sviluppo generale e di società vicino al modello europeo. Nella prima parte del 19° secolo, già si è realizzata una crescente integrazione del territorio del Kazakhstan attuale entro gli schemi russi, con quote sempre più numerose di popolazione che lasciano pastorizia e nomadismo in favore dell’agricoltura; vengono installate industrie; trasporti e commerci trovano sviluppo e, come risultato di tante trasformazioni, vengono a crearsi una classe lavoratrice e una dirigente autoctone⁴. Frange di opposizione resistono all’interno della popolazione kazaka. Nel 1916 la decisione di reclutare anche dall’Asia Centrale soldati da inviare in guerra solleva una delle più importanti rivolte nella storia della regione. Per sfuggire alla sanguinosa repressione, che è costata la vita a decine di migliaia di kazaki, in circa duecentomila trovano rifugio in Cina. Di lì a pochi mesi l’impero zarista cessa di esistere e tra il 1917 e il 1919, durante la guerra civile, si ha l’esperienza di governo dell’Autonomia di Alash, di ispirazione liberal-democratica, in opposizione ai Bolscevichi. Alla costituzione della Repubblica Sovietica Kazaka, nel 1920, diversi suoi esponenti ne occupano importanti posizioni; con le purghe staliniane degli anni ’30 vengono arrestati e uccisi. Nel 1924 prende avvio in Asia Centrale la campagna per la delimitazione delle nazionalità e il territorio abitato dai Kazaki assume la conformazione che detiene tuttora⁵.

Seguono gli anni della sovietizzazione. Le politiche di collettivizzazione volute da Stalin non solo forzano i kazaki a stabilirsi nelle città o nelle fattorie collettive, abbandonando il proprio abituale stile di vita, ma determinano le condizioni per la grande carestia degli anni 1930-33 e la fuga di centinaia di migliaia di persone verso le altre repubbliche socialiste dell’Asia Centrale e la Cina. I kazaki diventano così una minoranza, all’interno del Kazakhstan, rispetto a russi e ucraini, e solo dopo l’indipendenza tornano ad essere maggioritari nel proprio stato⁶.

Negli anni della seconda guerra mondiale dalle regioni occidentali dell’Unione Sovietica emigrano in massa verso il Kazakhstan sia fa-

⁴ *The History of Kazakhstan*, www.heritage.unesco.kz/kz/hn-english/history_en.htm.

⁵ G.L. BONORA, N. PIANCIOLA, *A Brief Historical Overview*, cit..

⁶ E. VOLKAVA, *The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33 and the Politics of History in the Post-Soviet Space*, 2012, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-kazakh-famine-1930-33-and-the-politics-history-the-post-soviet-space>.

miglie evacuate dalle zone di guerra (1941) sia sospetti collaborazionisti dei tedeschi costretti a un domicilio coatto (tra il 1943 e il 1944 tedeschi, ceceni, tatars di Crimea, calmucchi, greci e ingushi). Con la guerra, nel territorio kazako vengono anche trasferite industrie e manodopera qualificata⁷.

Nel 1954, l'anno successivo alla morte di Stalin, Nikita Krushev lancia la "campagna delle terre vergini", un programma di coltivazione intensiva di grano su 40 milioni di ettari nel Kazakhstan settentrionale, che si conclude nel 1963. Dopo aver soddisfatto la necessità di colmare vuoti di produzione alimentare nel breve periodo, a partire dal 1958 la produzione cala rapidamente per la mancanza di adeguato equilibrio tra sfruttamento della terra e utilizzo di fertilizzanti⁸. Di gran lunga più incisive e devastanti per salute e ambiente sono state le scellerate politiche nucleari condotte dai Sovietici in Kazakhstan. Dal 19 agosto 1949 fino alla chiusura, il 29 agosto 1991, nel poligono di Semipalatinsk sono state compiute 456 esplosioni nucleari che hanno devastato l'ambiente e la popolazione locale, provocando alta diffusione di cancro, problemi genetici e deformazioni fisiche che sono ancora oggi evidenti⁹.

Nel periodo in cui Leonid Brezhnev è stato segretario del Partito Comunista Sovietico (1964-82) il Kazakhstan ha visto realizzati ampi piani di industrializzazione e di urbanizzazione, nonché la kazakizzazione dell'apparato statale, sul quale ha dominato tra il 1960 e il 1986 (salvo un breve periodo di due anni) Dinmuhamed Kunaev. Quando a capo del PCUS sale Jurij Andropov, emergono nell'Unione Sovietica scandali di malversazione nella gestione del Partito a livello locale che investono anche il Kazakhstan. Kunaev viene rimosso e sostituito da Gennady Kolbin, di nazionalità russa. La protesta popolare scoppiata nel mese di dicembre ad Almaty contro tale avvicendamento viene

⁷ G.L. BONORA, N. PIANCIOLA, *A Brief Historical Overview*, cit..

⁸ M. MC CAULEY, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture, The Virgin Land Programme 1953-1964*, Londra, Macmillan, 1976.

⁹ Adottando la risoluzione 64/35, il 2 dicembre 2009, la 64° sessione dell'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite ha dichiarato il 29 agosto Giornata internazionale contro i test nucleari. Già sul finire degli anni '80 il gruppo Nevada-Semipalatinsk aveva avviato l'opera di dissuasione del movimento antinucleare kazako, proseguita fino alla costituzione di Atom Project, che continua nel coordinamento dell'iniziativa di messa al bando delle armi e degli esperimenti nucleari a livello globale. Il 29 agosto 2016 si è svolto ad Astana il forum internazionale di Nevada-Semipalatinsk e Atom Project, celebrativo dei venticinque anni dalla chiusura del sito. Per approfondimenti, è possibile consultare: <http://www.theatomproject.org/en> e http://www.inform.kz/en/nazarbayev-aug-29-1991-is-historical-day-for-kazakhstan-and-entire-world_a2942716.

duramente repressa e Kolbin resta al potere fino al 1989, quando viene sostituito da Nursultan Nazarbaev. Negli ultimi anni della dominazione sovietica, quest'ultimo cresce in statura politica nelle istituzioni dell'Unione, in quanto portavoce di istanze conservative della dimensione etno-nazionale e degli interessi economici e politici delle singole repubbliche e, ovviamente, in particolare del Kazakhstan¹⁰.

Inevitabilmente, anche le repubbliche sovietiche dell'Asia Centrale seguono il destino delle altre componenti dell'URSS. Il 25 ottobre del 1990 il Consiglio Supremo della Repubblica del Kazakhstan emana la Dichiarazione di Sovranità della Repubblica Socialista Sovietica del Kazakhstan. Il 16 dicembre dell'anno successivo il Kazakhstan si dichiara indipendente, nel giorno che viene celebrato come festa nazionale¹¹.

1. *Impostazione e principi del Kazakhstan indipendente*

L'impostazione e il destino dell'ordinamento del Kazakhstan indipendente sono indissolubilmente legati alla figura di Nursultan Nazarbaev, che assume nel 1989 l'incarico di primo segretario del Partito Comunista e, successivamente, di presidente del Soviet Supremo del Kazakhstan, divenendo il primo capo dello stato. Da allora ha vinto ogni elezione con una percentuale di preferenze anche superiore al 90%, superando il limite di mandato con una modifica alla Costituzione contenuta nella Legge sul Primo Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan – Leader della Nazione¹².

¹⁰ M. BRILL OLCOTT, *Kazakhstan Soviet Legacy*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 November 2011, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/11/30/kazakhstan-s-soviet-legacy-pub-46096>.

¹¹ G.L. BONORA, N. PIANCIOLA, *A Brief Historical Overview*, cit..

¹² Art 1: "Il primo Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan è la persona che sta al centro della statualità kazaka, è il leader della Nazione che ha fornito un contributo di rilievo allo sviluppo del Kazakhstan come stato democratico, laico, legale e sociale sovrano. Le restrizioni al diritto di essere eletti a Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan non si applicano al primo Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan – il leader della Nazione". Art. 3: "Il primo Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan – il leader della Nazione gode di immunità. Non può essere trattenuto per atti commessi nello svolgimento del suo ufficio di Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan e dopo il suo termine – in riferimento a quanto operato in riferimento al suo status... Non può essere soggetto a detenzione, arresto, perquisizioni, interrogatorio o a perquisizione personale. L'immunità si estende anche a tutta la sua proprietà in quanto proprietà privata del Primo Presidente...e ai membri della sua famiglia co-residenti, come l'uso dello spazio residenziale e del suo ufficio, mezzi di trasporto per affari, comunicazioni, corrispondenza, documenti ad essi

Negli anni '90 il consolidamento dell'autorità del presidente viene motivato dalle esigenze dettate dalla transizione, in quanto condizione più efficace per attuare un programma di riforme e tacitare resistenze o impedimenti¹³. L'assenza di disordini e la complessiva stabilità del Kazakhstan indipendente – comparate agli effetti delle precipitose riforme di Yeltsin, alle conseguenze destabilizzanti dell'esperienza democratica in Kirgizstan, alla guerra civile in Tajikistan – hanno confermato la sostanziale funzionalità delle prerogative presidenziali. Volendo evitare i rischi sottesi a una democratizzazione frettolosa, Nazarbaev ha sempre insistito perché avvenisse un passaggio graduale verso la democrazia per evitare sconvolgimenti e crisi destabilizzanti. Nel suo pensiero la democrazia non può essere proclamata, bensì raggiunta tramite molta sofferenza, come non può essere copiata da esperienze dall'estero o accettando dogmi altrui, senza procedere attraverso passaggi preparatori e con considerazioni di cultura locale, dati economici e una complessiva maturità dell'elettorato. Pertanto il Kazakhstan indipendente ha respinto l'idea di una promozione della democrazia a livello internazionale, riconoscendo piuttosto indefiniti valori democratici universali insiti nelle pratiche delle tribù nomadi. Ne è derivato che la moderna repubblica del Kazakhstan viene presentata come democratica, in quanto connessa al proprio passato culturale, nel quale si ritrova la cosiddetta democrazia nomade¹⁴.

appartenenti. Sulla proprietà posseduta come proprietà privata del Primo Presidente ... e della sua famiglia co-residente non possono essere imposte limitazioni. Il segreto bancario e l'inviolabilità dei conti bancari del primo Presidente ... e dei membri della sua famiglia conviventi sono garantiti". Traduzione dell'autore dal testo della Legge Costituzionale della Repubblica del Kazakhstan del 20 luglio 2000 N 83-II ossia: Legge sul Primo Presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan – Leader della Nazione (con gli emendamenti del 16.06.2010). Consultabile su: *Legal information system of Regulatory Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, <http://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/Z000000083>.

¹³ Secondo la Costituzione del Kazakhstan, adottata con referendum popolare il 30 agosto 1995 e successivamente emendata nel 2008 e nel 2011, la Repubblica del Kazakhstan è uno stato unitario con una forma di governo presidenziale (Art. 2). All'articolo 1 la Repubblica del Kazakhstan è proclamata uno stato democratico, secolare, legale e sociale del quale i più alti valori sono l'individuo, la sua vita, i diritti e le libertà. I principi fondamentali della Repubblica sono la concordia pubblica e la stabilità politica; lo sviluppo economico a beneficio di tutta la nazione; il patriottismo del Kazakhstan e la soluzione delle questioni più importanti degli affari dello stato secondo metodi democratici, incluso il ricorso al voto referendario o nel Parlamento. Il testo integrale della Costituzione è consultabile su: <http://www.constitution.kz/english/>.

¹⁴ M. Y. OMELICHEVA, *Democracy in Central Asia: Competing Perspectives and Alternative Strategies*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2015.

Tabella 1 - *Attributi fondamentali della democrazia per la popolazione di Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Uzbekistan (% di risposte)*

	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
Elezioni libere e giuste	72,0	52,9	86,9
Equilibrio dei poteri	30,3	16,2	13,1
Separazione dei poteri	35,7	28,4	37,7
Rappresentanza parlamentare	45,8	33,9	44,3
Sistema multipartitico	39,5	25,4	42,6
Diritti politici e civili	56,3	34,7	60,7
Mezzi di informazione indipendenti	58,8	42,4	62,5
Opposizione politica	46,6	40,0	41,0
Economia di mercato	53,6	41,4	42,6
Diverse forme di proprietà	36,5	24,3	45,9
Cittadini istruiti	62,3	45,0	65,6
Elite politica professionale	40,8	34,1	34,4
Cultura e mentalità democratica	54,3	42,1	44,3
Meccanismi di studio dell'opinione pubblica	42,2	29,0	45,9
Autogoverno locale	53,8	25,1	49,2
Canali di comunicazione tra elettori ed elite politica	53,7	41,1	47,5

Fonte: M.Y. OMELICHEVA, Democracy in Central Asia: Competing Perspectives and Alternative Strategies, p. 97. In questo studio del 2011 viene esplicitato quali sono, secondo un'indagine campionaria, gli attributi fondanti della democrazia per la popolazione del Kazakhstan e di altre due repubbliche centrasiatriche.

Priorità del Kazakhstan indipendente è stata la ricerca di una politica che aggregasse le diverse istanze religiose ed etnico-nazionali presenti nel Paese riducendo, in ultima analisi fino all'azzeramento, ogni possibile differenziazione di carattere etnico o culturale che fosse, in altri termini, un vero e proprio coagulante capace di allontanare la possibilità di successo per movimenti potenzialmente lesivi dell'unità dello stato nascente.

Se la proclamazione di indipendenza del Kazakhstan giunge per ultima rispetto alle altre repubbliche sovietiche, più come assunzione di un dato di fatto ineluttabile che come scelta in qualche misura partecipata, il fatto è dovuto in larga parte alle resistenze di Nazarbaev

alla disgregazione dell'Unione Sovietica stessa e alla esasperazione del nazionalismo (parte centrale, invece, dell'identità delle altre repubbliche di recente indipendenza). Con una etnia russa numerosa e collocata prevalentemente nel nord del Paese (vicino al confine con la Russia, un'area a forte vocazione industriale), Nazarbaev ritiene prudente attuare, per la costruzione dello stato, una politica moderata che mantenga relazioni di buon vicinato con le potenze regionali (Russia in prima istanza, e Cina). D'altra parte, politiche di stampo nazionalistico avrebbero indotto personale tecnico e burocratico di etnia slava a lasciare il Paese, minando anche i rapporti con Mosca, fino ad allora vitali per il Kazakhstan e, verosimilmente, destinati a giocare ancora un ruolo nello stato nascente minacciato dall'isolamento¹⁵.

Tabella 2 - *Composizione etnica del Kazakhstan al momento dell'indipendenza*

<i>Principali gruppi etnici nel Kazakhstan (1989)</i>		
Kazaki	6.531.921	39,5%
Russi	6.226.400	37,6%
Tedeschi	956.240	5,8%
Ucraini	896.240	5,4%
Uzbeki	332.017	2,0%
Uighuri	185.301	1,1%

Fonte: G. PASINI, G. PASTORI, R. REDAELLI, *Dati regionali. Kazakhstan*, in V. FIORANI PIACENTINI (a cura), *La disintegrazione dell'impero sovietico. Problemi di sicurezza nazionale e collettiva in Asia Centrale*, Roma, Rivista Militare, 1995, pp. 225-226.

Per quel che riguarda lo sviluppo di partiti politici e la competizione elettorale, negli anni dell'indipendenza si assiste a un progressivo coagularsi di forze di diversa ispirazione intorno alla figura del presidente, con alcune piccole formazioni che restano attive pur senza riuscire a superare la soglia di sbarramento necessaria per entrare in Parlamento. Visibilità e circolazione di idee sono in progressivo miglioramento, ma il dibattito politico stenta a guadagnare profondità.

Attualmente il sistema partitico kazako consiste di nove formazioni registrate, prima fra tutte Nur Otan (Luce della Patria), di cui il

¹⁵ B. NICOLINI, *Dinamiche storico-politiche in Asia Centrale nel secolo XX*, in V. FIORANI PIACENTINI (a cura), in "La disintegrazione dell'impero sovietico. Problemi di sicurezza nazionale e collettiva in Asia Centrale", Roma, Rivista Militare, 1995, p. 165 sgg..

presidente è Nazarbaev. Alle ultime elezioni politiche del 20 marzo 2016, Nur Otan ha ottenuto l'82,2% delle preferenze, guadagnando 84 dei 98 seggi disponibili del Majilis (Assemblea), la Camera bassa del Parlamento bicamerale¹⁶. La soglia di sbarramento del 7% è stata superata anche da altri due partiti: Partito Democratico del Kazakhstan – Ak Zhol e il Partito Comunista del Popolo del Kazakhstan¹⁷. La rappresentanza parlamentare è sostanzialmente questa dal 2012, quando è stata inaugurata la prima legislatura tripartita.

Nur Otan deriva dal partito Otan, fondato il 12 febbraio 1999 da diverse formazioni filo presidenziali: Unione dei Popoli del Kazakhstan, Unità, Movimento Liberale del Kazakhstan, Movimento per il Kazakhstan 2030. Nel 2006 Asar (il partito di Dariga Nazarbaeva, figlia del presidente), il Partito Civico e il Partito Agrario confluiscono in Otan, che ottiene così il 90% dei seggi parlamentari. A questo punto il partito cambia nome in Nur Otan e il presidente ne assume la leadership il 4 luglio 2007. Nel 2008 vengono fondate una sezione giovanile (Zhas Otan, Gioventù della Patria) e una scuola di partito.

Il Partito Democratico del Kazakhstan – Ak Zhol è stato registrato nel 2002 da una frangia dissidente del disciolto Scelta Democratica del Kazakhstan; è vicino agli interessi economici e industriali del Paese. Il Partito Comunista del Popolo del Kazakhstan è stato registrato nel 2004 da una scissione del Partito Comunista del Kazakhstan. Degli altri partiti il solo realmente di opposizione è il Partito Social-democratico Nazionale, registrato nel 2007, parte dell'Internazionale Socialista e molto critico nei riguardi di Nur Otan. Alle elezioni raggiunge percentuali di preferenze di poco superiori all'1,5%¹⁸.

Relativamente al rispetto degli standard internazionali e dei principi di democrazia nelle operazioni di voto e nella campagna elettorale, nel rapporto finale di monitoraggio dell'OSCE alle elezioni del 2016 viene evidenziata l'efficiente organizzazione, mentre

¹⁶ Il Parlamento del Kazakhstan consiste di una Camera Alta, il Senato (47 membri, di cui 40 eletti a suffragio indiretto da delegati delle amministrazioni locali e 7 di nomina presidenziale) e una Camera Bassa, Majilis (98 membri eletti a suffragio universale diretto e 9 dall'Assemblea dei Popoli del Kazakhstan, istituzione rappresentativa dei gruppi etnici presenti nel Paese).

¹⁷ *Kazakhstan Country Profile*, in "Election Guide, Democracy Assistance and Elections News", <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/111/>.

¹⁸ *Kazakhstan Country Update – European Forum*, <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/kazakhstan>.

permangono: restrizioni nella registrazione dei candidati, assenza di un vero e proprio dibattito politico, errori procedurali e nel conteggio dei voti. Progressi sono stati rilevati anche nella visibilità dei diversi candidati, ma resta ancora nettamente dominante il messaggio di Nur Otan¹⁹. Benché restino ampi margini di miglioramento, si tratta di una situazione ben diversa rispetto a quella delle prime elezioni del Kazakhstan indipendente. In particolare l'OSCE ha ampiamente contestato le elezioni del 1995, le prime dopo l'entrata in vigore della nuova Costituzione quando, in due turni, il 9 e 23 dicembre 1995, il Parlamento bicamerale subentra a quello monocamerale (177 deputati contestano la decisione) dopo l'invalidazione delle precedenti elezioni del marzo del 1994 da parte della Corte Costituzionale²⁰.

2. *Economia e visioni di sviluppo*

Nel contesto della transizione post-sovietica l'economia riveste per il Kazakhstan un ruolo fondamentale e propedeutico a qualunque altro progetto di riforma o di avanzamento in ambito politico e sociale, in quanto base della costruzione dello stato. Tale assunto viene espresso frequentemente dal presidente Nazarbaev nei discorsi ufficiali e nei documenti programmatici ove viene variamente declinata la sintesi "prima l'economia, poi la politica"²¹. In quanto formato nel sistema produttivo, sociale e politico dell'Unione Sovietica, Nazarbaev è convinto che una delle funzioni principali dello stato sia quella di provvedere alle necessità del popolo ma, a differenza del sistema sovietico, lo scopo delle istituzioni non è più quello di prendere decisioni al posto del popolo, bensì di creare le condizioni affinché i cittadini e il settore privato possano assumere decisioni in autonomia. Scopo dichiarato

¹⁹ *Republic of Kazakhstan, Early Parliamentary Elections 20 March 2016*, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/kazakhstan/248781?download=true>.

²⁰ *Elections Held in 1995*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2165_95.htm

²¹ N. NAZARBAEV, *The Kazakhstan Way (prefazione di Margaret Thatcher)*, London, Stacey International Publisher, 2008. Nel testo trova ampia trattazione il concetto di un'economia prioritaria rispetto a qualunque riforma di ordine politico e sociale, e fondamento dello sviluppo della nazione.

dal presidente è la creazione di “una economia sociale di mercato” e di un “capitalismo del popolo”²².

Conseguita l’indipendenza, il Kazakhstan realizza importanti riforme per la transizione da un’economia di stampo socialista a una di mercato (principalmente liberalizzazione dei prezzi e privatizzazione delle imprese statali), puntando sulla enorme ricchezza di petrolio e gas, nonché sulla vicinanza geografica a mercati in forte espansione, come quello della Cina (soprattutto) oltre a Russia ed Europa Occidentale. L’interruzione netta dei trasferimenti finanziari dall’ex Unione Sovietica (sui quali il Kazakhstan contava per finanziare le spese di governo), l’instabilità dei prezzi petroliferi e le politiche nazionali portano inizialmente ad aumento dell’inflazione, PIL negativo e deficit di bilancio. Per alleviare l’eccessiva dipendenza dal mercato russo, si rende necessario aprire agli investimenti stranieri, puntando sull’attrattiva esercitata dall’abbondanza di risorse naturali²³.

L’economia comincia a manifestare forti segnali di crescita nei tardi anni ’90 grazie agli elevati prezzi del petrolio, che hanno sostenuto il Paese anche durante la crisi finanziaria che ha colpito la Russia nel 1998. Il Kazakhstan ha anche introdotto, a metà degli anni ’90, rigorose riforme macroeconomiche, inclusi l’introduzione di una valuta convertibile, lo sviluppo del più moderno sistema bancario della regione, nonché il lancio di una piccola borsa di stampo occidentale. Inoltre il governo ha riformato i sistemi pensionistico e di prelievo fiscale, quelli sanitario e dell’istruzione²⁴.

Il perno dello sviluppo del Paese è nello sfruttamento degli idrocarburi. Il Kazakhstan si colloca tra i 15 maggiori produttori di petrolio, con il 3% del totale delle riserve mondiali stimate e al nono posto per riserve provate di petrolio. La produzione di idrocarburi equivaleva, nel 2015, al 18% del PIL e a circa il 60% delle esportazioni. La superficie occupata da siti petroliferi e gasiferi copre il 62% del territorio nazionale; i giacimenti petroliferi noti sono 172, oltre 80 dei quali ancora in fase di sviluppo. Oltre il 90% delle riserve petrolifere si concentra in 15 giacimenti principali, tra i quali si distinguono Tengiz, Kasha-

²² M. Y. OMELICHEVA, *Democracy in Central Asia: Competing Perspectives and Alternative Strategies*, cit..

²³ D. B. MINBAEVA, *Hybrid human resource management in post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, in “European J. International Management”, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2007.

²⁴ M. BRILL OLCOTT, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005.

gan²⁵, Karachaganak. Le stime ufficiali del ministero del Petrolio e del Gas riferiscono di riserve provate di idrocarburi (sia onshore che offshore) di 4,8 miliardi di tonnellate, pari a 30 miliardi di barili, e di una stima di 17 miliardi di tonnellate (o 124,3 miliardi di barili) di gas e petrolio che si troverebbe nella sezione kazaka del Mar Caspio²⁶.

Attualmente l'agricoltura occupa meno del 5% del PIL, mentre continua ad impiegare almeno un quarto della forza lavoro e costituisce un contesto di potenziale nuovo sviluppo per affrontare povertà e sicurezza alimentare e procurare un ulteriore ambito di diversificazione dei comparti economici.

Dal 2008 la gestione delle entrate dello stato è affidata al Fondo Sovrano di Ricchezza Samruk Kazyna, creato con un decreto presidenziale allo scopo di aumentare competitività e stabilità dell'economia nazionale e anticipare fattori di possibile influenza negativa delle oscillazioni dei mercati mondiali sulla crescita economica del Kazakhstan, anche mediante la gestione delle azioni delle compagnie controllate e quotate in borsa. Creato sul modello di fondi analoghi di Singapore e Malaysia, Samruk Kazyna è uno dei pilastri del sistema economico (e politico) del Kazakhstan, controlla il 45% dell'economia kazaka e monitora le attività di circa 600 membri (ossia le compagnie di stato che controlla), tra i quali KMG (gas e petrolio), KTZ (ferrovie), Kakakhtelecom (telecomunicazioni), Kazatomprom (energia), Air Astana (trasporto aereo) e Kazpost (poste)²⁷. Nel 2012 il Fondo è stato scisso in due entità: Samruk Kazyna e Bayterek, una holding di stato concentrata sulla gestione degli Istituti Nazionali di sviluppo economico, come la Banca di Sviluppo del Kazakhstan e il Fondo di Investimento²⁸.

²⁵ Sulle problematiche vicende legate allo sfruttamento del giacimento di Kashagan, si può consultare: *ENI, spedito il primo greggio proveniente da Kashagan*, <http://quifinanza.it/finanza/eni-spedito-il-primo-greggio-proveniente-da-kashagan/88047/>; <http://www.ncoc.kz/en/kashagan/default.aspx>.

²⁶ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview>.

²⁷ Nel dicembre del 2015 il governo ha approvato un piano di privatizzazioni che prosegue anche nel periodo 2016-20 con la vendita (parziale o totale) di 783 compagnie di stato, 217 delle quali ricadono sotto il controllo di Samruk Kazyna. *Samruk Kazyna group of companies under the privatization plan for 2016-2020 to auction 10 companies until July*, http://inform.kz/en/samruk-kazyna-group-of-companies-under-the-privatization-plan-for-2016-2020-to-auction-10-companies-until-end-of-july_a2907808.

²⁸ G. SANSYZBAYEVA, Z. AMETOVA, *The Role of "Samruk Kazyna" Sovereign Wealth Fund in Implementation of State Programs of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, in "Asian Social Science", Vol. II, n. 2, 2015.

La mancanza di diversificazione produttiva, tuttavia, rende l'economia altamente vulnerabile alle oscillazioni della domanda globale e del prezzo delle materie prime. La difficile congiuntura economica subita dai partner dell'Unione Economica Eurasiatica (e dalla Russia in particolare) e il calo nei prezzi delle materie prime hanno causato un rallentamento nella crescita economica. A febbraio 2014 il Kazakhstan ha svalutato la moneta nazionale, il tenge, del 19% e a novembre dello stesso anno il governo ha varato un pacchetto di misure di stimolo per l'economia alle quali ha fatto seguito, nella primavera del 2015, un'ambiziosa agenda per la modernizzazione dell'economia e delle istituzioni. Il 26 agosto 2015, il governo ha deciso di introdurre il cambio libero del tenge, aprendo a una nuova svalutazione²⁹.

Per fronteggiare l'andamento altalenante dell'economia e fornire un quadro di sviluppo diversificato dell'impianto produttivo, il governo kazako ha lanciato diversi programmi quadro per la crescita del Paese, capaci di contemperare la naturale vocazione di produttore di idrocarburi con nuove direttrici di sviluppo, sul modello di analoghe realtà del Golfo, accreditate come centri finanziari. Nel 1997 viene varata la Strategia di Sviluppo al 2030, un documento aperto fondato sul bilanciamento tra successo economico e stabilità politica³⁰. Il 12 dicembre del 2012, in un discorso rivolto alla nazione, il presidente Nazarbaev lancia una versione riveduta della Strategia, estendendone la programmazione al 2050. Entro quella data, nella visione di Nazarbaev, il Kazakhstan avrà condizioni economiche e di sviluppo umano tali da poter entrare fra i 30 Paesi più sviluppati al mondo, mentre sarà concluso il nuovo corso politico dello stato³¹.

A fronte di un quadro economico potenzialmente capace di ulteriore sviluppo permangono tuttora rilevanti criticità socio-economiche. In alcune aree occidentali a più forte industrializzazione estrattiva permane una latente instabilità dovuta al mancato adeguamento del trattamento economico all'intensificazione delle attività produttive. Il riferimento è soprattutto ai fatti di Zhanaozen, ossia alla violenta repressione seguita da un lungo periodo di scioperi e manifestazioni a sfondo sindacale e politico, avvenuta il 16 dicembre 2008 e nella

²⁹ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kazakhstan/overview>.

³⁰ *The Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan until the year 2030*, consultabile sul sito ufficiale del presidente della Repubblica del Kazakhstan: http://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/strategies_and_programs.

³¹ <https://strategy2050.kz/en>.

quale hanno perso la vita 16 lavoratori³². Tentativi di sciopero si sono avuti anche negli anni successivi, con qualche episodio, di portata di gran lunga inferiore, verificatosi anche nel 2016³³. Inoltre, benché le proteste non siano una realtà abituale in Kazakhstan, particolari tematiche, come quella periodicamente riproposta della riforma della terra (proprietà, possesso, locazione, sfruttamento), risvegliano l'attenzione di una parte dell'opinione pubblica, più sensibile al legame con il territorio e timorosa di possibili episodi corruttivi³⁴.

Conclusioni

Nel delineare direttrici e principi fondanti del Kazakhstan post-sovietico emerge che, dopo venticinque anni di indipendenza, il Paese si presenta come un caso di successo regionale quanto a stabilità e sviluppo, aperto all'innovazione e attento allo sviluppo tecnologico.

Capitalizzando sulla propria collocazione geografica e attuando scelte di orientamento moderato nella gestione delle questioni religiose ed etnico-nazionali, il Kazakhstan ha mantenuto stabilità interna e proficue relazioni con la Russia (nella gestione del cosmodromo di Baikonur e nella partecipazione alla Comunità di Stati Indipendenti e alla Unione Economica Eurasiatica), ha rivitalizzato quelle con la Cina (stabilendo proficui rapporti economici bilaterali e partecipando alla Shanghai Cooperation Organization), oltre a proporsi quale affidabile interlocutore internazionale, tra gli altri, per l'Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa (della quale il Kazakhstan ha avuto la presidenza nel 2010), la NATO e l'Organizzazione della Conferenza Islamica.

³² D. SATPAEV, T. UMBETALYIEVA, *The protests in Zhanaozen and the Kazakh oil sector: Conflicting interests in a rentier state*, in "Journal of Eurasian Studies", n. 6, 2015, p. 122 e p.129.

³³ *Kazakh Oil Industry Workers Go On Strike Over Pay Cuts*, "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty", 28 luglio 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-zhanaozen-oil-workers-strike/27885821.html>.

³⁴ *Kazakhstan's land reform protests explained*, "BBC News", 28 aprile 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36163103>; *Dozens detained in Kazakhstan over land reform protests*, "Al Jazeera", 21 maggio 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/dozens-detained-kazakhstan-land-reform-protests-160521132802863.html>; J. LILLIS, *Kazakhstan: China Looking to Lease Land for Agricultural Purposes*, in "Eurasia Insight", 3 febbraio 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020410.shtml>

La figura preponderante del presidente Nazarbaev, artefice e garante della costruzione dello stato, ha preservato il Paese da instabilità e disordine, permeando ogni scelta e ogni indirizzo di carattere politico, economico, sociale. La maturazione controllata del quadro politico stride, in apparenza, con il dinamismo impresso alle attività economiche e continuamente ricercato nella diversificazione delle attività produttive, di cui l'EXPO 2017, in programma ad Astana³⁵, costituisce il più attuale esempio di sintesi. Va considerato, tuttavia, che gli effetti delle riforme educative volute da Nazarbaev sono destinati a realizzarsi nel medio periodo, come esito di una scolarizzazione universale di qualità per ogni ordine e grado, che ha aperto alle nuove generazioni anche la possibilità di svolgere esperienze di studio all'estero (promosse con le borse di studio Bolashak, Futuro) o nei centri di formazione universitaria di eccellenza in patria (fra tutti, la Nazarbaev University di Astana e la KIMEP di Almaty). Quindi, nella visione riformatrice di Nazarbaev si trovano germi di innovazione e diversificazione non soltanto negli ambiti economici e produttivi, ma anche in quelli della creazione di una classe dirigente alternativa a quella di formazione sovietica che va esaurendosi. Resta, tuttavia, il nodo di chi potrà succedere a Nazarbaev assumendone l'eredità politica e mantenendo la stessa direttrice di ammodernamento del Paese, sia pure ancora in chiave controllata. La questione sembrerebbe già stata affrontata con spostamenti di vertice propedeutici, apparentemente, alla predisposizione di una leadership transitoria, capace di traghettare il Paese verso il nuovo futuro le cui basi sono già state poste dal primo presidente.

Abstract - Twenty-five years after obtaining independence, Kazakhstan is a success story among the post-Soviet Central Asian republics. Relying on the abundance of oil and gas and on a moderate and multi-vector foreign policy, the country has managed to carve out a space for visibility on the international scene, asserting itself as a reliable partner. The state-building process has been deeply influenced by president Nursultan Nazarbaev (in office since the

independence) and his vision of economic development. Due to the fall in oil prices, Kazakhstan is going through a difficult economic situation. Therefore, diversifying production has become more and more urgent. So far, several programs have been planned in detail, although they will be fully implemented in the medium-long term. Besides a full awareness of the economic potential, a parallel maturation of the political framework is still lacking.

³⁵ Dal 10 giugno al 10 settembre 2017 si svolgerà ad Astana l'EXPO 2017, che ha per tema "Energia del Futuro". Scopo dell'iniziativa, che coinvolge oltre 100 Paesi espositori oltre a numerose organizzazioni internazionali, è quello di raccogliere e promuovere progetti innovativi su forme di energia ad alto contenuto tecnologico e alternative all'oil & gas. Alla conclusione dei lavori l'area espositiva verrà convertita in un centro finanziario.

INDEPENDENT TURKMENISTAN IN THE RESHAPED GEOPOLITICAL SCENARIO: FOREIGN POLICY, ENERGY STRATEGY AND SECURITY ISSUES

by **Fabio Indeo**

1. The birth of a nation: Turkmenistan in the history

The territory of the modern Turkmenistan played a significant role as commercial hub along the ancient Silk Road until the 15th century: during the centuries Parths and Sassanids realized their empires in the southern part of the country, as well as the domination of Alexander the Great, while the “endogenous” as Ghaznavid and Seljuk empires affirmed themselves in the eastern part of the nation.

Until the soviet domination, this territory was not organized as a state but the clanic-tribal dimension prevailed: the different Turkmen clans – traditionally nomadic – neither merge themselves with a political unity in organized political institution, nor fight together against foreign domination.

During the second half of the XIX century Turkmenistan was progressively incorporated from the Zarist advance. After the foundation of the Krasnovodsk port city in 1869 – since 1991 renamed Turkmenbashi in honor of the first President of independent Turkmenistan – in the Turkmen shore of the Caspian Sea, Russian-Zarist began to conquer the central and southern territories of the modern Turkmenistan: following the epic battle of Gok-Tepe in 1881 – which is celebrated since 1991 as the symbol of the Turkmen resistance against Russia’s colonization – the Transcaspia administrative region was created, while the north-eastern region of the modern Turkmenistan were included in the Khorezm republic.

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Even if Tsarist domination was not so long (less than fifty years), its influence produced relevant implications on the evolution of this Central Asia's region: similarly to all colonial empires, even Russia consolidated its presence by means of military control, economic reforms and the realization of new political institutions.

As a matter of fact, 120 years of Tsarist-Soviet foreign domination contributed to define the character of Turkmenistan as a nation: territorial and national border delimitation, economic development, massive literacy diffusion, process of ethnic identification, creation of modern-state institutions, national aspirations¹.

The overthrow of the Tsarist regime and the beginning of the Bolshevik domination was anticipated by the 1916 revolt of the Turkmen population, which was exhausted due to the unsustainable impositions of Czarist authorities. The creation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Turkmenistan in 1924 enhanced the political identity of this under-construction nation, even if it was difficult to impose the idea of a national territory to a nomad or semi-nomad population.

Even if the Bolshevik domination was characterized by some perceived negative factors as the imposed collectivization of the land, purges of Turkmen political exponents and intellectuals, the repression and the attempt to put Islam under political control, in this historical phase the basis of the Turkmen nation started to emerge: as a matter of fact, the widespread dissemination of literacy in the country between 1920 and 1950, the economic and social changes linked to the sedentarization process and the rights granted to Turkmens as holders of the nationality facilitated the national and social identity of Turkmen population.

During the 80's of the last century, the reformist initiative undertaken by the Soviet President Gorbaciov and labeled *perestrojka* seemed not particularly attractive for the emerging Turkmen political class: after a long-term political experience in the Communist Party in Moscow, in 1985 Saparmurat Niyazov was appointed Prime Secretary of the Turkmen Communist Party by Gorbaciov – replacing former Mohammad Gapousov which was charged of corruption cases linked to cotton trade – and in the same years he was also appointed as President of Supreme Soviet².

¹ E.A. ALLWORTH (ed), *Central Asia: 130 years of Russian Dominance. A Historical Overview*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1994.

² J.B.J.VILMER, *Turkmenistan*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2010, pp. 31-32.

After five years, the sovereignty of the Turkmenistan's republic was proclaimed on 22nd August 1990, while after two months (in October) Niyazov was appointed President of independent Turkmenistan after a single-party election with only one candidate.

Turkmenistan was achieving the national independence without reclaim it: Niyazov was not an ardent supporter of Gorbaciov's reforms and he refused to adopt the measures of liberalization promoted by Moscow, which were perceived as a non-appropriated colonial interference on the domestic evolution of the post-soviet republics³. As a matter of fact, at the referendum on 17th March 1991 98% of Turkmens expressed their support to maintain the Soviet Union but Ashgabat must forcibly follow the pathway of the other Central Asian republics (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) proclaiming its independence on 27th October 1991, while Niyazov was appointed President obtaining 94,1% of votes⁴.

2. *Independent Turkmenistan under Niyazov rule*

Following the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, an independent Turkmen republic was established for the first time in history: before this date Turkmenistan never existed as a sovereign country and only under Soviet regime was created a new republic within the existing borders. Similarly to the other Central Asian republics, also in Turkmenistan the transition process from a soviet domination to the affirmation of the new independent states was characterized by continuity: as a matter of fact, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan, the former Secretaries of the national Communist Parties became presidents of the new republics. Niyazov led the country to political independence and to national sovereignty, even if external factors played a strong influence in this evolution: the dissolution of the Soviet Union was interpreted as a decision exclusively taken by Slavic Presidents of Russia Belarus and Ukraine and motivated by Moscow's will to abandon its former southern republics, conceived as an intolerable economic burden.

³ S. PEYROUSE, *Turkménistan. Un destin au carrefour des empires*, Paris, Éditions Belin, 2007, pp. 39-56, p. 75.

⁴ G. GLEASON, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence*, Boulder-Oxford, Westview Press, 1997, p. 111.

On June 21st 1992, Niyazov became president for a five-year term and without rivals, obtaining 98.5% of ballots⁵.

Following his power legitimization, the new president undertook a state-building process aimed at establishing the grounds of the new sovereign state, consolidating at the same time his leadership and a pervasive control on the country: however, this process fostered a dangerous authoritarian drift because political and state institutions were shaped on the emerging cult of personality.

Basically, the institutions created during the Soviet period were merely renamed and exponents of the old nomenklatura were appointed: the Communist Party of Turkmenistan changed name becoming the Democratic Popular Party of Turkmenistan and then the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, whose President was Niyazov⁶.

The gradual “Turkmenization” process of the society influenced the post-soviet administrative division: the *oblast* (regions) and *rayon* (districts) became *velayat* and *etrap* ruled by the *Hakims* which play functions of the executive power in a local dimension. The Supreme Soviet became the *Mejilis* (the Parliament) and its composition was reduced from 250 to 50 members.

Since June 1992 the role of Prime Minister was abolished and replaced by a cabinet of ministers: Niyazov was the chair and he also had the power to nominate ministers.

According to the new Constitutional Chart, the *Halk Maslahaty* (People’s Council or National Assembly) personified the highest representative institution, as a traditional model of Turkmen tribal assembly. This institution was established ex novo, with the aim to outline the main political orientations of the country. Moreover, the *Halk Maslahaty* held a veto power on the Parliamentary decisions as well as the power to amend Constitution without the Parliament’s approval. After several changes, in 2003 the number of the *Halk Maslahaty*’s members reached 255 including Niyazov⁷.

Turkmenistan was also the first post soviet country to adopt a new Constitution which defines Turkmenistan as a democratic presidential

⁵ G. CAPISANI, *The handbook of Central Asia: a Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 129-131.

⁶ G. CAPISANI, *The handbook of Central Asia: a Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, cit., pp. 129-131.

⁷ G. GLEASON, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence*, cit., pp. 112-115; J.B.J.VILMER, *Turkmenistan*, cit., pp. 33-35; S. PEYROUSE, *Turkménistan. Un destin au carrefour des empires*, cit., pp. 78-79.

republic (article 1) based on the separation of the three powers legislative, executive and judiciary (article 4).

Actually, Niyazov was establishing an authoritarian regime because he concentrated on himself the totality of the existent powers: as a matter of fact, Niyazov was at the same time President of the Republic, head of the only recognized political party, head of the government and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Moreover he hold the power to appoint the key figures of the national institutions: ministers, *hakims*, directors of the state industrial complex, university's deans, magistrates and attorney general⁸.

The president defines this authoritarian domestic policy as necessary but temporary: however this policy banned the development of a multi-party political system, the adoption of market rules, the creation of political associations (mainly those based on ethnic links) as well as imposed a complete censorship on all kinds of media, while frequent purges affecting ministers in order to eliminate potential political rivals.

Even if Turkmen Constitution does not formally forbid multipartitism, allowing the creation of political parties, the rules under Niyazov were so restrictive that it was hard to create alternative parties. Niyazov's main concern was not only to preserve the power but also to hamper the creation of a religious-inspired political parties – i.e. an Turkmen Islamic Party – which were perceived as a source of instability and a potential dangerous challenge to the secular power backed by Niyazov⁹.

The 1992 Constitution also envisaged a limit of two five-years terms but the referendum held on 15th January 1994 – promoted by Niyazov who obtained 99% of votes following an amazing 100% participation level – determined the annulment of the 1997 scheduled elections, extending the presidential term until 2002. In Decem-

⁸ J. ANDERSON, *Authoritarian Political Development in Central Asia: the Case of Turkmenistan*, in "Central Asian Survey", No 4, 1995, pp. 510-515.

⁹ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: a New International Strategy*, Asia Report No 85, Osh/Brussels, ICG, 4 November 2004, pp. 1-12; INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship*, Asia Report No 44, Osh/Brussels, ICG, 17 January 2003, pp. 1-9; J.B.J.VILMER, *Turkmenistan*, cit., p. 36.

ber 1999 the Parliament unanimously appointed him as president for life¹⁰.

The adoption of populist measures to grant social benefits to the population (free availability of water, salt and electricity, lower and controlled prices of bread and oil) aimed at ensuring domestic stability by means of the acquiescence of Turkmen and to prevent the development of political opposition movements¹¹.

Nevertheless, some opposition movements appeared also during the *Perestroika* period: *Agzybirlik* (unity) undoubtedly was the most popular one, as a nationalistic movement expression of the national *intelligentsia*, and the writer Velsapar was the main supporter. However, in a very short time *Agzybirlik* movement was banished, hindering the opportunity to build a political opposition to the Niyazov's power.

Under Niyazov, political representatives which contested President's policy and his eccentricity were imprisoned or pushed to exile abroad.

The United Turkmen Opposition (UTO) movement was created in 1997 in exile: the first Foreign Minister of independent Turkmenistan Avdi Kouliev – exiled after his disapproval of Niyazov's policy – was the main UTO's representative while Boris Shikmouradov (Kouliev's successor as Foreign Minister in 1993) was another strong and influent representative of the Turkmen opposition, also exiled for his criticism to the isolationist policy and because he was perceived as a potential competitor.

In spite of uniting forces and creating a coalition, Turkmen opposition split itself into weak movements, due to rivalry among the leaders: furthermore, the lack of links between them and Turkmen activists and the impossibility to spread their ideas on the country – given the isolationist policy – weakened all attempts of the opposition to reverse Niyazov¹².

The Niyazov's failed murder in 2002, which could be intended as a first step to trigger a coup d'état, boosted the repression against the residual domestic opposition, by means of a wider campaign of purges

¹⁰ J. ANDERSON, *The International Politics of Central Asia*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, pp. 81-82; D. LEWIS, *The temptation of Tyranny in Central Asia*, London, Hurst, 2008, p.79.

¹¹ G. CAPISANI, *The handbook of Central Asia: a Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, cit., p.132.

¹² S. PEYROUSE, *Turkménistan. Un destin au carrefour des empires*, cit., pp. 92-93.

which removed all president's potential rivals among ministries and security officers¹³.

The authoritarian regime of Niyazov exercised a pervading control in the political and social sphere which was also based on an extremization of the personality cult, characterized by eccentric decisions. In October 1993 Niyazov received by the Parliament the title of Turkmenbashi (the father of Turkmen people): after that, portraits, images and slogans of Turkmenbashi were in every public space of the country. Moreover, in 2002 Niyazov renamed the months and the days of the week using his name (January became Turkmenbashi), the name of his relatives and of the *Ruhnama*: only after his death, the new president Berdimuhamedov reintroduced the Gregorian calendar. But the imposition of his book *Ruhnama* in 2001 represented the peak of his eccentric management of the power: *Ruhnama* was defined as a kind of ethic code for Turkmen as well as a soul's book because it was not the expression of a political ideology but it contained popular tales and traditional histories based on moral principles. In 2004 a 16 hours-course of *Ruhnama* became compulsory to obtain the driving license, while doctors, medical staff and civil servants were examined about their knowledge of the book every three months¹⁴.

3. *Economy and foreign policy: the neutrality status (Baky Bytaraplyk)*

As regards the economy, independent Turkmenistan had to solve the structural problem linked to the centre-periphery scheme of relations, which was the base of the Soviet economy system (economic specialization) where Ashgabat played the role of natural gas and cotton supplier to the centre, represented by Moscow. The construction of a national economy was the main priority, attracting foreign partners and investors in the country in order to compensate the dissolution of the centre-periphery relations with the old motherland, considering that Turkmenistan was strongly dependent in terms of economic subsidies.

Unlike other post soviet countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Niyazov refused to adopt radical economic reforms (the so called "shock therapy") based on liberalization and privatization po-

¹³ D. LEWIS, *The temptation of Tyranny in Central Asia*, cit., pp. 82-85.

¹⁴ S. HORAK, *The Ideology of the Turkmenbashi Regime*, in "Perspectives on European Politics and Society", No 2, 2005, pp. 305-319.

licies and decentralization of powers: Turkmen president preferred to proceed along a gradual transition to the economy market, maintaining a tight state control of the economy and rejecting to implement radical economic reforms which could potentially trigger social discontent and tensions due to an uncontrolled growth of prices¹⁵. Agriculture and hydrocarbons exports represent now as then the backbone of the Turkmen economy.

Similarly to the other independent Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan aimed at developing the national agricultural sector with two objectives: producing cotton to be allocated for exports, in order to obtain foreign currencies to support national budget, given that the “white gold” represented ¼ of the national revenues; producing grain in order to achieve food security, considering that in Soviet time half of the cultivable area was dedicated to cotton¹⁶.

In the energy sector, Turkmenistan benefits of potentially huge reserves of natural gas, even if the isolationist position backed by Niyazov substantially hampered an independent evaluation of such reserves. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkmen production of natural gas competed with the Russian one, and national gas exports were completely dependent on the transit into Russian infrastructures, namely the Soviet Central Asia-Center gas pipeline system¹⁷.

The need to find alternative export routes became fundamental in 1997, when Gazprom decided to disrupt the flux of Turkmen gas delivered through its pipelines after the Turkmen refusal to accept rising tariffs to export national gas to Ukraine. Russian strategy aimed at diverting Turkmen exports to the markets of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), allowing Russia to deliver its own gas exports to the more lucrative European and Turkish markets.

However, the decreasing energy demand in the CIS markets – due to the decline of the post soviet industrial production – and their scarce solvency produced a collapse of the Turkmen gas production – from

¹⁵ R. G. GIDADHUBLI, *Economic Transition: Issues and Problems*, in K. WARIKOO (ed), “Central Asia: Emerging New Order”, New Delhi, Har-anand 1995, pp. 134-136, pp.141-143; M. OCHS, *Turkmenistan: the Quest for Stability and Control*, in K. DAWISHA, B.PARROTT (eds.), “Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus”, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 340-345.

¹⁶ J. ANDERSON, *The International Politics of Central Asia*, cit., pp. 120-125.

¹⁷ O. SKAGEN, *Caspian Gas*, London The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1997.

100 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 1992 to only 12 bcm in 1998 – and consequently a sharp reduction of exports and economic revenues¹⁸.

The realization of the Korpeje-Kurt Kuy gas pipeline with Iran in 1997, which is fuelled with the Turkmen gas produced in the old Dautabad gas field, represented the first successful attempt of an export strategy focused on diversification in order to reduce the dependence on Russia, even if the limited capacity (only 6 bcm per year) frustrated its potential role of alternative energy corridor for Turkmen production to reach the markets¹⁹.

The convergence of economic interests pushed Turkmenistan and Russia to improve their relations: in 2003 they signed a 25 years-energy agreement – which was renegotiated in 2006 – which committed Gazprom to acquire 50 bcm of Turkmen gas per year, also accepting a price increase from 65 to 100 dollar for thousand cubic meters (tcm). This deal appeared profitable for both: Turkmenistan obtained relevant revenues from its energy exports and Moscow enhanced its semi-monopole on the Turkmen export routes, because Russia maintained its control on 90% of Turkmen natural gas exports²⁰.

The foreign policy of independent Turkmenistan is focused on the enhancement of its strategic position in a geographic area including Caspian region, Iran and Afghanistan.

As the other Central Asian republics, Turkmenistan joined the CSI on 21st December 1991, with the aim of temporarily preserving a kind of common market among the new independent states. At the same time Turkmenistan joined other existent international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for the Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In the first years of independence, this opening approach aimed at introducing the new country in the international community but Niyazov swiftly set aside this orientation undertaking a foreign policy based on two main pillars: the development of bilateral relations – preferred to the multilateralism – and the adoption of the positive neutrality.

¹⁸ A. HUET, *Hydrocarbures en Asie centrale*, in “Le courrier des pays de l’Est”, No 1027, août 2002, pp. 32-33; L. JONSON, *Russia and Central Asia, a New Web of Relations*, London, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998, pp. 63-64.

¹⁹ N. BADYKOVA, *Turkmenistan’s quest for economic stability*, in G. CHUFRIN (ed.), “The Security of Caspian Sea Region”, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 238.

²⁰ L. ANCESCHI, *Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy: Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of Turkmen Regime*, London, Routledge, 2009 p. 122.

As a matter of fact, president Niyazov was wary of supra-governmental organizations as the CIS, which could allow Russia to promote an integration process on new basis. Consequently he undertook a strategy of progressive disengagement from the CIS and other multilateral initiatives backed by Russia: Turkmenistan was a CIS founding state and effective member for two years (1991-1993), then the country only attended meetings and at the Heads of State summit in Kazan (2005) Turkmenistan became an associate state, a less-binding form of participation²¹.

In 1996 Niyazov rejected the request to join the Custom Union which included Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus. Even today, the regional economic union appears not completely achievable because of the Turkmen refusal to adhere on this pathway: at first Ashgabat motivated this decision with its foreign policy's position of neutrality and not-aligned country, even if this approach highlighted economic and political reasons. Indeed, this Turkmen refusal to be included in a regional integration process can be explained by the lack of evident gains deriving from the integration of Turkmen economy with Central Asian ones: Turkmenistan is a small country with a population of only 5 million inhabitants (20% of the Uzbekistan's population) and its huge gas reserves – in the 90's Turkmenistan was defined the Kuwait of Central Asia – can be better used to strengthen national economy rather than to realize a regional economic integration. Moreover, the decision to maintain a centralized economy under strong state control hampered the adoption of the necessary measures to proceed with an integration process²².

In the security field, in May 1992 Niyazov refused to adhere to the collective security pact signed in Tashkent, which will become the main multilateral regional organization led by Russia and devoted to security. Consequently, when the Tajik civil war erupted – it was the first hotbed of instability in the post-soviet Central Asia – Ashgabat

²¹ R. POMFRET, *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy*, in "China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly", No 4, 2008, pp. 20-22.

²² B. RUMER, S. ZHUKOV, *Economic Integration in Central Asia: Problems and Prospects*, in B. RUMER, S. ZHUKOV (eds.), "Central Asia, the Challenges of Independence", New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1998, pp. 103-104, pp. 117-118; V.Y. BELOKRENTSKY, *Russia and Former Soviet Central Asia*, in T. ATABAKI, J. O' KANE (eds.), "Post Soviet Central Asia", London, Tauris Academic Studies, 1998, pp. 51-53.

did not participate at the rapid collective force composed by troops of other Central Asian republics²³.

However, Russia's support was essential to build Turkmen military forces, by means of a strong bilateral cooperation. Following the Treaty signed on 31st July 1992 Russia offered its contribution to develop the independent Turkmen national army: border guards, air defence and special forces were established under a joint command for a five years provisional period. Russia provided troops, training and economic support, while Turkmenistan covered costs to maintain the army. This deal was extremely favorable to Ashgabat because it had not the way to create a modern army alone, even if this represented an exception in the region also stressing a condition of vulnerability and dependence, because the other Central Asian republics already had their own national armies. In 1992 30,000 CIS soldiers were deployed in Turkmenistan, mainly to protect shared borders with Afghanistan and Iran²⁴.

Russia benefited of a profitable advantage in geopolitical terms, preserving its military presence in a post-soviet strategic area (bordering with Iran, Caspian basin and also Afghanistan) but this scenario rapidly changed. Turkmen authorities decided that since 1st January 1994 national military forces were put under exclusive Turkmen command and in 1999 Ashgabat decided to suspend 1992 Treaty: in December, Russia repatriated 300 border guards engaged along the Turkmen-Afghan border and Russian Navy ships which were anchored on the Turkmen shore of the Caspian Sea²⁵.

The adhesion to a permanent status of positive neutrality (*Baky Bytaraplyk*) in foreign policy reflected the Niyazov's approach toward the growing instability which affected some post-soviet regions and which could be a dangerous threat for the domestic security. Niyazov supported neutrality status as the best political choice to achieve national strategic aims such as preserving the territorial integrity of the country, promoting favorable conditions for the economic and social growth, developing the national energy potential without depending (in political and economic terms) on transit countries.

²³ R. FREITAS-WIRMINGHAUS, *Turkmenistan Place in Central Asia and the World*, in T. ATABAKI, J. O' KANE (eds.), "Post Soviet Central Asia", London, Tauris Academic Studies, 1998, pp. 166-168.

²⁴ A. RASHID, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.197.

²⁵ J.B.J.VILMER, *Turkmenistan*, cit., p. 209, pp. 219.220.

Turkmenistan joined the not-aligned movement in Cartagena and on 12th December 1995 the Assembly of the United Nations asked to its members to recognize this Central Asian republic as a neutral state²⁶.

The UN resolution gave force of law in the country after the release of a specific constitutional law composed by 12 articles, according to which Turkmenistan can neither join any military alliance nor host foreign military bases in its territory: moreover, the country cannot evidently participate in armed conflicts – with the exception of self-defence cases – or join economic blocs.

The neutrality status must be supported by an “open doors” policy, a multivector foreign policy aimed at developing good relations with all countries in order to attract foreign investments and know-how mainly in the energy sector. However, this Turkmen neutrality pushed the country to an economic and political isolation, enhancing the autarchy: actually, the isolationism represented an attempt to justify Turkmen refusal to implement the dispositions of international law and human rights standards as well as to avoid the adhesion to the Russian-backed security organization²⁷.

In the security field, Turkmenistan began to establish limited relations with NATO: in 1994 Turkmenistan was the first Central Asian country to join the NATO Partnership for Peace Program.

Even if Turkmenistan and NATO have cooperated to address some shared concerns such as to eradicate drug-trafficking and terrorism, the neutrality policy has hindered a deep cooperation between NATO and Turkmen army, also considering that the country cannot make its infrastructures available for military operations under the Atlantic Alliance’s auspices²⁸.

However, after the deployment of NATO and US military forces in Afghanistan following the 9/11 events, Turkmenistan allowed NATO to use an overland corridor for the delivery of humanitarian assistance: furthermore, Ashgabat allowed refuel operations of western military

²⁶ M. ESENOV, *Turkmenistan and Central Asian Regional Security*, in G. CHUFRIN (ed.), “The Security of Caspian Sea Region”, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 248-249..

²⁷ L. ANCESCHI, *Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy: Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of Turkmen Regime*, cit., pp. 26-29; D. LEWIS, *The temptation of Tyranny in Central Asia*, cit., pp. 98-99.

²⁸ A. PRIEGO, *The Atlantic Alliance in Eurasia. A Different player?*, in M. FREIRE, R. KANET (eds.), “Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia: The Return of the ‘Great Game’”, London, Palgrave Mac Millan, 2010, pp. 226-227.

flights which needed governmental authorizations for landing and overflight. This cooperation started in 2002 and was discretely conducted also after the death of Niyazov in 2006: in the attempt not to contradict the neutrality status, Turkmen authorities never officially confirmed the cooperation in the refuel and land transit domains²⁹.

Concerning regional actors, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan had a relevant role in the Turkmen foreign policy, mainly as trade partners.

Iran was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Turkmenistan. In addition to traditional historical links, these countries also share a border of 1,500 km and Ashgabat is located very close (only 28 km) from the Iranian border, where live 1-1,5 million ethnic Turkmen: the combination of these factors convinced Niyazov that it could be dangerous to have bad relations with this strong neighbor³⁰.

Turkmenistan developed good relations with the eastern bordering country – Afghanistan – mainly during the Taliban period until 2001, because they provided security in the region, a necessary condition to promote economic trade and to build the gas pipeline aimed at delivering Turkmen gas to Pakistan and India. In 1994 these countries inaugurated the Koushka-Turgundi railway to deliver goods but also light weapons and projectiles³¹.

Following the Kabul's conquest in September 1996, Niyazov refused to attend a Russian-Central Asian summit of heads of states which was held in Almaty due to its neutrality status, also rejecting the resolution which envisaged CIS monitoring activities to preserve the stability of the Afghan border.

Niyazov argued that Taliban rise to power was a domestic problem of Afghanistan, and they did not represent a threat to the Turkmen security: as a matter of fact, Taliban control of the southern Afghanistan was functional to the Niyazov's strategy of energy diversification and to the possibility to develop the overland energy corridor to supply Pakistan and India. After the deal with the US Unocal energy company, the former foreign ministry Shikhmouradov met Mullah Omar in February 1997 to discuss about the realization of the TAPI gas pipeline and they signed a memorandum of understanding two months later.

²⁹ A. COOLEY, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 45.

³⁰ P. KARAM, *Asie Centrale. Le nouveau Grand Jeu*, Paris, L' Harmattan, 2002, p.297.

³¹ B. RUMER, S. ZHUKOV, *Economic Integration in Central Asia: Problems and Prospects*, cit., pp.125-126.

In spite of UN sanctions against Taliban, Turkmenistan refused to recognize them – given its neutrality status according to which Turkmenistan never supports economic and political sanctions against other countries – and maintained its relations with Taliban, selling to them oil, construction materials and consumer goods³².

4. *Berdymukhammedov's rise to power: a new political course*

After fifteen years of power, the sudden death of Turkmenbashi on 21st December 2006 did not lead to a chaotic scenario of instability as well as did not trigger any competition to seize the power. As a matter of fact, soon after the announcement of the President's death a kind of "soft" coup d'état removed the Parliament chairman Ovezgeldy Atayev – which had the task to manage the transition period waiting for new presidential elections according to the article 61 of the Constitution – which was imprisoned enabling him to perform its assignment while the vice-chairman of the cabinet of ministers Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov became acting President.

Berdymukhammedov's rise to power has been probably eased by the fact that during Niyazov's era he always had political roles without economic implications (Minister for Health and since 2001 vice-chairman of the cabinet of ministers) so escaping to the periodic purges because he was not related to the business linked to natural gas and oil exports and he did not represent a threat to the Turkmenbashi's political authority³³.

On 26th December 2006 the session of the People's Council approved some constitutional amendments "tailored" on the Berdymukhammedov's profile allowing him to play the role of acting President. According to these amendments and new measures, in the case of president's death presidential powers are transferred to vice-chairman of the cabinet of ministers (Berdymukhammedov). Moreover, the minimum age for presidential candidates was dropped from 50 to 40 years allowing to Berdymukhammedov (which was 49 years-old) to run, while a 15-years residence in the country was also required, so

³² M. ESENOV, *Turkmenistan and Central Asian Regional Security*, cit., p. 251

³³ C. KIM, *Turkménistan: l'heure du dégel*, in "Politique Internationale", No 115, printemps 2007, p. 396.

excluding the participation of both Niyazov's son and daughter and the Turkmen opposition abroad.

The People's Council decided to hold presidential elections on 11th February 2007, with the participation of six candidates. A similar scenario could be interpreted as a partial opening to the political pluralism of the Turkmen authoritarian system. As a matter of fact, for the first time in the history of independent Turkmenistan several candidates ran for the presidential election, also considering that the late presidential election were held in 1992 and the only candidate was Niyazov which obtained a landslide with 99,5% of votes³⁴.

Actually, the main aim of the acting president was to soften the totalitarian and monolithic system created by Niyazov, but without dismantling it: the supposed break of the political system was apparent because the candidates were chosen by the People's Council, therefore transforming these elections as "primary elections", given that all the six candidates were members of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, the only officially recognized political party.

Moreover pluralism was strongly compromised due to the systematic exclusion of the opposition's candidates through legal impediments imposed by the new leadership, as the requisite of 15-years residence in the country which prevented the participation of the opposition in exile. In the attempt to circumvent these restrictions, the UTO exiled opposition movement named Nurmammedov – leader of the *Agzybirlik* movement and resident in Turkmenistan – as opposition candidate to the presidential elections: after some days he was arrested becoming ineligible.

Even if these elections were not conformed to the OSCE standard, it was undeniable that Turkmenistan has began a new political phase. At the 2007 elections 89,23% of Turkmens (with an astonishing electoral turnout of 99%) voted Berdymukhammedov as new president and successor of the Turkmenbashi³⁵.

During his presidency, Berdymukhammedov has introduced significant changes in the national foreign policy and also in the domestic scenario: the neutrality status remains the cornerstone of the Turkmen

³⁴ INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, Asia Briefing No 60, Bishkek/Brussels, 12 February 2007, pp. 2-4; OSCE/ODIHR, *Turkmenistan Presidential Election 11 February 2007. Needs Assessment Mission Report*, Warsaw, 18 January 2007.

³⁵ OSCE/ODIHR, *Turkmenistan Presidential Election 11 February 2007. Needs Assessment Mission Report*, cit..

foreign policy but he progressively set aside the isolationist approach developing profitable relations with eastern and western countries, which are prevalently interested in obtaining concessions in order to exploit the huge natural gas potential of this country.

In the domestic sphere, the adoption of political and economic reforms is carried on slowly, even if there are significant changes: as a matter of fact, Turkmen president has undertaken a gradual process of democratization and reforms, aimed at switching from a mono-party model to a multi-party system.

In January 2012 a law on political parties entries into force posing the base for the creation, in July 2012, of a new political party, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. This represents an historical landmark in the evolution of independent Turkmenistan, showing the attempt to formally implement a transition process from a one-party system which survived for 21 years³⁶.

However, it is necessary to highlight that at the 2012 presidential elections the DPT was the only officially-registered party: unlike 2007, OSCE refused to deploy a monitoring missions because several candidates don't necessarily mean political pluralism, given that the candidates were economic and political exponents linked to the presidential inner-circle.

At this election Berdymukhammedov was confirmed – with 97% of votes – as Turkmen president for another five-years term. As in the past, exiled opponents had not the possibility to express their candidature or to reach the country, fearing that they could be jailed: moreover, they did not fulfill basic requisites such as the above-mentioned 15 years-residency in Turkmenistan or to collect 10,000 signatures to support their candidature³⁷.

Following this new orientation two other significant changes were registered in 2013: an exponent of the new Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs was elected in the Parliament for the first time in the history of independent Turkmenistan and the Berdymukhammedov's decision to give up the role of DPT's president. Turkmen President ex-

³⁶ A.MALASHENKO, *Turkmenistan: has there been a thaw?*, in "Carnegie Moscow Center Briefing", No 4, September 2012, p. 3.

³⁷ OSCE OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS, *Republic of Turkmenistan, Presidential Election February 2012*, OSCE/ODIHR, *Needs Assessment Mission Report*, Warsaw, 3 January 2012, pp. 3-4, available online: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/86861>.

plained that his role of Constitution's guarantor is conflicting with a political party's affiliation. Moreover, his role of Supreme Commander-in-Chief is also not compatible with the presidency of a political party: in fact it is expressly forbidden by the Turkmen Constitution which prevents the political involvement of people having a military role³⁸.

Also this decision appears to confirm the process of gradual transition to a more-open system based on the distribution of powers: as a matter of fact, before this renounce also Berdymukhammedov – as his predecessor – concentrated on his hands the position of President of the Republic, prime minister, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, General of the Army and President of the DPT (which was the only existent party until 2012). Furthermore, also the *Halk Maslahaty's* lifting in 2008, following the reform of the Constitution, reflected this new political orientation: all powers and prerogatives of the People's Council were transferred to the President and to the Parliament, while the other organizations which preserve national traditions and an endogenous approach to the democratic transitions – such as the Assembly of Elders and *Gengesh* (local self-government bodies) – were maintained to again influence the national policy³⁹.

The creation of the Agrarian Party of Turkmenistan in 2014 – which is the third party officially recognized by the Turkmen authorities – has contributed to characterize Turkmenistan as a formal multi-party system⁴⁰.

Another demanding challenge in the domestic scenario has been the implementation of a “de-niyazovization” process, aimed at gradually dismantling the Turkmenbashi's personality cult (which is often replaced with a new presidential one) and to adopt limited reforms in the social and health sphere, in the education sector (as the abolition of *Ruhnama* book as compulsory subject in the secondary school) and in the pension system, in order to correct the heavy distortions provoked

³⁸ F. INDEO, *Turkmenistan: ascesa di un nuovo attore geopolitico regionale?*, in M. TORRI, N. MOCCI (a cura), “Il drago cinese e l'aquila americana sullo scacchiere asiatico”, Asia Maior 2013, vol. XXIV, Bologna, Odoya, 2014, pp. 58-59.

³⁹ M.Y. OMELICHEVA, *Eye on the International Image: Turkmenistan's Nation Branding*, in M.Y. OMELICHEVA (ed.), “Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia”, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015, p.105.

⁴⁰ *New Party Emerging in Turkmenistan*, in “Turkmenistan ru”, 11 September 2014, available online: <http://www.turkmenistan.ru/en/articles/17785.html>.

by the controversial policies of Niyazov and therefore neutralizing potential destabilizing social tensions⁴¹.

In spite of these relevant changes, the domestic scenario after nine years of Berdymukhammedov's power shows a continuity with the past mainly in the human rights and the liberty of press domains. The main international organizations – Human Right Watch, Amnesty International, Réporters Sans Frontières – agree in defining Turkmenistan as an authoritarian regime, even without reaching the extreme levels of the past⁴².

5. *A multivector energy strategy and security threats to the Turkmen-Afghan border*

Under Berdymukhammedov Turkmenistan has enhanced its strategic position in the regional and international geopolitical chessboard, progressively becoming an interesting potential partner for all international state and non state actors (i.e. the international energy companies) which have interests in the region. Indeed, given its geographic position, Turkmenistan could be a key partner for energy and regional security cooperation.

Regarding the energy dimension, the combination between the availability of huge natural gas reserves (17 trillion cubic meters, the world's fourth largest after Iran, Russia and Qatar)⁴³ and its geographic proximity to some of the main consumer markets – China, India, European Union, Russia, Pakistan – highlights the role of this Central Asian republic as a powerful gas supplier to supply regional and international demand.

⁴¹ S. HORÁK, J. ŠIR, *Dismantling Totalitarianism? Turkmenistan under Berdymukhammedov*, Silk Road Paper, Washington-Uppsala, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute-Silk Road Studies Program, March 2009, pp. 22-26, pp. 68-90; A. ABDRAKHMANOV, *Turkmenistan: Changing State Power Construction and Politics*, in "Central Asia and the Caucasus", No 45, 2007, pp. 130-138.

⁴² HUMAN RIGHT WATCH, *Turkmenistan*, HRW World Report 2016, available online: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/turkmenistan>; AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Turkmenistan*, report 2015-2016, available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkmenistan/report-turkmenistan/>.

⁴³ BRITISH PETROLEUM, *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2016, p. 20, available online, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review-2016/bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2016-full-report.pdf>.

In 2011 Turkmenistan's reputation as potential big energy player has been further confirmed following two independent audits – in June and November – undertaken by the British company GCA (Gaffney Cline and Associates) which increased previous estimates (made in 2008) of the Galkynysh giant gas field (which includes South Yolotan e Osman). Galkynysh is considered the second-largest natural gas field in the world (after North Dome, located in Qatar) with estimated gas reserves between 13 and 21 trillion cubic meters⁴⁴.

These estimates strengthens Turkmen ambition to develop a multivector energy policy based on the geographic diversification of gas exports, which appears lucrative in economic terms and profitable in geopolitical terms. As a matter of fact, the exploitation of these reserves will allow Turkmenistan to achieve its national target to produce 250 billion cubic meters of natural gas by 2030, allocating huge volumes (180-200 bcm) to supply several projects of new gas pipelines as well as to upgrade the existent ones⁴⁵.

President Berdymukhammedov has profoundly changed Turkmen energy scenario, which is currently characterized by the gradual marginalization of Russia and by the key role of China in the domestic natural gas sector. The combination between the international economic crisis and the decrease of the EU gas demand as well as the reduction of prices and the Turkmen-Russian disagreement about existent contracts represented influent factors which lead to the collapse of Russian imports from Turkmenistan: as a matter of fact in 2009 Russia imported 50 bcm of Turkmen gas, while in 2015 Moscow reduced its imports from 10 bcm to 4 bcm and in 2016 Russia stopped gas imports from Turkmenistan, annulling all the existent gas contracts⁴⁶.

The launch of the China-Central Asia gas pipeline (or Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline, because this energy corridor is mainly fuelled with Turkmen gas, even if Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan also play a role as

⁴⁴ OIL&GAS JOURNAL, *GCA: Turkmenistan's Iolotan Gas Field is World's Second-Largest*, 13 october 2011, available online: <http://www.ogj.com/articles/2011/10/gca-turkmenistans-iolotan-gas-field-is-worlds-second-largest.html>.

⁴⁵ E. LATYPOV, *Caspian Sea Littoral States' Perspectives On The Southern Gas Corridor, EU Cooperation and Chinese Dominance*, in "Natural Gas Europe", 25 September 2014, available online: http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/azerbaijan-turkmenistan-kazakhstan-southern-corridor-eu-cooperation-china#_ftn10.

⁴⁶ C. PUTZ, *Russia's Gazprom Stops Buying Gas from Turkmenistan*, in "The Diplomat", 6 January 2015, available online: <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/russias-gazprom-stops-buying-gas-fromturkmenistan>.

transit countries and suppliers) in 2009 marked a great success for the Turkmen strategy of energy diversification, breaking the traditional semi-monopoly of Russia on Turkmen exports: until 2009, 90% of Turkmen gas exports were delivered through Russian pipeline, while the remaining 10% was sold to Iran⁴⁷.

Given the huge energy potential of Turkmenistan – which holds the fourth largest gas reserves in the world – China has heavily invested in order to develop the Turkmen energy sector: in the Chinese energy strategy, Turkmenistan has become a key partner to support Beijing's strategy of diversification aimed at reducing the dependence on maritime energy routes. At the beginning, the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) invested 4 billion dollars to develop Bagtyarlyk gas field (with 1,3 tcm of estimated reserves) which is also the main source of supply of the China-Central Asia gas pipeline.

Further on China financed the development of Turkmenistan's giant Galkynysh (Renaissance) gas field, investing 8 billion dollars for the first production phase and an undisclosed sum for the second phase⁴⁸.

Chinese dominant position in the Turkmen Energy sector also emerges considering that CNPC is the only foreign company to detain a Production Sharing Contract on onshore gas field (Bagtyarlyk), which has proved and abundant reserves, while the other foreign companies signed contracts to develop offshore gas fields, which are promising even if their energy reserves are not proved neither comparables with eastern onshore fields.

The visit of Chinese president Xi Jinping in Turkmenistan in September 2013 – as part of a wider diplomatic mission in Central Asia to launch the new Chinese geopolitical strategy of the Silk Road Economic Belt – further cemented the energy cooperation between Ashgabat and Beijing. During this Sino-Turkmen important summit, Turkmengas and CNPC – two national energy companies – signed an agreement to extend the capacity of the Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline: China committed itself to buy additional 25 bcm of natural gas per

⁴⁷ F. INDEO, *Turkmenistan 2015: Existing Challenges to the Permanent Neutrality and the Strategic Development of the Multivector Energy Policy*, in M. TORRI, N. MOCCI (eds), "Asia Maior 2015", vol. XXVI, Roma, Viella, 2016, pp. 490-491.

⁴⁸ T. REJEPOVA, *Turkmenistan, China Reach New Energy Deals*, in "Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst", 16 October 2013, available online: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12834-turkmenistan-china-reach-new-energy-deals.html>.

year by 2020 and to realize the Line D of this pipeline, which will cross Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Under this agreement Turkmenistan will supply China annually with 65 bcm of gas by 2020-2021⁴⁹.

In 2015 the China-Central Asia gas pipeline had a capacity of 55 bcm but it delivered only 27,7 bcm of Turkmen gas to China, mainly produced in the Bagtyyarlyk gas field even if small volumes from the Galkynysh's first production phase were included⁵⁰.

Chinese investments and loans have had a strategic impact on the development of the Turkmen energy sector, supporting an increase of the production, the modernization and the realization of new infrastructures as well as ensuring important energy export revenues to boost national budget.

However, this deep energy partnership appears dangerously unbalanced: as a matter of fact, currently 70% of Turkmen exports flows to China, hindering Turkmenistan to successfully develop a multi-vector strategy of energy exports. Furthermore, there are two other additional concerns: firstly, China buys Turkmen gas paying a lower price compared to other gas imports and, secondly, revenues from China are used to repay the multibillion loans granted by China to develop the national energy sector. According to recent figures, China paid \$185 per 1,000 cubic meters of Turkmen gas, while the average price that Beijing pays for other gas imports (i.e. from Australia) is \$225⁵¹.

This scenario is pushing President Berdymukhammedov to immediately find new and alternative energy partners, accelerating the implementation of the eastern and western vectors of export: the first one is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline while the western vector is the long-debated Transcaspian corridor⁵².

The TAPI pipeline has been envisaged as the eastern corridor of exports, through which Turkmenistan will supply the lucrative South Asian markets of India and Pakistan, crossing Afghanistan. TAPI retraces the old project backed by Niyazov in the 90's and then set aside due to the rising international criticism and opposition against Afghan

⁴⁹ T. REJEPOVA, *Turkmenistan, China Reach New Energy Deals*, cit..

⁵⁰ BRITISH PETROLEUM, *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy*, cit., p.28.

⁵¹ BRITISH PETROLEUM, *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy*, cit., p.28.

⁵² F. INDEO, *Turkmenistan 2015: Existing Challenges to the Permanent Neutrality and the Strategic Development of the Multivector Energy Policy*, cit., pp. 491-499.

Taliban. TAPI should deliver 33 bcm of Turkmen gas by 2021, with an expected cost of \$10 billion. Originally the natural gas field of Dauletabad was indicated as the main source of supply for this project, but the stagnant/declining production of this mature gas field will make it necessary to commit Galkynysh production also. In 2015 Japanese energy companies have been involved to finance Galkynysh's production third phase⁵³.

The implementation of this pipeline may have a strategic relevance for Ashgabat because it will offer an additional export option, bypassing at the same time China and Russia and concretely realizing a diversification of export routes.

On 13th December 2015, Turkmen city of Mary hosted a meeting of the main political authorities of the countries involved in TAPI project, to attend the ground-breaking ceremony of the TAPI gas pipeline. The state companies Turkmengaz and Turkmengazneftstroi are engaged to design and construct the national segment of the TAPI, to be completed by December 2017⁵⁴.

In spite of the undoubtedly diplomatic progress, the rising threats to regional security and stability appear likely to delay the implementation of this export corridor which is currently vital for the national strategy of diversification. Firstly, the TAPI route will cross areas affected by a great instability such as South-Western Afghanistan (Herat, Helmand, Kandahar) and Pakistani Baluchistan. Secondly, the growing confrontation along the Turkmen-Afghan border between Islamic extremists (Taliban, foreign fighters linked to the IS or IMU) and Turkmen border guards could contribute to spread instability (even if this area is currently a long way from the northern areas involved in the unrest), representing a threat to regularly supply energy delivered through TAPI⁵⁵.

As regards the Transcaspian corridor project and the idea to deliver natural gas export to the EU market, Turkmenistan has adopted an

⁵³ *Turkmenistan to Work With Japan to Further Develop Galkynysh*, in "Natural Gas Asia", 18 October 2015, available online: <http://www.naturalgasasia.com/turkmenistan-to-work-with-japan-to-further-develop-galkynysh-16787>

⁵⁴ THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKMENISTAN, *Construction Work on TAPI Gas Pipeline and the Third Development Stage on the Galkynysh Field Start*, 13 December 2015, available online: <http://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/news-en/3875-construction-work-on-tapi-gas-pipeline-and-the-third-development-stage-on-the-galkynysh-field-start>.

⁵⁵ F. INDEO, *Turkmenistan 2014: Security Concerns And Unfulfilled Diversification of Export Energy Routes*, in M. TORRI, N. MOCCI (eds.), "Asia Maior 2014", vol. XXV, Bologna, Odoya, 2015, pp. 456–457.

“ambiguous” policy, supporting the relevance of the Southern Energy Corridor as one of the pillars of the Turkmen strategy of diversification but without a concrete engagement in order to complete this project.

The memorandum of understanding on the energy cooperation signed with the European Union in 2008, according to which Turkmenistan engaged itself to deliver 10 bcm of natural gas per year to the European markets, never materialized.

Actually there are two main preconditions which have influenced and hampered a complete adhesion of Ashgabat to this project: the solution of the Azerbaijani-Turkmen dispute on the Kyapaz-Serdar offshore field in the Caspian basin and the achievement of a shared solution about the Caspian legal status among the five littoral states (Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Iran), allowing to overcome Russian opposition to the realization of an offshore pipeline aimed at delivering Turkmen gas to Azerbaijan and then to the EU markets⁵⁶.

Nevertheless, the EU and Turkey⁵⁷ have undertaken a successful diplomatic activism involving Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan in regular meetings in order to overcome their disputes and to cooperate for the Southern Gas Corridor’s implementation: on 1st May 2015 these four countries signed the Ashgabat Declaration and President Berdimukhammedov agreed to deliver a part of its production in the Trans Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP), which at present involves Azerbaijan (as gas supplier) and Turkey (as transit-consumer market)⁵⁸. Furthermore, in December 2015 Turkmenistan concluded the East-West pipeline, a 773-kilometer gas pipeline with a capacity of 30 bcm of natural gas per year that connects Galkynysh’s largest gas field with the Caspian port of Turkmenbashi. Consequently, the country currently disposes of the gas to potentially fuel the westward energy corridor to the EU. The fact that the whole pipeline has been built by national energy companies – Turkmengaz and Turkmennebitgazgurlushyk – and that the \$2 billion estimated cost has been covered by the Turkmen gov-

⁵⁶ M. MURADOVA, *Competition for Caspian Gas Transit Intensifies*, in “Central Asia and the Caucasus Analyst”, 6 July 2011.

⁵⁷ J.C.K. DALY, *TANAP Looks to Connect Turkmenistan to Europe via Turkey*, in “Silk Road Reporters”, 12 November 2014, available online: <http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2014/11/12/tanap-looks-connect-turkmenistan-europe-via-turkey>.

⁵⁸ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Ashgabat Declaration*, 1 May 2015, available online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/sefcovic/announcements/ashgabat-declaration_en.

ernments shows the strategic relevance of this corridor to the national strategy of energy export diversification⁵⁹.

However Russia maintains its opposition to the realization of energy infrastructures along the Caspian basin, advancing environmental and ecological issues and threatening to use its veto right to prevent all Caspian pipeline energy projects as well as claiming the consensus among all five littoral states, if Russia fears to lose dominant position as main gas supplier for the EU markets. The official position of Ashgabat regarding the project is that the consent of the countries whose territories are involved is enough to build a pipeline: this position was expressed during the Caspian summit in November 2010, when Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan reached a kind of geo-energetic convergence about the realization of the Caspian “missing link”. Nevertheless, Turkmen president has never moved against Russian interests, maintaining a prudent approach avoiding to antagonize Russia, which always remains an influent geopolitical player in the region⁶⁰.

Berdymukhammedov is fully aware that Russia holds relevant geopolitical levers to influence foreign policies of the post-soviet states and to push them to realign with Moscow’s interests.

In addition to the Turkmen’s involvement in the Trans Caspian pipeline – a threat to Russian energy strategy of exports – Turkmenistan refused to join multilateral regional organization backed by Russia as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes China, Russia and the other Central Asian republics. Mainly the Eurasian Economic Union’s supra-national project is perceived by Ashgabat as a dangerous attempt of Moscow to reaffirm its own imperialistic ambitions: in the security field, Berdymukhammedov has always rejected the offers of the CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bor-dyuzha to join the organization, to enhance security cooperation and protection along the border with Afghanistan⁶¹.

⁵⁹ *Breaking: Turkmenistan Completes Strategic Cross-Country Pipeline*, in “Natural Gas Europe”, 23 December 2015, available online: <http://www.naturalgaseurope.com/turkmenistan-inaugurates-strategic-cross-country-pipeline>.

⁶⁰ S. BLAGOV, *Moscow Aims for Caspian Settlement in 2011*, in “Eurasia Daily Monitor”, no. 216, 3 December 2011, available online: [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=37238](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37238).

⁶¹ J. KUCERA, *Russia Frustrated By Refusal Of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan To Cooperate On Security*, in “Eurasianet”, 19 May 2015, available online: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/72631>; A. JAFAROVA, *Turkmenistan not Considering to Join Eurasian Econo-*

The current Russian foreign policy – aimed at protecting the rights of Russian ethnic minorities in the post-soviet space – is perceived as a potential threat for Turkmenistan as well as for the other four Central Asian states, which host sizeable communities of Russian-speaking populations. About 4% of Turkmenistan’s population (110,000 residents) hold dual citizenship. The measures of cultural and administrative discrimination adopted in Turkmenistan against Russians could offer a pretext to Moscow for intervention, similarly to the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine cases, or to adopt restrictive migration policies, limiting the flux of Turkmen workers into Russia and therefore triggering a potential scenario of domestic social instability, due to the high unemployment rate and the lack of professional opportunities⁶².

The progressive worsening of the security conditions along the eastern border shared with Afghanistan is currently one of the main source of growing concern for the Turkmen authorities: since 2014 the activism of Taliban fighters is increased and they took the control of some Afghan provinces as Khamyab province in December 2014 and then the Faryab province⁶³.

Given the difficulties of Kabul government to restore order and the central authority on this border area, the incumbent threat linked to potential transborder armed incursions points out the risk to trigger a conflicting scenario, which is perceived as a destabilizing factor for Turkmenistan’s national security.

Along the Turkmen-Afghan border the situation is further complicated by the presence of an estimated 1.5 million ethnic Turkmens in the northern Afghan provinces of Faryab and Jowzjan, just beside the border with Turkmenistan.

In addition to the Taliban threat, the rising presence of Central Asian foreign fighters linked to the Islamic State (IS) is another looming challenge facing Turkmenistan. Even if the Turkmen-Afghan border is not the main area of IS-foreign fighters activity – which is mainly

mic Union, in “Azernews“, 16 July 2014, available online: <http://www.azernews.az/region/68909.html>.

⁶² S. F. STARR, *Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan: Staying Away*, in S.F. STARR, S.E. CORNELL (eds), “Putin’s Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents“, Washington-Stockholm, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2014, p. 158.

⁶³ B. PANNIER, *More Warnings South of The Afghan-Turkmen Border*, in “Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty/Qishloq Ovozi“, 14 August 2014, available online: <http://www.rferl.org/content/quishloq-ovozi-afghanistan-turkmen-turmoil/26530471.html>.

focused on the Ferghana valley, a region shared among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – and the threat of Islamic terrorism appears less concrete in Turkmenistan than in other Central Asian countries, the presence of armed terrorists in the region is perceived as a serious challenge to the solidity of the central authority. Since October 2015, nearly 70% of Turkmenistan's land military forces were deployed in the southern parts of the provinces of Mary and Lebap, both of which border Afghanistan, to patrol and defend the 257 km largely deserted border and to prevent transborder armed incursions⁶⁴.

However, Turkmenistan's armed forces may not be ready to face the challenge of frequent terrorist incursions from the eastern border, which could destabilize the country and represent a serious threat to its national security. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Turkmenistan's armed forces are considered among the weakest in the region, due to several factors such as the lack of personnel training and as a result of the neutrality policy. As a matter of fact, the Turkmen army did not undertake any military operations and were not involved in any multilateral training exercises as a consequence of Turkmenistan's refusal to participate in some regional military-political blocs. Normally, 12,000 border guards are deployed along the Afghan-Turkmen border but these guards are considered ineffective due to the lack of qualified personnel⁶⁵.

This Taliban threat along the border can also compromise the Turkmen traditional policy toward Afghanistan, based on a preventive diplomacy: Ashgabat has always adopted a pragmatic approach toward Afghanistan, offering economic solutions to Afghanistan's problems and attempting to integrate the country within a regional economy through the development of trade and energy infrastructures (natural gas and electricity networks). For instance, TAPI gas pipeline will make available to Afghanistan both the supply of Turkmen natural gas, lucrative transit fees and revenues (estimated at 500,000-\$1 billion per year) and, last but not least, the building of infrastructure and the creation of new jobs. Moreover, Turkmenistan is the main

⁶⁴ *Turkmenistan Reshuffles Security Chiefs As Afghan Unrest Deepens*, in "Eurasianet", 6 October 2015, available online: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75411>.

⁶⁵ D. GORENBURG, *External Support for Central Asian Military and Security Forces*, SIPRI Working Paper, January 2014, pp. 12-15, available online: <http://www.sipri.org/research/security/afghanistan/central-asia-security/publications/SIPRI-OSFno1WP.pdf>; F. INDEO, *Turkmenistan 2015: Existing Challenges to the Permanent Neutrality and the Strategic Development of the Multivector Energy Policy*, cit., pp. 485-487.

electricity supplier for the country and the supplies will increase five-fold in the next years following the construction of two new plants. In the infrastructure's sector, Turkmenistan has promoted the railway interconnection's project with Afghanistan and Tajikistan, building the national section of this trans-regional railroad corridor which will play a significant role in integrating Afghanistan in the regional markets, increasing trade turnover and becoming an important link in the transport network, aiming at contributing to the economic and commercial integration.

Following its ambitious aim is to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan through preventive diplomacy, Ashgabat government has proposed to host an inter-Afghan peaceful dialogue under UN auspices, as a new political and diplomatic mechanism for resolving this issue.

6. *Conclusions and prospects*

In the medium term Turkmenistan will deal with different issues which could affect the political and economic evolution of the country. In the energy perspective, the partnership with China will not be beneficial: on the one hand, Chinese investments have allowed Turkmenistan to increase production and to develop new gas fields but on the other hand Ashgabat should swiftly reduce this condition of unbalanced dependence, because 70% of its exports are delivered to one market, contradicting the multi-vector strategy and stressing the vulnerability of the country. Furthermore, Berdymukhammedov's repeated opposition to stipulate Production Sharing Agreements with foreign energy companies to develop onshore gas fields (with the exception of the Chinese CNPC) restricts the options to reduce Chinese influence on the national energy sector.

Nevertheless, the concrete realization of alternative export routes appears difficult to achieve in the current geopolitical scenario: instability along the Turkmen-Afghan border and the concrete threats to the regularity and security of the future energy supply negatively affect TAPI's development.

Concerning the Trans Caspian gas pipeline, the perspective to deliver Turkmen gas exports to the EU market realizing an offshore gas pipeline along the Caspian appears unrealistic, given the Russian unchanged opposition. Moreover, the recent energy deal between Tur-

key and Russia for the realization of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project can concretely frustrate the strategic relevance of Turkmen gas along the westward export corridor: in this case, the “time factor” – in other words, which project will be firstly concluded – will determine the success of these different projects. In this scenario, Turkmenistan could decide to start again the energy cooperation with Russia: as a matter of fact, Gazprom’s decision to interrupt gas imports from Turkmenistan has provoked heavy losses in economic and geopolitical terms.

As regards economy, Berdymukhammedov’s will to transform the country from an agrarian country to an industrial one – using modern technologies to develop projects to expand natural gas processing and petrochemical production in order to obtain high-quality products such as fuel, liquefied gas, fertilizing products – represents a coherent orientation within a diversification strategy, reducing the dependence on revenues which basically come from two export sources: natural gas and cotton.

Instability along the Turkmen-Afghan border and the threats of Taliban/IS foreign fighters transborder incursions are concrete and dangerous, mainly considering the potential inability of Turkmen army to the challenges posed to national stability.

On 12th December 2015 Turkmenistan celebrated the 20th anniversary of permanent neutrality and Turkmen president stressed the neutrality status as a stronghold of the Turkmen foreign policy: however a further worsening of the security conditions along the eastern border could push Ashgabat to partially revise its doctrine, developing bilateral military relations (with NATO, China – also considering the special Sino-Turkmen relationship – Russia or Uzbekistan) or multilateral cooperation in order to receive the military support needed to contain armed incursions by the Taliban. In the multilateral framework, Ashgabat’s long-term refusal to be included in CSTO could foster a potential involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): in this case this regional organization will boost joint-operations among member-states in the security field.

In the domestic scenario, the concrete impact of the gradual political liberalization and the pathway to a multi-party system could be evaluated only in the forthcoming years: presidential elections scheduled for February 2017 will become a significant test, even if the lack of strong political candidatures and the envisaged exclusion of the opposition’s exponents will affect this transition to the pluralism.

Berdymukhammedov has undertaken an undeniable process of transformation compared to the middle-age totalitarian monarchy of the Turkmenbashi era, even if this gradual reformism appears more oriented to meet domestic security issues and to improve the country's image in the international arena than to promote radical and genuine changes.

As a matter of fact, these reforms only enhance the perception of transformation aiming at persuading the population, the geopolitical players and the international investors, even if these initiatives can be interpreted as instrumental reforms to downplay social tensions, worrying that the country could be ravaged by instability conditions similar to the Arab spring events.



Riassunto - Il saggio esamina le vicende storiche, politico-economiche e strategiche del Turkmenistan, paese il cui ruolo di area di transito dei commerci lungo la Via della Seta risale a molti secoli orsono, e che ha inoltre visto dominare in alcune delle proprie regioni grandi imperi “stranieri”, dai Parti ai Sassanidi ad Alessandro il Grande, ma anche dinastie “locali”, come quella dei Selgiuchidi. Vengono poi trattate estesamente le vicende politiche del Turkmenistan dopo la dissoluzione dell’Unione Sovietica, con particolare riferimento alla figura del presidente Niyazov e agli sviluppi costituzionali che ne hanno caratterizzato il lungo dominio sul paese. La struttura economica è inoltre caratterizzata dalla netta prevalenza del settore energetico (soprattutto gas, del quale il Turkmenistan è il quarto produttore mondiale) che ne condiziona anche le relazioni internazionali, tanto quelle con

la Russia quanto quelle (prevalenti) con la Cina. Ampio risalto è inoltre dato alle novità costituzionali e di politica estera introdotte dal successore di Niyazov, Berdymukhammedov, salito al potere nel 2006. In materia di relazioni internazionali, in particolare, il “nuovo corso” appare orientato ad attenuare l’isolamento del Paese, pur mantenendone inalterato lo status di neutralità; sul piano interno sono innegabili i progressi nella direzione della democratizzazione del sistema costituzionale e in generale delle riforme. Anche sul piano delle relazioni commerciali, la diversificazione dei mercati e la ricerca di opportune alternative di sbocco costituiscono linee-guida dell’odierno Turkmenistan, pur permanendo difficoltà rilevanti, dovute soprattutto all’instabilità dello scenario geopolitico: la prossimità del confine afgano costituisce infatti un serio, permanente fattore di tensione.

RECENSIONI E SEGNALAZIONI

MARCO FORTIS, *Conti pubblici, credito, competitività. L'Italia a una svolta?*, Bologna, il Mulino, Collana della Fondazione Edison, 2016, pp. 156, € 10,20.

In questo volume, il sesto che la collana della Fondazione Edison dedica alla crisi economica europea ed italiana, Marco Fortis offre un quadro ampio e articolato di tre temi, le “3C”, che hanno caratterizzato il dibattito economico italiano nella prima metà del 2016: la dinamica dei conti pubblici, l’evoluzione del sistema italiano del credito e la questione della competitività della nostra economia nel contesto internazionale: appunto le “3C”. A questi temi sono dedicate le tre parti del volume, che riportano articoli pubblicati dall’autore su “Il Sole 24 Ore” e su “Il Messaggero” tra il dicembre 2015 ed il maggio 2016. Fortis è vicepresidente della Fondazione Edison, docente di “Economia industriale e commercio estero” all’Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano, nonché editoria-lista de “Il Sole 24 Ore” e de “Il Messaggero”: fa parte inoltre dei consiglieri economici di Palazzo Chigi, oltre ad essere un tecnico molto ascoltato da ministri e governi di diverso colore politico. Grazie a questo osservatorio privilegiato, Fortis ha potuto fornire una rappresentazione del sistema produttivo italiano più realistica e positiva di quanto normalmente accada: ha potuto cioè sottolineare come, negli ultimi due anni, si siano registrati, in Italia, progressi significativi in termini di efficienza e di sostenibilità della crescita.

Attraverso un’articolata ed approfondita analisi dei conti pubblici e grazie ad una più precisa misurazione dei parametri finanziari delle banche, la posizione dell’Italia risulta migliore rispetto a molte stime di altre fonti per quanto riguarda sia la sostenibilità del debito pubblico sia la solidità del sistema creditizio: anche se permangono numerose sacche di inefficienza, il sistema Italia, nel suo complesso, si è dimostrato dinamico e competitivo. Non vi è dubbio che la riduzione del debito pubblico resti uno dei problemi centrali dell’economia italiana: tuttavia, come sottolinea l’autore, esistono fattori che giustificano un cauto ottimismo. Il disavanzo corrente è infatti inferiore al 3%, l’avanzo statale primario (attuale e storico cumulato) è tra i più elevati al mondo, l’indebitamento privato di famiglie e imprese non finanziarie è molto basso, il debito pubblico posseduto da stranieri in percentuale del PIL è più o meno allo stesso livello della Germania. Secondo indicatori elaborati dalla stessa Commissione Europea il debito pubblico italiano è quello “più sostenibile nel lungo termine tra i Paesi UE, date le riforme pensionistiche effettuate e la curva di invecchiamento della popolazione”.

Il sistema bancario italiano, pur solido nel suo complesso e non avendo in passato ricevuto aiuti pubblici come in altri Paesi, presenta numerose criticità che dipendono da

due ordini di fattori: la lunga e severa crisi economica, che ha comportato la crescita delle sofferenze, ma anche la “cattiva gestione e governance di alcuni istituti medi e piccoli per lungo tempo non percepita (la crisi della Banca Popolare di Vicenza ne è l’esempio più emblematico, ancor più di quello delle 4 banche minori recentemente commissariate e a cui è stato evitato il bail in)” (Fortis, p. 9). Le aggregazioni tra banche e la ristrutturazione di alcuni istituti come Unicredit e Mps sembrano a Fortis una strada obbligata per superare il problema dei crediti deteriorati e mantenere sostenibile un sistema bancario nazionale che non è meno solido di quello delle maggiori economie europee.

Ancora più ottimista è il giudizio di Fortis sulle prospettive del sistema produttivo italiano in termini di crescita e di competitività. L’autore ritiene che le recenti politiche del mercato del lavoro abbiano contribuito, grazie al *jobs act* e alle decontribuzioni, alla creazione di un discreto numero di nuovi posti di lavoro, per la maggior parte a tempo indeterminato. Stimoli alla ripresa sono inoltre venuti dalla crescita dei consumi delle famiglie, mentre gli investimenti hanno contribuito alla crescita in misura molto limitata. Le esportazioni, a loro volta, devono essere considerate un punto di forza non solo in senso assoluto ma anche relativo. Nei primi tre mesi del 2016, infatti, l’export italiano ha saputo mantenere i valori dell’anno precedente a fronte di cali dell’export per molti altri Paesi UE tra cui Spagna, Gran Bretagna, Olanda, Finlandia, Danimarca, Portogallo e Paesi Baltici. Quanto alla produzione industriale, questa è cresciuta negli ultimi due anni soprattutto nei settori *hi-tech*. Nel primo semestre del 2016 il valore aggiunto a prezzi correnti del settore manifatturiero ha registrato la crescita più elevata fra quelli dell’Eurozona, mentre lo stesso non è accaduto per la produzione in volume: questo significa che è migliorata la qualità dei prodotti esportati e che il sistema produttivo si è spostato verso una fascia più elevata della catena del valore, diventando più innovativo e moderno.

Positivo è pure il giudizio di Fortis sulla politica del governo nei confronti dell’Europa. Occorre rivendicare, in Europa, una politica di maggiori investimenti, così come il governo sta facendo, al fine di rilanciare la crescita e l’occupazione. Nello stesso tempo è necessario “porre un aut aut sul bilancio europeo di fronte ai comportamenti egoisti di alcuni Paesi dell’Est che prendono prontamente risorse senza essere altrettanto pronti o disponibili a collaborare su alcuni temi fondamentali come quello dell’immigrazione”.

Il messaggio finale del libro è che le potenzialità messe in luce troveranno realizzazione e contribuiranno alla crescita solo se la via delle riforme verrà perseguita con determinazione. Il processo riformatore intrapreso e da proseguire è compito della politica. L’economista Fortis può solo indicare quali siano stati i risultati raggiunti negli ultimi due anni. La natura del volume, come sottolinea lo stesso autore, è quella dell’*instant book*, e cioè di uno strumento di lettura agile, ma non per questo meno interessante per chiunque voglia conoscere meglio le caratteristiche delle “3C”. La trattazione complessiva appare, in conclusione, particolarmente illuminante grazie alla ricchezza dell’informazione statistica che corredata le diverse parti del volume.

RENATA TARGETTI LENTI

ELENA GRANAGLIA, MAGDA BOLZONI, *Il reddito di base*, Roma, Ediesse, 2016, pp. 227, euro 12.00.

Il volume si colloca all’interno del dibattito sulle misure alternative di contrasto alla povertà. Oltre ai progetti di legge depositati in Parlamento, alle proposte di studiosi e di organizzazioni sociali e alle iniziative adottate a livello locale, è infatti di fine gennaio

2016 l'approvazione da parte del Consiglio dei Ministri di un disegno di legge volto ad affrontare la materia. Una delle proposte avanzate, quella del "reddito di base", incontra ancora, d'altra parte, ostilità di varia natura e vi si oppongono critiche di natura sia teorica sia applicativa. Da una parte si cerca di sottolinearne, in termini negativi, gli aspetti di scarsa efficienza attribuibili alla sua natura assistenziale: dall'altra se ne denuncia la scarsa applicabilità dovuta all'elevato costo che graverebbe sulla collettività. Queste perplessità, si argomenta nel volume, possono tuttavia essere facilmente superate sulla base di ragioni tanto di giustizia quanto di efficienza. Le implicazioni di tale ipotesi per le politiche pubbliche sono evidenziate con chiarezza da Elena Granaglia e Magda Bolzoni.

Nel primo capitolo sono discusse le principali configurazioni che il reddito di base può assumere, dal reddito minimo al reddito di cittadinanza, all'imposta negativa, alla dotazione *una tantum* di capitale fino alle tante declinazioni che ciascuna di tali alternative può assumere. Il reddito minimo e il reddito di cittadinanza sono analizzati in dettaglio: altre ipotesi sono invece introdotte per completezza e in sintesi. Fra le altre proposte avanzate l'imposta negativa sul reddito consiste in uno schema integrato di spesa-imposta, grazie al quale chi guadagna un reddito inferiore al reddito-soglia riceve un trasferimento (appunto l'imposta negativa) e chi, invece, percepisce redditi superiori paga l'imposta (positiva) limitatamente alla quota di reddito eccedente il reddito-soglia. Il reddito di partecipazione, a sua volta, consiste in un trasferimento di carattere universale, analogo al reddito di cittadinanza ma vincolato alla disponibilità all'attivazione, e cioè alla disponibilità al lavoro. Anziché in forma di flusso di reddito il trasferimento può inoltre essere erogato sotto forma di dotazione di capitale *una tantum*.

In letteratura, generalmente, reddito di cittadinanza e reddito minimo sono analizzati separatamente, quasi fossero misure alternative. Il primo è definito come un trasferimento monetario di tipo universale erogato agli individui appartenenti ad una determinata collettività, cioè in base alla semplice cittadinanza. Il secondo viene invece erogato a sostegno dei soggetti più poveri, in base all'avvenuta dimostrazione di disporre di un reddito inferiore ad una determinata soglia. Granaglia e Bolzoni presentano invece il reddito minimo e il reddito di cittadinanza come forme diverse di una medesima misura denominata "reddito di base": la specificità della misura consiste nel fatto di essere "un trasferimento monetario, finanziato dalla collettività attraverso le imposte, e volto ad assicurare a tutti uno zoccolo di reddito, liberamente spendibile sulla base delle preferenze dei beneficiari, senza vincoli di destinazione". Sono escluse, dunque, le forniture di servizi.

Il reddito di cittadinanza presenta il vantaggio di essere erogato, su base individuale e in automatico, a chiunque per il solo fatto di essere cittadino. Richiede tuttavia un finanziamento elevato e rischia di essere scarsamente sensibile all'eterogeneità delle condizioni di bisogno. Il reddito minimo può invece compensare questi limiti, ma la compensazione non è senza costi. Mutamenti anche molto piccoli nella definizione della soglia e delle risorse possono infatti comportare mutamenti rilevanti nel numero dei beneficiari: l'accertamento delle condizioni di bisogno può inoltre implicare arbitrarietà da parte sia degli operatori sia dei potenziali beneficiari: può poi causare stigma e richiedere tempo, con il risultato di determinare carenze di copertura. Il reddito minimo, infine, è generalmente erogato su base familiare, trascurando quindi le eventuali iniquità nella ripartizione infra-familiare delle risorse.

Nel secondo capitolo sono esaminati i diversi schemi di reddito di base nei paesi dell'Unione Europea. Questi presentano specificità e differenze poiché, come accade per il sistema di protezione sociale, sono di competenza dei singoli Stati in virtù del principio di sussidiarietà. Granaglia e Bolzoni sottolineano, a questo proposito, che si dovrebbe discutere di reddito minimo, piuttosto che di reddito di cittadinanza, poiché è questa la

fattispecie di più frequente applicazione nella maggior parte dei paesi dell'Unione, ed è anche quella più dibattuta. Le analogie tra i diversi schemi esistenti includono diversi aspetti critici, quali il difficile accesso alla misura da parte delle fasce giovanili, la capacità (in alcuni casi piuttosto scarsa) di contrastare la povertà nonché i vincoli sanzionatori relativi alla eventuale mancata disponibilità all'attivazione. La conclusione è che sarebbe opportuno giungere ad una "ristrutturazione della spesa sociale degli Stati membri che imponga ovunque l'adozione di uno schema di reddito minimo adeguato". D'altra parte, non solo la lotta contro la povertà e l'esclusione sociale è uno degli obiettivi della Strategia 2020 dell'Europa sociale: anche la crescita del numero di persone a rischio di povertà impone "una ridefinizione delle responsabilità in tema di competenze sociali tra l'Unione e gli Stati membri".

Nel terzo capitolo sono discusse le diverse misure di contrasto alla povertà attivate in Italia. Il quadro che emerge è quello di una eccessiva frammentazione tanto categoriale quanto territoriale. Sono pure descritte, e confrontate nel dettaglio, le principali proposte a favore di un reddito di base esistenti nel nostro paese. Anche se si differenziano per numerosi aspetti, queste possono tutte essere fatte rientrare nella categoria del reddito minimo. Per accedervi sono previste soglie diverse di povertà e modalità differenti di prova dei mezzi: non hanno, quindi, carattere di universalità, ma sono tutte indirizzate solo a chi è povero. tutte prevedono, inoltre, richieste di attivazione attraverso il lavoro e talvolta presentano vincoli all'accesso anche più cogenti rispetto agli altri Paesi europei.

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo discute i fondamenti etici e normativi del reddito di cittadinanza rispetto al reddito minimo. Sono presentate le principali obiezioni che, in letteratura e nel pubblico dibattito, sono mosse a queste due misure: tali obiezioni possono essere sintetizzate nelle carenze in materia di tutela dai bisogni, nel loro carattere essenzialmente assistenziale che può generare forme di parassitismo e nell'adozione di una visione eccessivamente riduttiva della giustizia sociale. Secondo queste argomentazioni diminuzione (eventuale) dell'offerta di lavoro, parassitismo ed assistenzialismo si tradurrebbero in una riduzione dell'efficienza delle misure stesse. È opinione abbastanza consolidata, inoltre, che il reddito di cittadinanza non sia sostenibile sotto il profilo finanziario. Il reddito minimo, d'altra parte, con il vincolo all'attivazione, lederebbe alcuni diritti fondamentali poiché farebbe dipendere il trasferimento "dai comportamenti": con la selettività verrebbe, di fatto, sancita "una divisione fra cittadini di serie A e di serie B".

Con questo volume Granaglia e Bolzoni si propongono di far fronte ai numerosi rilievi, se non vere e proprie critiche, mossi in diverse sedi a misure del tipo "reddito di base". Le autrici hanno mostrato come sia il reddito di cittadinanza sia il reddito minimo siano difendibili non solo in termini di giustizia sociale, ma anche di efficienza in quanto stimolo, fra l'altro, alla cooperazione. Il contributo risulta di particolare rilievo negli attuali mercati del lavoro, caratterizzati da transizioni frequenti da un posto di lavoro a un altro, come viene sottolineato anche da molti documenti europei sul costo della mancanza di politiche sociali comuni. A questo proposito la specificazione delle diverse variabili è un fattore determinante. Per quanto concerne i redditi minimi, ad esempio, sembra alle autrici dirimente "l'adozione di una prospettiva di «reciprocità equa» che obbliga a definire i processi di selezione e le misure di attivazione da una posizione di comune uguaglianza morale fondamentale". Le misure di reddito minimo esistenti in Europa e proposte per l'Italia sembrano invece essere "assai distanti dal soddisfare tale requisito".

Il reddito di base, qualunque sia la configurazione, resta comunque una misura che può generare effetti collaterali. Sostengono infatti le autrici, ad esempio, che "...nonostante le ragioni in termini di diritto alle risorse comuni nonché di diritto a un'esistenza decente, il reddito di cittadinanza rimane esposto a rischi di parassitismo. Similmente,

nonostante le possibili ragioni in termini di diritto a una compensazione in presenza di cattiva sorte, il reddito minimo rimane esposto ai tanti rischi della selettività. Basta che si definiscano in modo leggermente diverso la soglia che separa gli aventi dai non aventi diritto e/o le risorse da verificare nella prova dei mezzi e varia anche il numero dei beneficiari”.

Per tenere conto dei diversi aspetti, positivi e negativi, di entrambe le misure il volume presenta due possibili configurazioni del reddito di base, in grado “di minimizzare i possibili punti critici”. Queste sono il reddito di partecipazione e quello che è stato definito “un reddito minimo di cittadinanza”. Per quanto importanti, “tali configurazioni e il più complessivo reddito di base non possono e non devono essere caricati di tutto l’onere del contrasto alla povertà e alla vulnerabilità che i mercati hanno creato e stanno creando. Sono, pertanto, urgenti anche una ridefinizione delle responsabilità del mercato e delle imprese che in esso operano e, dunque, nuovi equilibri fra pre-distribuzione e, con essa, politiche dell’occupazione e politiche di regolazione dei mercati e delle imprese, e redistribuzione”.

In sintesi, il volume offre una serie di argomentazioni teoriche, normative e descrittive utili per una più approfondita analisi degli schemi che possono essere fatti rientrare nella categoria del “reddito di base”. Lo scopo è quello di offrire maggiori elementi di conoscenza a chi desidera “opporsi sia alle accuse di assistenzialismo spesso mosse al reddito di base, sia alle sterili contrapposizioni fra sostenitori del reddito minimo e sostenitori del reddito di cittadinanza”. La convinzione delle autrici è infatti che “il reddito di base” debba essere considerato con cautela “ma con la necessaria consapevolezza che esso è anche, inequivocabilmente, parte integrante dei diritti di cittadinanza”.

R. T. L.

GIOACCHINO GAROFOLI (a cura), *I maestri dello sviluppo economico*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, pp. 180, € 24,00.

Il volume raccoglie i contributi di diversi autori (Luca Meldolesi, Andrea Ginzburg, Giuseppe Canullo, Alessandro Roncaglia, Gioacchino Garofoli, Paolo Pettenati, Adriano Giannola, Josep M. Bricall, Claude Courlet) presentati in una sessione dedicata ai Maestri dello sviluppo economico nella Conferenza dell’Associazione degli Economisti di Lingua Latina che ha avuto luogo a Cluses, in Francia, nell’ottobre del 2013. Due ragioni avevano motivato l’organizzazione di quella sessione: la prima era legata alla scomparsa di Albert Hirschman, uno dei grandi pionieri della teoria dello sviluppo economico, avvenuta pochi mesi prima; la seconda derivava dall’opportunità di diffondere la conoscenza del percorso di ricerca e della capacità di fare scuola di alcuni maestri italiani (Giorgio Fuà, Augusto Graziani, Paolo Sylos Labini). Queste motivazioni spiegano anche la struttura del volume, che presenta ben tre saggi su Albert Hirschman, stimolati dalla riflessione sul suo apporto svoltasi a Cluses. Il pensiero degli altri autori era già stato trattato in alcuni Convegni ed erano già stati pubblicati diversi saggi per ricordare le loro figure. Successivamente al Convegno di Cluses sono scomparsi inoltre sia Augusto Graziani sia Pierre Judet: nel volume sono stati quindi inseriti saggi anche su questi due autori, oltre a un saggio su Destanne De Bernis.

Tutti gli autori, il cui pensiero è illustrato nei contributi del volume, sono stati accomunati dall’interesse ad interagire con gli studiosi delle altre discipline sociali oltre ad essere “fortemente orientati all’analisi delle tematiche rilevanti per la società e l’economia e sensibili alla soluzione dei problemi esistenti nell’interesse collettivo”. Tutti si sono oc-

cupati delle teorie, delle strategie e delle politiche a sostegno dello sviluppo economico, sia con riferimento ai problemi del mutamento di lungo periodo nei rispettivi paesi, sia allo sviluppo comparato in paesi diversi: hanno inoltre dedicato numerose analisi a forme e modelli di industrializzazione diversi in regioni e paesi a livello intermedio di sviluppo, ma anche ai paesi più poveri e “più bisognosi non solo di risorse ma anche di idee e strumenti per organizzare il loro sentiero di sviluppo”.

Hirschman ha pubblicato nel 1958 un saggio fondamentale (*The Strategies for Economic Development*) che è diventato un classico della teoria dello sviluppo economico. Il saggio è stato il frutto della sua esperienza di componente del *board* della Federal Reserve incaricato di seguire l'applicazione del Piano Marshall in Italia e Francia e poi, prima del rientro nel mondo della ricerca universitaria, negli Stati Uniti. Aveva poi lavorato in Colombia, come consulente prima del Governo e poi di imprese private per ben cinque anni. Garofoli sottolinea l'importanza di queste esperienze, che hanno consentito ad Hirschman di misurarsi “con le questioni concrete, interagendo con i processi decisionali (sia dei ‘policy maker’ che degli operatori privati) da assumere nei riguardi dei problemi da risolvere e non solo, dunque, con questioni astratte o comunque analizzate a distanza e con distacco rispetto alle scelte effettive”.

Anche gli altri maestri ricordati nel volume hanno svolto un ruolo analogo. Destanne De Bernis è stato il “consigliere del principe” nell'elaborazione del Piano di Sviluppo Economico dell'Algeria negli anni successivi alla decolonizzazione. Pierre Judet ha lavorato ai progetti di sviluppo economico e industriale in Tunisia e Algeria e, successivamente, ha svolto ricerche in occasione di missioni per la cooperazione allo sviluppo in Asia e America Latina. Giorgio Fuà, oltre ad un'esperienza con Myrdal alla Commissione Economica per l'Europa delle Nazioni Unite, ha lavorato sia con Adriano Olivetti che con Enrico Mattei e ha organizzato l'avvio dell'Ufficio Studi dell'Eni. Fuà e Sylos Labini, dal canto loro, hanno partecipato alla stesura del Piano del Lavoro della Cgil e hanno partecipato al Comitato Tecnico Scientifico del Ministero del Bilancio e della Programmazione Economica: “In quella occasione hanno discusso la questione delle modificazioni strutturali dell'economia italiana a medio-lungo termine, con riferimento soprattutto alla questione degli investimenti pubblici e delle grandi infrastrutture, senza timore di assumere posizioni minoritarie tanto che la loro relazione di minoranza all'interno del CTS è stata successivamente trasformata in un libro (*Idee per la programmazione*) pubblicato nel 1963”.

Si può affermare che questi autori sono stati “dei costruttori di ponti” tra analisi teorica e realtà concreta. Anche se le loro impostazioni metodologiche sono state differenti, tutti hanno affrontato temi centrali dello sviluppo economico con grande capacità analitica. È proprio questa capacità che rende attuale il loro pensiero, tanto che i loro contributi possono “essere utilizzati per affrontare molte delle questioni economiche oggi sul tappeto”. Tutti sono inoltre ben lontani da una concezione del sistema economico fondata sull'equilibrio: ritengono invece che il processo di sviluppo e di trasformazione dell'economia avvenga “per salti, per connessioni, con processi interattivi, con sequenze di investimenti che generano cambiamenti e movimenti successivi che nulla hanno a che fare con le logiche statiche basate sull'adattamento dei prezzi, sull'allineamento dei rendimenti e sull'allocazione ottimale delle risorse”. Tutti attribuiscono poi un ruolo centrale alla storia. È possibile rilevare anche una loro sostanziale convergenza sulla concezione del ruolo dello Stato nel processo di sviluppo oltre che sulla opportunità dell'interazione tra attori pubblici e privati e sulle complementarità tra investimenti pubblici e investimenti privati: tutti hanno infine dato importanza ai rapporti tra agricoltura e industria, da considerarsi complementari.

In alcuni dei Maestri è particolarmente sviluppato il senso civico ed è percepita la responsabilità sociale dell'economista non solo come intellettuale, ma anche come studioso che deve trovare soluzioni ai problemi della società. Compito dell'economista è anche quello di essere divulgatore, per facilitare la diffusione "di idee e strumenti per gli interventi di politica economica". Si deve infine sottolineare con Garofoli come gran parte dei Maestri si siano distinti come fondatori di scuole e di istituzioni culturali: il debito di riconoscenza verso questi Maestri è quindi grande. E si deve a Garofoli di avercelo ricordato con un volume ricco e appassionato.

R. T. L.

FABIO MUSSO, ANTONELLA ZUCHELLA, PAOLO C. PISSAVINO (a cura),
Internazionalizzazione e oltre. Le imprese italiane e il sistema paese fra strategie e realtà competitive, Bari, Cacucci, 2016, pp. 200,
€ 22,00.

Il volume, pubblicato sotto gli auspici dell'Università degli Studi di Urbino e di Assoamerestero, raccoglie contributi di diversi autori su un tema strategico quale l'internazionalizzazione delle imprese italiane, tema la cui complessità richiede un'analisi secondo tre diverse prospettive: quella riferita al sistema economico nel suo complesso e al modo con cui le sue caratteristiche (incluse quelle infrastrutturali, normative, finanziarie e quelle legate ai rapporti con le istituzioni) influiscono sull'apertura internazionale delle imprese che ne sono parte; quella delle imprese stesse e delle condizioni in cui esse si trovano quando cercano di internazionalizzarsi; quella infine delle istituzioni e dei soggetti esterni alle imprese che possono svolgere un ruolo di stimolo, supporto e coordinamento nel favorire processi di internazionalizzazione più efficaci.

I primi tre capitoli della prima parte riguardano la prospettiva di sistema. Nel contributo di Gioacchino Garofoli, "Industria italiana e competitività: una riflessione sul passato e indicazioni per il futuro", viene offerto un quadro di sintesi che consente di ripercorrere le tappe dello sviluppo industriale italiano dal dopoguerra a oggi. Garofoli evidenzia i fattori di competitività dell'economia nazionale e come essi siano cambiati nel corso del tempo. L'analisi evidenzia una traiettoria molto complessa, caratterizzata da una ricorrente distanza fra dinamiche del sistema produttivo e strumenti di politica economica: questi sono stati infatti spesso inadeguati e comunque tardivi. I problemi, inoltre, si stanno riproponendo in una prospettiva europea: l'Europa può diventare infatti un fattore che accresce le opportunità solo se sosterrà grandi progetti d'investimento ed una visione dello sviluppo più ampia, a livello europeo e sovranazionale.

Antonello Zanfei, nel capitolo "Innovazione nei servizi pubblici e competitività del sistema paese", propone un'analisi dell'innovazione nei servizi pubblici e del modo in cui questa influisce sulla competitività del sistema. Il lavoro si basa su un confronto fra l'Italia e i principali Paesi europei per quanto riguarda i servizi pubblici in rete: i risultati mostrano che in Italia la capacità di offerta di servizi in rete è decisamente inferiore rispetto ai Paesi del Nord Europa. Le debolezze più marcate emergono in settori strategici quali l'*e-Procurement* e l'*Infomobility*. In questi ambiti è necessario investire significativamente per recuperare posizioni a livello internazionale.

Il contributo di Alessandro Giovannini, Raoul Minetti e Susan Chun Zhu, dal titolo "Banche, erogazione del credito e internazionalizzazione delle imprese italiane", approfondisce il tema dell'accesso alle risorse finanziarie e in particolare del modo in cui le di-

namiche di internazionalizzazione delle imprese dipendono dal supporto del settore finanziario, e più specificatamente delle banche. Dal lavoro emerge come politiche alternative siano state adottate negli ultimi anni per sostenere il fabbisogno di capitale delle imprese nel loro processo di internazionalizzazione. È cresciuto l'intervento del settore pubblico, particolarmente attraverso la Cassa Depositi e Prestiti, ma anche attraverso nuovi strumenti per stimolare maggiormente l'iniziativa privata. Tuttavia tali politiche, per essere davvero efficaci, dovrebbero essere accompagnate dall'incentivazione di un sistema di fondi e da un sistema di intermediazione finanziaria capace di stimolare gli investimenti in obbligazioni d'impresa.

Nella seconda parte del volume i capitoli dal quarto al sesto riguardano la prospettiva delle imprese. Il saggio di Antonio Majocchi e Alfredo D'Angelo, intitolato "Imprese familiari e internazionalizzazione: riflessioni teoriche ed evidenza empirica italiana", analizza la relazione fra imprese familiari e grado di internazionalizzazione. Attraverso una ricerca empirica viene evidenziato come le imprese conseguano risultati migliori in termini di internazionalizzazione quando sanno dotarsi di amministratori indipendenti (quelle quotate) o quando coinvolgono sia il capitale che il *management* dall'esterno. Si tratta infatti di bilanciare la componente familiare con quella dell'apertura al mercato: solo così si potranno ottenere buoni risultati sui mercati internazionali.

Roberta Bocconcelli, Marco Cioppi e Alessandro Pagano, nel capitolo intitolato "La dimensione collaborativa nello sviluppo delle piccole e medie imprese italiane: accordi, consorzi e contratti di rete", sviluppano il tema delle alleanze fra imprese. Gli autori analizzano le varie forme organizzate di collaborazione, con particolare riferimento ai consorzi, ai contratti di rete e agli accordi in ambito di *supply chain*, di marketing e di carattere tecnologico/produttivo. L'obiettivo è quello di valutare l'impatto di tali strumenti sulle capacità delle PMI di svilupparsi a livello internazionale.

Il contributo di Cosetta Pepe e Mario Riso, "Strumenti tecnici per il commercio internazionale: criticità e assistenza alle imprese italiane", propone poi una riflessione sul grado di utilizzo da parte delle imprese italiane di strumenti prevalentemente tecnici negli scambi. Dall'analisi emerge come il ricorso a specifici strumenti di supporto di carattere logistico, finanziario, assicurativo, di tecniche di *countertrade*, nonché il migliore utilizzo delle clausole *Incoterms*, possano contribuire al rafforzamento delle imprese e, complessivamente, della competitività del sistema italiano sui mercati internazionali.

Nella terza parte del volume i capitoli dal settimo al nono esaminano la prospettiva dei soggetti esterni alle imprese, analizzando quali possono essere gli strumenti attivabili per favorire il rafforzamento della capacità di azione delle imprese sui mercati internazionali. Con il capitolo su "Le politiche di promozione per l'internazionalizzazione tra stato e mercato: specializzazione, reti fiduciarie e approccio di squadra", Gaetano Fausto Esposito e Camilla Sala evidenziano le opportunità che possono derivare dall'organizzare il sistema di promozione per l'internazionalizzazione secondo un principio di specializzazione, che valorizzi apporto pubblico e contributo del mercato. L'obiettivo è di evitare il duplice pericolo "dell'individualismo possessivo e dello statalismo centralistico", realizzando un mix fra uniformità (centralismo) e diversità (individualismo).

Nel capitolo su "L'internazionalizzazione delle PMI tra promozione di sistema e assistenza personalizzata: il ruolo di una associazione imprenditoriale" David Doninotti evidenzia il fatto che un Sistema Paese efficiente deve saper fornire alle imprese strumenti adeguati per la definizione di una strategia di internazionalizzazione, non limitandosi a promuovere l'export, ma estendendo l'intervento agli ambiti dell'import strategico, a quello degli investimenti sia in entrata che in uscita, fino alla creazione di canali distributivi complementari. A tal fine possono fornire un importante contributo, oltre ai soggetti

pubblici, anche altri soggetti fra cui le associazioni imprenditoriali, il sistema camerale e gli enti locali, che tuttavia dovranno personalizzare i servizi alle imprese stimolando l'adozione di tecniche di commercio estero e di azioni promozionali predisposte su misura per le stesse.

Il capitolo di Vittoria Marino e Giada Mainolfi, "*Country brand management: esperienze internazionali a confronto attraverso la ricerca qualitativa*", esamina la rilevanza del processo di *country branding* nello scenario economico internazionale, evidenziando le connessioni fra il *brand* Paese e la politica internazionale. I risultati dello studio, condotto attraverso un'analisi delle esperienze internazionali, sollecitano studiosi e *place managers* ad articolare il processo di *country branding* partendo da un set di variabili critiche e puntando al coordinamento fra responsabili delle politiche, professionisti di marketing e *stakeholders*.

L'insieme dei lavori offre un prezioso contributo ad una migliore comprensione delle dinamiche recenti dei processi di globalizzazione. Emerge con tutta evidenza come le piccole imprese, invece di trarre vantaggio dalle potenzialità offerte dalla crescente apertura dei mercati internazionali, incontrano difficoltà ad espandersi a causa dei limiti derivanti dalla piccola dimensione strutturale, organizzativa e finanziaria. Mentre le imprese di media dimensione sono riuscite ad affermarsi sui mercati esteri, come evidenziato dai dati sulla rinnovata competitività internazionale del sistema manifatturiero italiano, le piccole imprese, che rappresentano di gran lunga la quota più rilevante della nostra struttura industriale, hanno incontrato crescenti difficoltà. Una severa selezione nell'ultimo decennio ha infatti portato alla scomparsa di oltre un quarto delle piccole imprese, quelle con meno di cinquanta addetti: la piccola dimensione, oggi più che in passato, rappresenta infatti una condizione di maggiore vulnerabilità. Sarebbe quindi necessario adottare modelli d'impresa caratterizzati da una maggiore dimensione, o comunque instaurare forme di alleanza tra le imprese. Nello stesso tempo occorre dotare le imprese esistenti di adeguati strumenti di rilancio per aiutarle ad evolvere verso un più elevato livello dimensionale. I due aspetti, ruolo dell'operatore pubblico e forme di cooperazione, sono particolarmente rilevanti quando si tenga conto del fatto che le carenze infrastrutturali, fra cui quelle digitali, si traducono in un ulteriore freno da rimuovere.

R. T. L.

ANNA TONELLI, *Per indegnità morale. Il caso Pasolini nell'Italia del buon costume*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2015, pp. X; 155.

«Prendiamo spunto dai fatti che hanno determinato un grave provvedimento disciplinare a carico del poeta Pasolini per denunciare ancora una volta le deleterie influenze di certe correnti ideologiche e filosofiche dei vari Gide, Sartre, di altrettanto decadenti poeti e letterati, che si vogliono atteggiare a progressisti, ma che in realtà raccolgono i più deleteri aspetti della degenerazione borghese».

Queste righe sono tratte dal corsivo di Ferdinando "Carlino" Mautino che «l'Unità» pubblica il 28 ottobre del 1949, accompagnando la notizia dell'espulsione di Pasolini dal Pci (la citazione è tratta da N. Naldini, *Il sogno di una cosa 1948-1949*, in P. P. Pasolini, *Vita attraverso le lettere*, a cura di Nico Naldini, Torino, Einaudi, 1994, pp. 112-113). Nello stesso mese, lo scrittore era stato allontanato dal suo ruolo di docente (avventizio) presso la scuola media di Valvasone, dove insegnava da due anni. Alla base della duplice estromissione, i cosiddetti "fatti di Ramuscello", frazione del comune di Sesto al Reghena

(Pordenone): il 30 settembre – per l'a. è più plausibile l'ipotesi del 30 agosto – Pasolini, a margine della festa in onore di Santa Sabina, si sarebbe appartato in un vicino campo con alcuni adolescenti; gli atti sessuali li consumati, su un prato, sarebbero tornati sulla bocca dei ragazzi nei giorni seguenti, favorendo la diffusione di una voce giunta sino ai carabinieri. Seguiva un processo chiuso nel 1952 con l'assoluzione in appello degli imputati dall'accusa di atti osceni per insufficienza di prove. Al contempo, era ribadita l'assoluzione di Pasolini per l'imputazione di corruzione di minorenni; accusa dalla quale il poeta era già stato assolto in primo grado alla fine del 1950.

Quando il processo giunge all'epilogo, Pasolini si è già trasferito con la famiglia a Roma, dove tra non poche difficoltà economiche e tensioni, riesce a trovare un incarico come insegnante in una scuola media di Ciampino. Superfluo ricordare l'impatto sulla poetica pasoliniana della periferia romana, col suo degrado redento dalla "purezza" e dal vernacolo delle giovani ossessioni, «poco più che creta e poco meno che Apolli», che la popolano. Sempre nella capitale, inoltre, gli si schiude progressivamente una cerchia di frequentazioni tra cinema, editoria e stampa, decisiva per l'inserimento dell'allievo (mancato) di Roberto Longhi, nel dibattito civile e culturale del paese.

Intendiamoci, quella di A. Tonelli non è una biografia di Pasolini negli anni friulani, oppure un libro sul rapporto tra Pasolini e il Pci, o tantomeno una monografia sul Pasolini politico. O meglio, grazie a una puntuale ricognizione archivistica il volume getta luce su tutti questi aspetti del percorso pasoliniano. Tuttavia, siamo di fronte a uno studio sulla morale sessuale divenuta terreno di contesa politica; in questo contesto, il 'caso' Pasolini viene letto dall'a. come «esempio significativo per cogliere i segni di una temperie culturale e politica intrisa di valori e riferimenti contraddittori che si incontrano e scontrano nell'Italia uscita dal ventennio fascista e dalle lacerazioni della guerra» (p. VII).

L'espulsione dal Partito in cui si era iscritto dal 1947 e il pubblico «scandolo» – così recita il verbale dei carabinieri della stazione di Cordovado – fomentato dalla stampa locale democristiana, ansiosa di distruggere un avversario locale di non comune spessore e abilità, segnano la convergenza di due strategie di controllo del privato utilizzate dalle «due chiese». La Dc accusava, ma il partito di Togliatti espelleva per «indegnità morale», eliminando così un giovane certo intraprendente, ma forse troppo indipendente, specie in fatto di gusti letterari – pochi mesi dopo fu il segretario in persona a «condannare» su «l'Unità» il «pederasta» Gide – e inclinazioni sessuali. «Tu dottore non sei di quelli che si scaldano troppo, ma di quelli che ragionano»: è una frase rivolta a Pasolini dai militanti comunisti che il giovane docente incontra in osteria alla fine di ogni comizio durante le combattutissime elezioni del 1948 (Da N. Naldini, *Cronologia*, in P. P. Pasolini, *Saggi sulla politica e sulla società*, a cura di Walter Siti e Silvia De Laude, Milano, Mondadori, 1999, p. LXIX). Eppure, il ventisettenne professore, che aveva profuso tutto se stesso nella militanza sul territorio partecipando all'attività organizzativa del partito – concorse, fra l'altro, alla costituzione della Federazione di Pordenone – fu «processato» ben tre giorni prima che avesse luogo l'istruttoria ed espulso senza troppi complimenti.

All'interno di un quadro in cui Dc e Pci utilizzano il privato come spazio di contesa politica, ogni deviazione dalla *weltanschauung*, e relativa morale, che informa ciascun partito, viene percepita come incompatibile con la piena appartenenza alla comunità. Nella «costruzione del nemico», insomma, la vita privata dei singoli, a qualunque livello, assume un peso determinante ed è posta sotto la lente d'ingrandimento della burocrazia di partito. Pasolini, prosegue Tonelli, diventa così «per i democristiani il simbolo da colpire e per i comunisti il pericolo da scongiurare» (p. 69).

Ma l'espulsione del poeta per il suo «indecoroso» comportamento, osserva l'a., non rientra solo nell'economia di una contesa politica senza quartiere tracimata sul terreno

della sessualità. Si tratta infatti «di un provvedimento che rispecchia pienamente la politica del Pci, che prevede un sistema di controllo in grado di vigliare sulla condotta dei militanti e di prescrivere ammende e punizioni nei casi di irregolarità e disobbedienza» (pp. 74-75).

Dietro la duplice estromissione e la “trappola” democristiana ricostruita con acribia dall’a. – «un lavoro perfetto, minuzioso e paurosamente tempestivo: abbiamo molto da imparare da loro», era l’impressione che lo stesso Pasolini comunicava a un’amica e militante comunista di Pordenone – c’è un giovane che si sente quasi spacciato. A Mautino, che su «l’Unità» gli ha dato del degenerato, Pasolini scrive che la madre «ieri mattina è stata per impazzire», mentre «mio padre è in condizioni indescrivibili: l’ho sentito piangere e gemere tutta la notte. Io sono senza posto, cioè ridotto all’acattonaggio». Eppure è ancora in grado di chiudere con «Ti abbraccio» una lettera durissima: «Non mi meraviglio della diabolica perfidia democristiana», aveva scritto, «mi meraviglio invece della vostra disumanità; capisci bene che parlare di deviazione ideologica è una cretineria. Malgrado voi, resto e resterò comunista, nel senso più autentico di questa parola» (Casarsa, 31 ottobre 1949).

È un copione, quello delle ostilità convergenti fra cattolici e comunisti, che tornerà a ripetersi anche in occasione della pubblicazione di *Ragazzi di vita*, stampato nel 1955 da Garzanti e sottoposto al sequestro; parzialmente diversa, invece, la storia della ricezione di un film come *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), dove alle critiche da sinistra risponde un certo apprezzamento da parte degli ambienti cattolici più sensibili al nuovo clima conciliare.

Partendo dalla ricostruzione di un avvenimento preciso – i “fatti di Ramuscello” e la successiva espulsione dal Pci – *Per indegnità morale* offre così un contributo di prim’ordine all’inquadramento di Pasolini nella cultura politica degli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta. Soprattutto, consente di realizzare quanto l’omosessualità, vissuta con la consapevolezza di uno strumento conoscitivo volto a smascherare le ipocrisie di una società carica di umori reazionari e sessuofobici, avesse finito per giocare un ruolo determinate nell’assegnare a Pasolini il ruolo scomodo di intellettuale militante ma non organico, compagno non compagno, «scandolo» non solo per i carabinieri, ma soprattutto per gli ortodossi del partito-chiesa.

FRANCESCO TORCHIANI

BRUNO PISCHEDDA, *L’idioma molesto. Cecchi e la letteratura novecentesca a sfondo razziale*, Torino, Nino Aragno, pp. 313, 2015, euro 20.

Il problema era stato impostato da Gabriele Rigano su «Storiografia» (*Note sull’antisemitismo in Italia prima del 1938*, 12, 2008, pp. 215-267). In quella sede, lo storico aveva ripercorso alcuni dei tratti salienti della produzione di Emilio Cecchi – si pensi, tanto per fare un esempio, alla sua attenzione per due autori non certo privi di punte antisemite come Hilaire Belloc e Gilbert K. Chesterton e alla sua vicinanza agli ambienti integristi e antisemiti di Mons. Umberto Benigni – in “dittico” con quella di uno dei massimi studiosi del mondo antico, Gaetano De Sanctis.

In questo libro Bruno Pischedda mette a punto, con gli strumenti dell’italianista, una fine analisi della prosa levigata del fiorentino seguendo il filo conduttore delle pulsioni antisemite latenti in più di un passo della sua opera. Se più di uno studioso aveva mes-

so in luce le consonanze fra la rappresentazione sostanzialmente negativa della civiltà americana e il contesto politico-culturale dell'Italia fascista (penso a Michela Nacci, ma anche a Roberto Vivarelli), Pischedda insiste qui sull'importanza del contributo di Cecchi ad alimentare quell'humus culturale fatto di pregiudizi, stereotipi e immagini negative dell'ebreo – o dello straniero – senza postulare un'immediata rispondenza con il razzismo di stato degli anni Trenta, ma rilevando come anche di quelle immagini potesse servirsi il «progetto discriminante» (p. X) dell'Italia fascista.

Il «caso» Cecchi, a tal proposito, sembra prestarsi in modo particolare alla possibilità di verificare questo assunto. La sua multiforme attività di scrittore, critico letterario e artistico, giramondo riluttante e firma di punta del «Corriere della Sera», così come il carattere particolare della sua pagina, lo imposero a «un pubblico largo, indifferenziato» (p. 7), che in quell'Italia in orbace acquisiva nozioni del «mondo» – culturalmente e geograficamente inteso – di sicura presa.

Pischedda procede ricostruendo l'ostilità dell'autore di *America amara* verso «l'ebreo»; un sentire da collocarsi «al confine estremo tra pregiudizio albergante e convinzione profonda». Lo fa cogliendo il serpeggiare di tale idioma culturale – inteso come plesso di credenze o stati d'animo in grado di alimentare o anche solo di costeggiare ideologie ben strutturate e volte al conseguimento di un preciso obiettivo politico – in ambienti largamente frequentati, quelli rondisti, e altri, quelli integristi, appena lambiti.

Il particolare angolo visuale utilizzato dall'a. comporta naturalmente dei sacrifici. Ne esce meno rappresentato, a questo proposito, il Cecchi critico d'arte (di influenza tale da meritarsi l'ingresso in ben due volumi delle antologie di Paola Barocchi, *Testimonianze e polemiche figurative in Italia. Dal divisionismo al Novecento*, Firenze, D'Anna, 1974, *passim*; *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti polemiche documenti*. Vol. III. *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura e sul monumentale 1925-1945*, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, *passim*), con l'importante eccezione della sua risposta al referendum di Interlandi sull'italianità dell'arte nel pieno della campagna antisemita. In quella sede, Cecchi se ne uscì negando sostanzialmente il problema dell'esistenza di un'arte ebraica, ma riconoscendo l'influenza concreta degli ebrei nel funzionamento del mercato dell'arte e della determinazione dei gusti prevalenti (cfr. la risposta di Cecchi in T. Interlandi, *La condizione dell'arte*, Roma, Edizioni di «Quadrivio», 1940, pp. 39-41).

È un antisemitismo, quello di Cecchi, «così poliforme e capace di sbalzi ingegnosi entro la trita congerie di pregiudizi diffusi», da esercitare un vero e proprio «effetto seducente» (p. 110). L'a. cita a tal proposito uno degli ultimi «pesci» finito nella raccolta che aveva per titolo quello di un celebre quadro di Manet. *Il giardino di Buddha*: lo scritto apparso su «La Ronda» nel 1919, descriveva un'immaginaria visita compiuta in un castello del Kent da Cecchi, ospite di un proprietario «piccino, nero, nasuto», prodigo nel mostrare ai suoi ospiti una dimora, costruita su terre che ora ospitano le ossa dei legionari romani vincitori dei britanni, il cui arredamento trasuda cosmopolitismo con venature orientalizzanti. Attraverso una descrizione che procede per accumulo e l'uso di un'ironia tanto sottile quanto tagliente, Cecchi mostra al lettore una collezione di opere e chincaglierie che alterna punte di qualità assoluta a vera e propria paccottiglia: si tratta, per lo scrittore, del precipitato di una civiltà, quella inglese, in cui «l'infiltrazione ebraica, col mischiare e sostituire i milionari ebrei internazionali ai mercanti e rappresentanti dell'aristocrazia di religione, di coltura e di razza, ha potuto forse colorire d'un cinismo più specioso e volgare più determinatamente a oriente» (*Il giardino di Buddha*, in E. Cecchi, *Pesci rossi*. Edizione critica a cura di Margherita Ghilardi, Firenze, Vallecchi, 1989, pp. 111-112).

È un episodio meno clamoroso di quello, ben analizzato dall'a., legato alla stroncatura cecchiana di un *best-seller* del primo dopoguerra, *Sciogli le trecce*, Maria Maddale-

na, di Guido da Verona (Milano, Bemporad, 1920, con relativi interventi, solo per citare qualche nome, di Bacchelli, Borgese e, appunto, Cecchi), ma forse per questo tanto più significativo nel restituire la capacità di quella prosa di instillare stereotipi e immagini negative attraverso tutte le sfumature di un finissimo dettato.

L'antisemitismo è comunque solo una variante delle punte razziste che troviamo nelle prose di viaggio affidate a uno dei libri cui è legata la fama di Cecchi, quell'*America amara* che «raccolge e coordina impressioni, osservazioni e memorie di due miei soggiorni abbastanza lunghi agli Stati Uniti ed al Messico: nel 1930-31 e 1937-38», con particolare attenzione ai «fatti politici e culturali» (dall'*Avvertimento* dell'autore a *America amara*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1939, p. non numerata). La scarrozzata domenicale per Harlem diventa così l'occasione per annotare una serie di profili umani dai tratti zoologici inequivocabili: ecco donne dalla «fierezza barbarica» con «lunghe frange sugli occhi come cavalle», facce «rattrappite come chicchi di caffè tostato» illuminate da «occhietti senza cigli» come «occhi di serpi», vecchi dal «cranio mostruosamente appuntito», con «la pelle del viso tumefatto e azzurrognolo» che fa pensare «al cuoio degli elefanti» (E. Cecchi, *America amara*, cit., p. 71). Il campionario, nello stesso libro, offre molti altri episodi: il più noto, anche se forse non il più significativo, è il saggio introduttivo all'antologia *Americana* di Vittorini, con quei riferimenti a un paese «traviato», gli Stati Uniti, guasti anche a causa delle «nefandezze della promiscuità razziale» (E. Cecchi, *Introduzione a Americana. Raccolta di narratori dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, Milano, Bompiani, 1942 [ma gennaio 1943], p. XXIII). Sono attestazioni, osserva Pischetta, di un atteggiamento «segregazionista» che in Cecchi ha basi «sia biologiche che spirituali: rimanda a una *physis* insormontabile come alla *religio* degli antichi» (p. 25). Ma va ricordato che quello del poligrafo fiorentino è un convincimento in grado di calibrare le sue comunque mai roboanti manifestazioni quando si tratta di descrivere l'Italia di Mussolini all'estero: illuminanti, a tal proposito, appaiono le pagine dedicate alla sua lunga collaborazione al «Manchester Guardian».

Tra le fonti letterarie, e non solo, che Pischetta scandaglia con cura una particolare importanza viene accordata all'integrità cattolica, mediata dall'inquietante personalità di Mons. Benigni. Campione dell'antimodernismo, Benigni era autore di una *Storia sociale della Chiesa* in più volumi ricca di spunti antisemiti, proprio come la sua collaborazione a fogli e testate più o meno clandestine: tre queste, quel «Bollettino anti-semita» di cui Cecchi sarebbe stato a conoscenza e avrebbe «pubblicizzato» presso sue conoscenze. Di più, lo scrittore avrebbe insistito affinché Benigni collaborasse a «La Ronda». Al di là dell'effettiva posizione della pedina-Cecchi nella cerchia cospirativa di Benigni, l'a. non nasconde come, a parte il collante dell'anti-internazionalismo e la comune avversione dei due all'ebraismo come spina dorsale dell'*establishment* finanziario mondiale, completamente diverso fosse il rispettivo modo di declinare quegli umori antisemiti: «Là dove Benigni inveisce, accusa e mobilita il risentimento dei confratelli in Cristo, Cecchi escogita formule nuove e allude con prudente sagacia. Il dato creativo, in lui, resta sempre ben rilevato; i pregiudizi che sparge a più riprese sulla pagina hanno solitamente alcunché di ispirato se non di magistrale: stupiscono per la scioltezza estrosa con cui vengono declinati e per la fredda determinazione che vi soggiace» (pp. 150-151).

Il capitolo finale, che mette a fuoco il passaggio sostanzialmente indolore dell'Accademico d'Italia Cecchi al post-fascismo (p. 246), è un tassello di grande importanza nella ricostruzione della transizione culturale tra fascismo e Repubblica che ha lasciato sul campo, nei conti col recente passato, proprio lo strisciante antisemitismo presente in alcuni settori della cultura italiana.

F. T.

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