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## **From friends to collaborators?**

A comparison of bilateral conflicts  
in the Italo-German relationship

Dörte Dinger

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# **From friends to collaborators?**

## **A comparison of bilateral conflicts in the Italo-German relationship**

***Dörte Dinger***

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Both incidents made waves in Italo-German relations.  
But in 1984, the Germans said: How could just you say that?  
You, as being our allies and friends?  
Nowadays, in contrast, you clearly feel the German contempt:  
How dare that guy down there in Italy say such a thing?

Luigi Vittorio Ferraris<sup>1</sup>

## 1 Introduction

For quite a long time, Italo-German relations have been treated like a red-headed stepchild.<sup>2</sup> Neither do they matter in research on foreign policy, nor in domestic politics within both countries. Relationships to the US, France and to direct neighbours are considered as to be more important. It has been mainly through public quarrels, for example in recent times about German refusal against Italian participation in the 5+1-talks with Iran<sup>3</sup>, that their bilateral relationship attracted interest. Despite widespread indifference, however, among observers of Italo-German relations an inspiring debate on the relationship's actual status has broken out. The discussions culminated in a publication conjointly edited by three approved experts in the field (Rusconi/Schlemmer/Woller 2008). The book presents a wide spectrum of perspectives on the question of continuity versus change. Positions range from decidedly supporting the hypothesis of both countries' estrangement up to clearly affirming the exact opposite, namely emphasising the very stability of the relationship. Rusconi, most prominently, argues that since the fall of the Berlin Wall, German-Italian relations are undergoing a process of significant changes, towards what he calls "gradual estrangement". Because important "axioms" of the bilateral relationship have

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1 During an interview with the authoress in Rome, June 2005.

2 This working paper presents first results of a research stay at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (Rome) in the autumn 2008. The Institute provided an inspiring and helpful research environment. A grant from the German Academic Exchange Service provided the necessary financial support. Former versions of this paper have been presented to doctoral colloquiums at the University of Trier and at the University of Bremen. I would like to thank all participants, and particularly Rainer Baumann, Bernhard Zangl and Hanns W. Maull, for their useful suggestions and advice. I also thank Alexander Grasse and the anonymous referee for their comments.

3 The 5+1 group negotiates nuclear issues with Teheran. It consists of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – China, Russian, France, Britain, and the US – plus Germany. In June 2007, Germany openly took position against Italy's participation in the group, which caused strong protest in Rome.

lost their centrality, each country's foreign policy is no longer as convergent as before and politicians from both sides find it difficult to understand each other. Consequently, political cooperation becomes inefficient or does no longer take place at all (Rusconi 2008). In the same volume, this claim is contradicted by Woller who argues that cultural, economic and social relations between both countries are more intense than ever before, not at least due to political promotion. Italo-German relations remain to be about a "special relationship". In that sense, he describes their actual status not as estrangement but as "normality with empathy" (Woller 2008: 17). Due to the well-informed and empirically rich contributions, the volume delivers illuminating insights into the reality of Italo-German relations. Nevertheless, the reader is left clueless in view of weighing up the different arguments. That is why the question of continuity versus change is still open.

The present study aims to contribute to this debate and take it one step further. I will compare two empirical cases of bilateral conflict. These have taken place at different points in time, that is to say before and after the end of the cold war: in 1984, when Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti called the desirability of German reunification into question, and in 2003, when Prime Minister Berlusconi accused a German European deputy of behaving like a Nazi guard. I will examine systematically whether patterns of change will prevail over continuity, and whether we can speak, in these concrete cases, about estrangement or not. Furthermore, I want to put forward a systematic analysis of changes in bilateral relations. Building on insights of social constructivism, I propose a two-layer analysis examining interaction and – over and above – patterns of meaning. Such an approach does not only allow assessing the existence of potential changes but also accounts for their depth. The study's empirical basis is firstly a content analysis of newspaper coverage, including four German and four Italian newspapers. Secondly, problem-centred qualitative interviews have been conducted with involved German and Italian diplomats. Results do underline the existence of what Rusconi called estrangement, and they illustrate an ongoing change within the bilateral relationship of Italy and Germany.

## **2 Analytical Framework: Change in Bilateral Relations**

Delving deeper into research on bilateral relations, it soon becomes apparent that blurriness in terms of concepts, criticized above in the case of Rusconi/Schlemmer/Woller (2008), is not an isolated case. Quite the contrary, their volume represents nothing but the most recent example of lacking theoretical frameworks when studying bilateral relationships systematically. Nowadays it seems almost antiquated to study bilateral relations of nation-states while the rest of the IR community debates globalisation, denationalization, supra-nationalism and non-state actors. However, there is no sign at all that bilateral contacts have been replaced – though its characteristic features, settings and proceedings may have changed (Hellmann et al. 2007). States are, and remain to be, committed to the dialogue with other states. It is striking, therefore, that there is no specific bilateral relations literature in IR<sup>4</sup>. Prevalently, bilateral relations are treated within the framework of diplomacy studies, concerned indeed with relations between states. Yet, in most cases these studies are insufficient to address important aspects of bilateral relationships. As a field mainly consisting of narratives of retired practitioners, they are of limited conceptual wealth and of a rather descriptive character (Sofer 1988; Hocking 2005). Focusing almost exclusively on “important men”, they cannot account for change other than merely behavioural adaptation. In order to study changes in their different degrees, it is necessary to include an analysis of social structures in which concrete interactions are rooted. Hence, an injection of social constructivist insights will improve our understanding of bilateral relations significantly.

As social constructivists have pointed out, an understanding of intersubjective structures is important to comprehend what states do. First attempts to transfer constructivist approaches to the realm of diplomacy are promising (Jönsson 2002; Sharp 1999; Neumann 2002; Lose 2001; Krotz 2007). Diplomacy itself is not conceptualized as a “natural product” of somehow given national interests, but viewed as constructed in processes of communication and interaction<sup>5</sup>.

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4 Many encyclopaedias, such as the Encyclopaedia of International Relations and Global Politics and the Encyclopaedia of Government and Politics, do not even hold entries on the term. All the more interesting seems to be a project by Krotz and Katzenstein, who are currently working on a research project “Bilateralism between Unilateralism and Multilateralism: Germany and the United States in Europe and the North Atlantic World”. This project seeks to deepen our understanding of bilateralism in world politics – its nature and variety, and its conflicts and compatibilities within different multilateral and unilateral contexts.

5 This claim does not imply that instrumental rationality plays no role within bilateral relations. However, what is conceived as “national interest” depends on broader, constructed structures of meaning.

Analyses of diplomatic relations need no longer be purely descriptive, but offer a theoretical framework of reference; they are not concerned merely with single decisions, but able to explain long-range developments in foreign policy; and the actor-focus is complemented with a conception of social structures in which action is embedded. Applied to the concrete case of a bilateral relationship, a two-dimensional model evolves. Firstly, and most concretely, interaction has to be studied. Be it formal or informal consultations, exchanges of information, institutional bindings or common initiatives in wider contexts – interactions are understood as a continuous and complex process linking together both partners (Saunders 1993)<sup>6</sup>. Interaction obviously is the most visible and tangible layer of a bilateral relationship. However, there is more to it than that. As Saunders (1993: 13) puts it aptly, “We begin to understand the relationship only when we understand ways in which each may perceive itself in contrast to another”. Therefore, the analysis of meaning has to be integrated as second dimension. It consists of constructions both partners attach to the relationship, how they perceive their own role, their partner and their togetherness. These constructions establish some kind of ideational framework in which concrete interaction takes place. They thus limit free, individual choices of action: bilateral interaction does not evolve in a vacuum. Including a dimension of meaning allows accounting for deeper changes, since alterations in intersubjective meanings is less likely than on the behavioural level. Conversely, if changes can be found also in the dimension of meaning, change will be substantive and profound.

Applying these considerations to empirical cases, I rely on the assumption that changes in interaction patterns and social structures can be best observed in situations of conflict. Here, all of a sudden everyday business and meanings of the relationship become called into question. Situations of conflict do not necessarily lead to uncooperative behaviour, but offer a wide range of interaction opportunities: Partners can treat each other in a more confrontational or more integrative way (Pfetsch 2006), demonstrating higher or lower partner orientation (Pfeiffer 2006), fostering therewith conflict solution or escalation. What differs is not the sheer existence of conflicts but in fact the way of dealing with them. Therefore, I will compare interaction patterns in terms of solution- versus escalation-promoting behaviour. In this sense, dense contacts and willingness to compromise would indicate a solution-oriented strategy,

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6 As the focus lies on the political-diplomatic bilateral relationship, this means interaction between governments.



whereas insistence or even the total absence of settlement efforts would reflect an escalating behaviour. I treat potential changes in this dimension as indicator for wider changes in bilateral interaction.

In addition, conflicts offer interesting insights into social constructions. They tend to challenge traditional perceptions and may even lead to new ones, which is why meanings are most probably mentioned clearly and discussed openly. Hence, conflicts are some kind of focal points to study the constructions of meanings attached to a relationship. For grasping potential changes, I suggest focusing on a scale from value orientation to pragmatism: When asking for reasons, motives and purposes of bilateral relations, answers on a continuum between common values and common interests are to be expected. The purpose of jointly expanding liberal democracy over the globe would indicate a commitment to common values, whereas a mutual increase in economic exchange would point to rather pragmatic notions of common interests. Again, shifts in these constructions are perceived as reflecting a more general change in meaning attached to the relationship.

### **3 Case Comparison: Andreotti 1984 and Berlusconi 2003**

Now having at hand an analytical framework which allows capturing patterns of interaction and intersubjective structures of meaning, two cases of bilateral incidents will be examined in order to learn about changes in the bilateral relationship.

#### **3.1 Selected Cases and Methods**

In both cases to be compared, incidents have been caused by taboo-breaking statements of high Italian representatives – Foreign Minister Andreotti in 1984 and Prime Minister Berlusconi in 2003. I argue that these cases are comparable – at least within the limits historical comparison always faces – and of explicative value.

### **3.1.1 The Andreotti Case 1984: “The Threat of Pangermanism”**

On September 4th, 1984, then Italian Foreign Minister Andreotti was invited to a festival of the communist party's organ *Unità*. Originally, the whole setting was predominantly marked by domestic political topics and dynamics. Andreotti delivered his address as some kind of an alien: The experiment of governing together with the communists had failed, and his own demo-Christian party found itself to be part of a government coalition with the socialist party under Prime Minister Craxi. The communists on their part were digesting not only the return to opposition but also the considerable loss of their leader Berlinguer only few months before. Elections to the European Parliament had ended in the first relative victory of the communist PCI over the demo-Christian DC, nourishing the historical competition between both parties (Hausmann 2004). Against such a background, however, the event immediately awoke international interest when it became public that Andreotti had replied off the cuff to a statement on the “German question” in the following words:

“We all agree that both German states are on good terms with each other [...]. But it should be clear that one should not exaggerate in that direction, meaning that one must recognize: Pangermanism has to be overcome. Two German states exist, and two German states should remain”.

This statement, originally thought to comment on the sudden cancellation of Honecker's visit in the Federal Republic, evoked a storm of protest in the German political establishment as well as in the media. A guessing game started, trying to solve the riddle of Andreotti's motivation: had he been carried away by the atmosphere of a communist festival, where the majority saw German division as some kind of just punishment for the crimes committed in the past (Petersen 1999)?<sup>7</sup> Was it simply about a manifestation of the general Italian alienness towards the German question (Scheib 2001)?<sup>8</sup> Or did Andreotti instead pursue a vulpine strategy, aimed at assuring communist support for his potential presidential candidature?<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, it was for certain

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7 In this sense, the PCI was the only Italian party promoting offensively and explicitly the recognition of the German Democratic Republic (Scheib 2001: 186).

8 With the exception of German Ostpolitik that had been very popular in Italy, Italian attitude was limited to occasional statements of sympathy towards the Federal Republic (Scheib 2001). Therefore, Corni argues that Andreotti's words “mirrored cynically what others had only thought” (Corni 2004: 51, my translation).

9 This thesis dominated discussion of the incident in Italian newspapers. Indeed, it perfectly fit into Andreotti's image being described as “la volpe”, the fox, and it was hard to believe that he had not taken into account the consequences of what he said.

that he caused strong, unanimous irritation in Germany. This was firstly due to the fact that Andreotti publicly put German reunification into question – at that time, still a taboo within the Western alliance. Yet Italy had always had an ambiguous position on a reunified Germany and inwardly many may have had doubts, so far at least on a rhetorical level all Italian politicians had been clearly supporting it<sup>10</sup>. Secondly, Germans were displeased by the adoption of the phrase “pangermanism”. Hitherto this had been typical for communist propaganda, denouncing the Federal Republic’s supposed revanchist stance in particular after Kohl’s coming into power. The forced cancellation of Honecker’s visit had been nothing but the most recent example (Sterpellone 1985; Hacke 2003)<sup>11</sup>. Just in a moment when the Federal Republic was confronted with severe attacks by the Soviet Union, a close ally seemed to embrace the same arguments. This was perceived as an affront to Western Germany’s efforts of reconciliation. These reasons altogether let Andreotti’s statement grow into a well and truly bilateral quarrel between Italy and Germany. The conflict was terminated only by Andreotti’s public adjustment and excuses<sup>12</sup>.

### **3.1.2 The Berlusconi Case 2003: “A Perfect Nazi Guard”**

In the second half of 2003, Italy took over the presidency of the European Union’s Council. Expectations and demands towards the presidency were very high, on the one hand due to the difficult situation the EU had to confront after the Iraq crisis, and on the other hand due to diffidence and scepticism Berlusconi’s return to power had raised among the European partners. For them, Italy’s European policy had become less calculable; it seemed to be

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10 This is why then Italian ambassador in Germany, Luigi Vittorio Ferraris, criticizes Andreotti more in terms of style rather than in substance: “Many have already spoken it out, everyone thought it, but articulate it so brutally was not appropriate at all” (Ferraris 1994: 258, my translation).

11 It is indeed true that Kohl adopted a new tone in intra-German relations, emphasizing stronger than his predecessors the incompatibility between the two Germanys, and claiming the moral superiority of the Federal Republic. He also caused some perplexity when, only a few days before the Andreotti incident, he stated that German acceptance of the Eastern German border (Oder-Neisse) would be valid only until a future German reunification (cf. *La Repubblica* 19.09.1984, p. 11). Nevertheless, Hacke concludes that in substance, the new government’s German policy was marked by continuity (Hacke 2003: 302ff.).

12 Since in this paper I focus on the settlement of conflicts rather than on the conflicts itself, I limit myself to this brief case description. Details on the Andreotti case and its wider contexts as well as on the Italian and German domestic situation may be found in Ferraris (1990, 1994, 1996); Corni (2004); Hacke (2003); Romano (2004); Rusconi (1992); Scheib (2001); Sterpellone (1985).

less inclined towards integration and rather Euro-sceptic. Indeed, Berlusconi had put new emphasis on objectives such as the defence of national interests, raising Italy's international profile and the promotion of closer links with the USA (Quaglia 2007: 136)<sup>13</sup>. Scepticism was further nurtured by Foreign Minister Ruggiero's dismissal in January 2006, the Italian withdrawal from the Airbus project, Berlusconi's resistance to the European arrest warrant and his decision to side with the USA during the Iraq crisis (Braun 2004; Caciagli 2004). Particularly in Germany, also the involvement of two right-wing parties in Berlusconi's coalition had raised many criticisms. Chancellor Schröder even compared his Italian colleague to the right-wing populists Haider and Le Pen<sup>14</sup>. Besides scepticism amongst European governments, also the European media were harsh on Berlusconi's coalition, especially in light of taking over the EU presidency. The German "Die Zeit" entitled Italian presidency as "European fall of mankind" (27/2003, my translation), and the British "Economist" certified Berlusconi to be "unfit to lead Europe" (386/2003). Against such a background, the Berlusconi government intended to use the office for brushing up its international reputation. But yet the first day turned to become a "diplomatic Waterloo" (Pistello/Fiore 2004: 27, my translation). In response to Berlusconi's inaugural speech in the European parliament, outlining the program of Italy's presidency, German social democratic deputy Martin Schulz made two points directly criticizing the Italian Prime Minister. Schulz firstly referred to racist comments made by minister Bossi and compared him to Haider, calling Berlusconi to take responsibility for his ministers; and secondly, he pointed at the Prime Minister's conflict of interest when complaining about the slow progress made by Italy on a number of pan-European judicial measures. In his reply, Berlusconi let himself get carried away to the following statement:

"Mr Schulz, I know there is a producer in Italy who is making a film about Nazi concentration camps. I will suggest you for the role of guard. You would be perfect!"<sup>15</sup>

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13 In the literature there is vivid debate on whether Berlusconi's European policy changed only in style or also in substance. Some authors even speak of a "new policy paradigm" (Quaglia 2007). For details see Coralluzzo 2006; Quaglia 2007; Brighi 2006, and footnote 27.

14 Schröder did so on a party conference in May 2002. The statement found his way into the SPD publication "Blick nach rechts", but had to be retracted under public pressure. Two years before Schröder already had caused a storm of protest when he asked for severe EU sanctions in case of right-wing parties coming into power in Italy (cf. Die Zeit 9/2000).

15 The full text of the debate is accessible under <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20030702+ITEM-001+DOC+XML+V0//IT&language=IT>.

Berlusconi caused not only a wave of protest in the EU parliament, but also in Germany, where his attack was perceived as unacceptable offence reviving old stereotypes of Nazi Germany<sup>16</sup>. The gaffe thus became a bilateral incident, keeping both countries' politics and diplomacy busy for nearly two months. During the following weeks, it further escalated. Italian State Secretary on Tourism Stefani attacked German tourists in Italy as being "stereotypical blonds with hypernationalist pride [...] who noisily invade our beaches" (Graff 2003) and, as a response, German chancellor Schröder cancelled his vacation in Italy. The dispute flared up again when Schröder, a month later, was invited by the President of the European Commission (and former Italian Prime Minister) Prodi to some kind of reconciliation summit at Verona. Against initial scheduling, Berlusconi refrained from participating – a comportment that became still interpreted against the background of the Schulz case, though such a reading was denied by Berlusconi himself. However, in Verona partners finally decided to leave the incident behind and closed it formally.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.1.3 Selection Criteria and Comparability**

The two particular cases have been selected for a variety of reasons. Firstly I selected cases of conflict for the above cited motives. Secondly, I tried to hold the initial conflict constellations as similar as possible for allowing a focus on conflict management instead of conflict contents. Indeed, basic parameters for settlement are quite comparable: in both cases, Germany felt offended by a high Italian representative. In both cases, incidents were about central aspects of German identity casted into doubt – strive for reunification and dissociation from the Third Reich. And in both cases, the German government expected an excuse from the Italian partner. Thirdly, I chose cases located in similar institutional settings – here, the more restricted bilateral framework. Note that this refers to settlement processes rather than to initial incidents, which by contrast were situated in very different surroundings: Andreotti made a

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16 Kapò were concentration camp prisoners which found themselves privileged by the SS to command other prisoners. Though mostly being criminals instead of political prisoners or Jews, they were Nazi victims too (Levi 1979). However, in the following debate Berlusconi's statement was widely interpreted as intending to say that Schulz's behaviour was like a SS camp guard: "It is not clear, however, that either Berlusconi nor much of the European media were aware of what he was saying" (Downey/Koenig 2006: 170).

17 Again, I limit myself to such a brief case description leaving out many details, developments and contests. These are described – though quite subjective, but still very detailed – in Pistelli/Fiore (2004). See also Missiroli 2004 and Downey/Koenig 2006.

quite informal statement at a communist party festival, driven by dynamics of domestic politics and probably without having international or bilateral implications in mind. Berlusconi, on the other hand, spoke in the very formal situation of Italy's EU presidency inauguration in the European parliament, yet by definition an international event. However, in both cases incidents were immediately perceived and treated as bilateral problems. In 1984, the dispute between the bilateral partners clearly outweighed its domestic aspects – in the media coverage as well as in the perception of the involved politicians and diplomats. Also in 2003 the case was framed predominantly in bilateral terms. Indeed, Downey/Koenig (2006) who surveyed European media coverage following the dispute, observed that the involved actors were portrayed as representatives of their nations rather than as members of parties or European institutions they belonged to. Furthermore, although conducted intensively across Europe, the debate was three times more intensive in the involved countries. What is essential is that in both cases, partners turned to “classical” bilateral modes of diplomacy in order to settle the conflict – with diverging emphases and success, as the analysis will reveal.

### **3.1.4 Data and Methods**

The data for comparing the cases primarily consists of newspaper articles. I analysed coverage of four Italian and four German daily newspapers: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Die Welt* in the case of Germany; *La Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Sole/24 Ore* and *La Stampa* in the case of Italy. Altogether, 562 articles have been collected and analyzed. After having gathered all articles related to the incident, I examined them by using qualitative content analysis (Mayring 1997, 2000). In addition, the analysis was further enhanced through the inclusion of 14 expert interviews (Meuser/Nagel 1991) that I conducted with involved Italian and German diplomats and politicians<sup>18</sup>. Interviewing was done using, the problem-centred interview method has been applied (Witzel 2000). As I will show in the following, a comparison of both cases shows significant and instructive differences.

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<sup>18</sup> See a list of interview partners in the annex. At the requests of most diplomats, in this paper their statements became anonymized. This is not true for the case of Genscher and Andreotti. As being public figures, they are cited literally.

## **3.2 Changes in Interaction: From Resolution to Cohabitation**

A comparison of interaction patterns in the Andreotti and the Berlusconi cases demonstrates that behaviour of both partners has indeed changed over time. In dealing with these conflicts, on our analytical continuum partners have slid significant steps from solution towards escalation.

### **3.2.1 Government Contacts**

In the Andreotti case, government contacts took place quite frequently. Five direct contacts at highest level became known in a conflict period of only one week. Two times Italian Ambassador Ferraris was summoned to the Foreign Ministry. Italian Prime Minister Craxi and German chancellor Kohl exchanged letters of excuse and reconciliation. To terminate the conflict finally, German Foreign Minister Genscher held a closed meeting with his Italian colleague Andreotti at Brussels. Beyond the sheer fact of meeting, both governments seemed to be willing to reconcile. In fact, the two talks between Ferraris and the German representatives were first and foremost characterized by the will to express German disappointment and bitterness and especially Genscher used drastic words to do so. During an interview with the authoress he emphasized having been obliged to summon ambassador Ferraris in order to calm down public discussion in Germany – without however attributing much importance to the case himself.<sup>19</sup> Yet, German representatives also communicated their interest in knowing more about the circumstances of Andreotti's statement and about the Italian position in general. Especially the practice, unknown in Germany, of a government member delivering an address at an opposition party's manifestation attracted some curiosity, if it was not taken as explanation for Andreotti's words. The Italian side went one step further towards solution, not only explaining the severe German reactions. In his letter to Kohl Craxi essentially qualified the statements made. Without mentioning Andreotti explicitly, he assured Kohl of Italy's unchanged support for German reunification. In Genscher's meeting with Andreotti himself, finally, both governments agreed on a common declaration which had been prepared in advance by the embassies. Diplomats that were involved also reported a high interest in conflict solution. In Brussels, for example, Italian and German

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<sup>19</sup> Genscher: "Here in Germany they expected who knows what kind of severe reaction from me" (in the following, all translations from the interviews are mine). During an interview with the authoress in Bonn, April 2009.

representatives “got together in order to discuss: ‘how can we proceed?’. This was our objective. [...] It was our job to avoid that the EEC barge would hit choppy waters every time in Rome or wherever one of them turned to be a loose cannon”. Government contacts in the Andreotti case, thus, undoubtedly aimed to solve the incident.

In contrast, the situation is somewhat more complicated in the Berlusconi case. Firstly, direct government contacts were less frequent. In spite of the longer duration of the conflict (altogether 53 days), only 5 meetings of government representatives became known. Directly following the incident, both Foreign Ministries summoned the respective ambassadors, Neubert and Fagiolo. Though not situated at the highest level in administration hierarchy (ambassadors talked with the respective Political Directors), the sessions were exclusively used to communicate the respective irritation, but not to understand partner positions or even to reconcile. For instance, German ambassador Neubert reports how he was summoned nearly informally to the Italian Foreign Ministry and had a “friendly talk” with his Italian colleague – whereas, as he came to know afterwards, the Farnesina’s political direction had already released a Communiqué announcing the ambassador’s chastisement prior to his actual arrival. The agreement on a common declaration was thus doomed to failure. Involved diplomats remember how the embassies were engaged in working on a common wording the entire next day, an enterprise that did not succeed due to “eagerness and insistence” of politicians on either side. The lowest common denominator that could be agreed upon was a telephone talk between German chancellor Schröder and Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi which finally took place in the evening of that same day. However, rather than resolving the incident, both sides again changed their irreconcilable points of view without any convergence of positions. Consequentially, the interpretation of the talk could not be other than equivocal: whereas Schröder announced to accept Berlusconi’s apologies in order to end the quarrelling “to the benefit of Europe”, Berlusconi publicly denied having made any excuse at all. In the following days, both governments preferred communicating via media. Only when Stefani’s article had become public, did Italian Foreign Minister Frattini and his German colleague Fischer meet in Brussels. Frattini dissociated himself and the whole Italian government from Stefani’s statements, thereby attempting to appease his counterpart and adopting a somewhat more integrative behaviour. Finally, the meeting of Schröder and Berlusconi at Verona which was thought to become some kind of “summit of reconciliation” was firstly overshadowed by Berlusconi’s non-attendance at the scheduled opera visit and



secondly characterized by the attempt to ignore the conflict, without coming to a shared interpretation. Government contacts in the second case of study, therefore, aimed not as plainly as in the first case to resolve the incident. In effect, both partners showed less interest in contacts in general and within the few contacts, less integrative behaviour. An exception has to be made for Frattini who tried to settle the conflict during a meeting with Fischer.

### **3.2.2 Position-Taking**

In the Andreotti case, communication was driven by the Italian will to downplay the Foreign Minister's statement. Many actors engaged in this undertaking: firstly Italian Ambassador Ferraris, who made efforts to minimize the case adopting a double-sided strategy. On the one hand, he tried to convince Andreotti that he had failed and asked for his excuses, explaining the German point of view. On the other hand, vis-à-vis his German counterparts, he downplayed the controversy by attributing it merely to translation misunderstandings<sup>20</sup>. Secondly the Italian Foreign Ministry itself engaged in narrowing down. The same day a qualification of Andreotti's utterance became published, saying that it had been made in an informal context without any memorandum in writing. Thirdly, nearly all Italian politicians including Prime Minister Craxi unanimously rejected potential doubts about Italian support for German reunification. And finally, also Andreotti himself substantially retracted his statement when relating the accusation of pangermanism not any longer to the Federal Republic, but instead to a demonstration of right-wingers in South-Tyrol that had taken place some days before his gaffe. The German counterparts, on the other hand, demonstrated readiness to accept these qualifications and excuses. Genscher, after his meeting with Ferraris, announced to be highly pleased, and after having met Andreotti he called for closing the incident and looking ahead. Even Kohl, who remained somewhat unsatisfied after Craxi's letter, accepted Andreotti's declaration at Brussels. Whereas Andreotti thereby accepted the German request for an excuse, this is not the case for Berlusconi. In the telephone talk with Schröder he indeed expressed his regrets, but explicitly stated: "I did not apologize"<sup>21</sup>. After the publication of

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20 Indeed, the Italian word "devono" referring to the enduring existence of two German states has been translated into the German word "sollen" (should), although it can also mean "müssen" (must). In this sense, Ferraris argued that Andreotti had pointed merely to the improbability of German reunification rather than to its non-desiderability.

21 Cf. for instance *La Repubblica*, 05.07.2003, p. 6 (in the following, all translations from Italian and German newspaper articles are mine).

Stefani's article, Berlusconi first refused to ask for Stefani's resignation, as demanded by the German partner. It was more the pressure of several Italian tourist associations than the will to appease the German partner that made Berlusconi give in finally. On the German side, respectively, Schröder first seemed to accept the vague excuses "for the benefit of Europe". After Stefani's article, Schröder himself contributed to further escalation. Whereas Fischer seemed to be disposed to accept the relativizing statements by Italian ministers, Schröder insisted on asking for Stefani's withdrawal and even threatened with the cancellation of his vacation in Italy. In general, a lower willingness to concessions and thus, a lower engagement for settlement is observable on both sides. Also the attempts to downplay the incident vary significantly from the Berlusconi to the Andreotti case. First insights can already be drawn from looking at the different labelling of the incidents in the newspapers. The event in 1984 is predominantly called simply bilateral or diplomatic incident; however, very often also trivializing definitions such as "polemic", "dropping a brick" or "argument" can be found. Dramatizing definitions like "bilateral earthquake", "severe storm" only rarely appear. Directly opposed to that, the prevalent labelling of the Berlusconi incident is rather scandalizing, speaking of the "bottom of Italo-German relations since 1945", "clash" or even "war". Maybe due to the longer duration, also the language in the newspapers becomes more drastic. Besides commentatorship, however, the situation becomes more ambivalent in both cases, which is maybe due to the respective domestic situations in both countries. On the one hand, labels used by some political actors in 1984 were quite severe. Genscher and Kohl repeatedly alluded to a "serious hurt". As the *Frankfurter Rundschau* observed properly, they nearly suggested "the imminent breakdown of diplomatic relations to Rome"<sup>22</sup>. The social democratic opposition was more disposed to downplay the incident, thereby also criticising the government's strong wordings. This situation was mirrored on the Italian side, where the government tried to trivialise the dispute, whereas opposition used harsh definitions in order to thereby attack the Foreign Minister. A similar situation can be found in the 2003 case, where again Italian government and German opposition try to downplay the incident, whereas German government and Italian opposition tended to exaggerate the conflict, in order to attack or, respectively, defend themselves from domestic counterparts. Labelling the conflict thus does not change significantly over time, but is in both countries and cases strongly marked by the internal political debate. What varies, however, is the range attributed to the dispute. In 1984,

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<sup>22</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18.09.1984, p. 3.

statements of all actors are marked by the intention to reduce Andreotti's statement to his personal opinion, which does not coincide with Italian government as a whole. This is not true in the 2003 case, when Berlusconi for instance stated that Schulz's attack offended not only him "personally, but Italy as a whole"<sup>23</sup>. In turn, German government spokesman Anda declared that Stefani's article marked a "general despising of all Germans"<sup>24</sup>; a view shared by the Italian opposition. This is even more striking as in the former case, the conflict object (casting doubt on German reunification) in fact concerned all Germans, whereas in the latter case one single German had been attacked. However, a lesser interest in minimizing the conflict is evident in government interaction. Though involved diplomats tried to calm the conflict, they were stopped by their respective political authorities. This is indeed very instructive: in 1984, we observe many efforts to limit the range of the incident on all sides, which indicates a more integrative and relation-protecting approach. In 2003, by contrast, politicians even exaggerated the importance of the incident and disregarded the fact that this would hinder conflict settlement.

### **3.2.3 Publicity**

Different degrees of interest in downplaying the case are also reflected in the degree of publicity which varies strikingly between 1984 and 2003. Doubtless this is due to changes in the media, different data collection methods<sup>25</sup> as well as divergent conflict duration<sup>26</sup>. But the gap between 106 articles in 1984 and 456 (!) articles in 2003 appears too huge to be explained only by external developments. Indeed, it is also related to both governments' cacophony, a higher scandalization of the incident and a lack of efforts to resolve the case

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23 Corriere della Sera, 05.07.2003, p. 1.

24 Corriere della Sera, 08.07.2003, p. 6.

25 In the former case, newspaper coverage has been scanned by me in person in order to identify articles dealing with the incident. In the latter case, this work has been done by a computer program which undoubtedly worked more accurately. It is hence probable that in the recent case articles have been included in the analysis which in the former case would have been overlooked.

26 If calculated day-by-day, in the Andreotti case there are eight days with newspaper coverage, an average of 12.35 articles per day. In the Berlusconi case, there are 22 days with newspaper coverage (from a total of 53 days which is the entire conflict period), what makes still an average of 22.8 articles per day. Besides such number games, I would doubt that conflict duration has a one-sided influence on media coverage, that is to say, media coverage is purely a result of conflict duration. Instead, I assume that in turn also media coverage can influence conflict duration. Therefore, it is treated as an autonomous observation here.

behind closed doors. In 1984, for instance, ambassador Ferraris refused to publicly comment on his talks with Genscher, and remembers that also the German Foreign Minister for his part did not inform the press: “As a courtesy and in order to appease the whole situation, Genscher avoided journalists or television being present” (Ferraris 1990: 108). Similarly, Italian Prime Minister Craxi kept silent for four days until he wrote a letter of excuse to German chancellor Kohl. Kohl, in turn, did not even mention the incident in an election campaign speech dedicated to Ostpolitik and the German question. Contrarily, in 2003 the Berlusconi incident seemed to be an event which everyone should comment on in public. Schröder, for instance, chose a government declaration in parliament, and thus a moment of maximum media attention, to declare that he was waiting for Berlusconi’s formal excuses. Furthermore, both heads of governments did not cut off the unprecedented cacophony of their government members which hindered a smooth pacification.

### **3.2.4 Ending the Conflict**

Regarding the ending of the conflict, the Andreotti incident can be interpreted as a case of conflict resolution. After a closed meeting with German Foreign Minister Genscher one week after the incident, Andreotti declared that he regretted his statement, that his accusation of pangermanism was not addressed to the Federal Republic but rather related to a demonstration of right-wing South Tyrols at Innsbruck, and, most importantly, that German reunification still enjoyed unrestricted Italian support. He therewith fully accepted the German reading of the incident and granted their request for a formal excuse. Or simply, in Genscher’s words: “In Brussels, Andreotti accepted the draft I had prepared before. And the subject was closed”.<sup>27</sup> By doing so, an adjustment of policies to the preferences of the partner (Pfeiffer 2006) – and thus, a solution – took place. In contrast, in the Berlusconi case conflict solution did not succeed. The Italian and German governments, despite of some more or less serious attempts at reconciliation, only arrived at a continuation of cooperation while tacitly accepting the continuing existence of divergences – what could be labelled cohabitation (Pfeiffer 2006). It was not possible to find a common position on conflict interpretation. The German government insisted on having been offended one-sidedly and unjustly, whereas the Italian government stuck to the version of a German provocation and thus, to reciprocal responsibility. This

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27 During an interview with the authoress in Bonn, April 2009.

became clear for example in the attempt to work out a common declaration, which in the end failed because of Italian reluctance to include formal excuses and German unwillingness to refer also to Schulz's "provocation". Neither side was disposed to give in, and accept the other side's request for excuses, as it had been true in the Andreotti case. Due to the incompatibility of positions and the unwillingness to make them converge, the incident was not closed unanimously, but both governments chose their own respective interpretations and only avoided addressing them further.

### **3.2.5 Duration**

As already mentioned, conflict duration varied significantly between both conflicts: from a one-week-period in 1984 to an almost two-month-period (53 days) in 2003. The difference in lengths is not the case or due to "objective", external circumstances. Quite the contrary, the differences in conflict duration can be understood as a result of the different behaviours adopted. In this sense, it is remarkable to what extent all actors in 1984 actively contributed to a fast closing of the incident, not only by adopting damage-limiting behaviour, but also by refraining from additional statements once the incident was closed. This is true even in a situation in which a reference to the incident was to be expected: as already mentioned, Kohl did not even name the incident in a speech explicitly about German Ostpolitik only a few days after Genscher's and Andreotti's meeting at Bruxelles. Furthermore, in the mass of articles on German-French reconciliation on the occasion of Mitterand's and Kohl's meeting at Verdun, only very few voices referred to recent Italo-German quarrels. In the Berlusconi case, in turn, quite the opposite was true: for about two months, the conflict further escalated due to never-ending debates and reciprocal accusations – for instance the attacks by State Secretary on Tourism Stefani, the decision of German chancellor Schröder to cancel his vacation in Italy, and the non-attendance of Berlusconi at the opera visit. Indeed, involved diplomats did not find the initial, somewhat populist behaviour of the leaders Schröder and Berlusconi surprising, which they call "a typical Berlusconi" and a "classical Schröder"<sup>28</sup>. But the fact that Stefani added fuel to the fire, and virtually every Italian and German politician was keen to contribute to the debate, and neither Berlusconi nor Schröder attempted to end media cacophony – all this added a new quality to the settlement process in their view.

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28 During interviews with the authoress.

The comparison of interaction patterns in terms of resolution versus escalation points to significant changes over time. Termination of the conflict shifts from resolution to cohabitation, the behaviour of both partners from damage-limiting towards confrontational, conflict settlement from smooth and fast to slow-moving. As stated in the beginning, these developments are taken to represent a general drift on the interaction layer as such. However, at this point results are quite superficial. They may suggest that changes are due to – for instance – particular domestic constellations, and sympathy or antipathy between acting politicians. Above all, changes could be traced back to differences in political culture, characters and styles of the respective leaders. This argument has become very prominent especially when talking about Berlusconi's foreign policy (Brighi 2006; Croci 2001; Fedel 2003; Campus 2002)<sup>29</sup>. And it seems plausible – too striking are the differences in style between politicians such as Schröder and Berlusconi on the one hand and Andreotti and Genscher on the other hand. Even if the analysis of interaction already has shown that it was not all about the behaviour of leaders, but at least the whole political elite that changed their interactions, one may still attribute that to the particular characters of two alpha dogs. In order to clarify whether the observed changes are basically limited to individual characteristics and personal constellations or not (that is, whether changes are predominantly linked to Berlusconi and Schröder or not), taking a look at deeper rooted intersubjective structures is instructive. These are expected to change more slowly and thus, are not directly dependent on single persons in power. If change can be found also within this dimension, a more substantial character of that very change becomes evident.

### **3.3 Changes in Meaning: From Value-Based to Pragmatic Constructions**

During both conflicts' settlement processes, all actors describe the relationship in overwhelmingly positive terms. Italo-German relations are labelled "excellent" and could not work better<sup>30</sup>. However, a closer look reveals that

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29 As Brighi puts it aptly: "From May 2001, [...] Italy's political life has been more or less equated with the deeds, and often misdeeds, of its prime minister" (Brighi 2006). Regarding foreign policy, there is a debate whether Berlusconi has changed Italian foreign policy (a thesis supported among others by Ignazi (2004) and Rossi (2002)) or whether it basically remained stable in substance, though rhetoric may have changed (this claim represented most prominently by Croci (2001, 2002)).

30 Cf. for instance *Corriere della Sera* 04.08.2003, p. 9; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 17.09.1984, p. 3.

partners attach diverging meanings to their bilateral relationship. A comparison of these patterns of meaning suggests a shift from more idealistic towards utilitarian constructions.

### **3.3.1 The Relationship's Importance**

At first sight, constructions of the relationship's importance remain quite constant over time. Publicly both sides continuously emphasize its value. However, differences in degree can be observed. Firstly, in 1984, statements on importance are rare. The relationship's significance does not need to be explained in detail but is considered obvious: talking about rationales seems not to be necessary at all. In contrast, importance is no longer taken as a given in the 2003 case, but has to be explained. When doing so, secondly, the approach is much more pragmatic, in the sense that statements of importance are framed in cost-benefit terms. Statements about purposes alter their frames of references from normative to pragmatic goals; they are much more concrete, explicit and short-termed in the latter case. In 1984, the few existing assertions are quite broad and abstract – for instance, when Craxi states that “a good relationship between Rome and Berlin is essential for defending the entire occident”<sup>31</sup>. Instead of naming concrete objectives, the relationship is implicitly (or rarely, explicitly) linked to broader normative goals. Furthermore, the relationship is perceived as an end in itself, a “friendship in which both are interested”<sup>32</sup> – independent from concrete utility calculations. This is very different in 2003, when talking about purposes of cooperation seems to occupy a great deal of all bilateral considerations. Overwhelmingly, in this case, statements are related to Italy's EU presidency. The German delegate for European Integration in the Foreign Ministry, Bury, emphasises that “we are interested in a constructive collaboration”<sup>33</sup> in order to close convention works successfully. In the same sense, Schröder repeats time and again that “the federal government has an interest in the success of the Italian EU presidency”<sup>34</sup>. In turn, Italian ambassador Fagioli is convinced that in the end, “the common interest of Italy and Germany in Europe will prevail”<sup>35</sup>. Such common interest is located first

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31 Corriere della Sera 18.09.1984, p. 2.

32 Corriere della Sera 17.09.1984, p. 1.

33 La Stampa, 04.07.2003, p. 2.

34 La Stampa, 04.07.2003, p. 3; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 11.07.2008, p.1; Corriere della Sera, 04.07.2003, p. 2.

35 Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 11.07.2008, p. 1.

and foremost in institutional reforms. Beyond that, other concrete fields of Italo-German cooperation in Europe are mentioned. German Minister of the Interior Schily, for instance, praised Italo-German collaboration in EU-border politics. Leaving the European contexts, few hints are made to Italo-German cooperation in the global context, for example in the settlement of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore economic interdependences and cooperation are brought up. While stating these rationales, very strong pragmatic notions become evident, most present in German statements, which often speak about “sober working relations”<sup>36</sup>. And thirdly, besides individuation of concrete cooperation fields, the analysis indicates that Italo-German relations have lost centrality within the partners’ foreign policies: at least, explicit statements on centrality can be found almost only during the Andreotti incident.

### **3.3.2 Foundations**

Debates during the incidents also contain statements about the fundamentals of the relationship. In both cases, the overwhelmingly dominant normative underpinning is that of “alliance”. That is to say, partners position their togetherness above all in the context of the Western alliance or the European Union. Differences in the importance of the two contexts are not substantial, but can be attributed to the historical context as well as to the conflict object: whereas in 1984, when the incident was about the German question and thus, about the East-West Conflict, references to the Western alliance were more frequent, in 2003 the conflict took place against the background of the Italian EU-presidency, which made the EU-context predominate. Despite such continuity in frameworks, however, its substantial meaning, the concepts to which it is related and the context in which it becomes mentioned seem to be quite different. In the Andreotti case, the construction of the German-Italian alliance was strongly value-based. Actors referred to solidarity, liberty and peace when speaking about it. Italian Prime Minister Craxi, for instance, declared that German-Italian cooperation is built upon liberty and the Western creed<sup>37</sup> and a Demo-Christian politician stated that the Italo-German relationship contributes to peace and liberty in Europe<sup>38</sup>. Also the German government emphasised German-Italian initiatives for peace and liberty in the

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36 Original wording: „sachliche Arbeitsbeziehungen“. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25. August 2008, p. 5.

37 Cf. *Il Sole/24 Ore*, 18.09.1984.

38 Cf. *Il Corriere della Sera*, 14.09.1984.



Western World. On such a strong foundation, the conflict is not perceived as to be threatening the relationship as such, as Andreotti himself stated explicitly: “In certain moments, it was possible that we had a somewhat different opinion in some aspects. But this took place against the background of commonality; we always have been much more convergent than divergent”<sup>39</sup>. Quite different from that, in 2003 the category became a more pragmatic notion, and commonality is not as central as before. For example, an Italian diplomat compares the Berlusconi case to former conflicts and observes: “The Berlusconi case could escalate in such a manner because basic braces which hold together the relationship are no longer as strong as before: personal relations, values, culture, party relations. [...]. In such a new environment, crises take longer”. Though references to common values were continuously made, especially by State Presidents Rau and Ciampi, the concept of ally was stronger related to single, limited projects of cooperation within different policy fields (as already the analysis of purposes has demonstrated). This is true again when talking about traditions. It is striking how in 1984, once more primarily commonalities are evoked. So both countries’ initial division and similar unification processes are frequently mentioned, in order to induce comprehension for Germany’s striving for reunification. But also other common traditions are remembered, e.g. Italo-German engagement in European integration after the Second World War. By drawing on common traditions, the actors try to bridge the current dispute and to emphasize the similarities and points of contact between both partners. This is the case only to a lesser degree in 2003. Still, “common traditions” are evoked to describe normative underpinnings of the relationship – but what these traditions are, is not specified in detail anymore. The only exception from generally more vague recourses to traditions is the Nazi/fascist period, which – also due to the conflict object – is tackled more in detail. In contrast to 1984, however, this is not to provoke sense of community, but used as a means to attack the partner in the political debate.

### **3.3.3 Partner Orientation**

Differences in partner orientation become evident when comparing the diverse degrees of empathy for the partner’s position. It is striking to what extent the Italian side in 1984 is keen to understand German frictions – ranging from huge mass of newspaper articles on the “German question” to politician’s

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39 During an interview with the authoress in Rome, March 2009.

talks about a particular German sensibility. Genscher even announces his pleasure having encountered so much understanding in Italy. He was also convinced – and behaved in such way – that it was necessary to offer Andreotti a back door which allowed him to save his face: thereby demonstrating empathy with his partner.<sup>40</sup> Apart from Genscher, German commentators also cautiously demonstrated comprehension for Andreotti when alluding to Kohl's responsibility, who had at least irritated Western partners with statements on Germany's future frontiers. In 2003, in contrast, these attempts lack on both sides – neither Italian newspapers publish comparable amounts of background explanations to the German past in general and the significance of the “kapos” in particular<sup>41</sup>, nor can we find much information about the background of Schulz's provocation in German newspapers. Accordingly, statements by politicians are to a higher degree characterized by undifferentiated positions than in 1984. Beyond empathy both partners in 2003 seem to behave stronger unilateralist. Schröder as well as Berlusconi fished for one-sided advantage on the domestic stage, even at cost of the relationship. This is in fact an accusation which also Andreotti had to face. Many commentators interpreted his statement as a tactical move to gain communist support for his run for presidential office<sup>42</sup>. However, in dealing with the once triggered conflict, in 1984 neither German nor Italian actors seemed to have sought for one-sided, domestic advantage. In 2003, instead, the Chancellor “with his intuition for people's mood and tabloids' headings reacted in all severity”<sup>43</sup>. Following the same logic, also the respective oppositional parties misused the case as ploy for internal political dispute, in Italy even more than in Germany. The Italian Left accused Berlusconi of damaging Italy's image in Europe, whereas German conservatives criticised the populism of Schröder's foreign policy. So one can say that in 1984 bilateral reconciliation was regarded a priority, whereas in 2003 unilateralist thinking prevailed.

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40 During an interview with the authoress in Rome, April 2009.

41 Of course some exceptions have to be made. Rusconi for example asks for “Never call a German ‘Kapo’” because this would mark a “serious moral and historical insensibility” (*La Stampa*, 03.07.2003, p. 2).

42 As *La Repubblica* puts it: “To assure communists' applause, Andreotti ends up in re-echoing *Pravda's* articles”, 16.09.1984, p. 3.

43 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11.07.2003, p.3.

### **3.3.4 Partner Images**

Changes are even more evident when comparing respective partner descriptions. In 1984, the terms “ally” and “friend” were used nearly equally often and sometimes even synonymously. Indeed, many politicians spoke of “our German” respectively “our Italian friends” – end even about “the people’s friendship”. Accordingly, acting politicians emphasize personal relations of friendship. Genscher calls Andreotti “my friend Giulio”, Andreotti characterizes his relationship with Genscher as “very cordial and intensive” (Franco 2002: 15) and expands this to the whole bilateral relationship: “There have always been good personal relations, it was not a relationship between enemies but between friends”<sup>44</sup>. In fact, much of German irritation seemed to be provoked by the fact that the accusation of pangermanism came from “a friend”: Genscher told the Italian ambassador feeling also personally betrayed, and Kohl’s spokesman announced that “the chancellor feels the same as all people do: anger about friends runs deeper”<sup>45</sup>. Involved German diplomats stated repeatedly that they felt as having been betrayed by a friend, and Italian diplomats confirmed that their German colleagues treated them accordingly. Friendship is thus conceived of as basic meaning of all bilateral contacts between both countries. It is also an a-political category, pointing to traditions, cultural, historical and personal connections. In 2003, in contrast, the term “friendship among the peoples” – even if still commonly used – has lost some of its substance. Yet rhetorically evoked, it is not anymore reflected in actual relations between politicians, for instance. This becomes most evident when Schröder, interviewed by an Italian newspaper, described his relationship with Berlusconi: “It is not necessary to love each other; it is enough to respect each other. [...] Often you expect friendship between politicians, but one does not have to exaggerate towards this direction”<sup>46</sup>. Though used unanimously in official declarations, we can even speak about a marginalization of friendship as central category<sup>47</sup>. Instead the perception of the respective partner becomes stronger utilitarian. In 2003, the focus lied on Germany’s political and economical strength which was brought up in nearly every second (Italian) article. In contrast, the image of Germany emerging in the 1984 articles was characterized by descriptions of the

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44 During an interview with the authoress in Rome, March 2009.

45 *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 18.09.1984, p. 1.

46 *La Repubblica*, 18.08.2003.

47 Exception has to be made for the friendship between Rau and Ciampi; but in 2003, both found themselves against their wishes on the margins of the event and did not succeed in settling the incident.

democratic character, the reliability and reservation of the Federal Republic; its economic strength was mentioned only two times in all articles. However, the category of friendship still had some practical relevance also in 2003, when it became a means in the internal political dispute. The German conservative opposition used the reference to German-Italian friendship in order to discredit the supposed short-sighted daily politics of the social-democratic chancellor, whereas in Italy in turn the oppositional parties from the Left alluded to the concept of friendship in order to criticise Berlusconi's crisis management.

Concerning partner images, also adjustments regarding the perception of relative strength have been noted. Roles have become more asymmetric and contested. In 1984, an idea of a friendship at eye level prevailed: "If it is true that the Federal Republic is one of Italy's most important political and economic partners, the same is true vice versa"<sup>48</sup>. Although objectively also in 1984 a real balance between them was mere illusion, German politicians emphasised German dependence on Western and particularly Italian support in the Cold War, therewith avoiding any impression of preponderance. In the expert interviews conducted, nearly all involved diplomats emphasized that the Andreotti case was a matter of conflict between equals. Also Genscher himself stated that he perceived Italy as a partner at eye level – "absolutely".<sup>49</sup> In 2003, Italian politicians seem to be less optimistic regarding the symmetry in Italo-German relations. In many articles a fear of Franco-German prevalence in Europe shows through. It becomes very clear that Italy feels to be inequitably neglected and treated as "little brother", much to Italian diplomats' regrets: "For Germany, Italy has lost importance. Now there is inequality, a new inequality in our relationship"<sup>50</sup>. Yet, it still claims to be on eye level with Germany: that is why Italy's role experiences do not match its role expectations anymore. On the German side, in turn, the problem seems to be less present. In the public statements, there are in fact no comments at all on a new asymmetry in the relationship – this implies, that there are neither attempts to assure symmetry, at least in terms of lip service. By the same token, within the interviews German diplomats seemed to be almost astonished when asked about Italo-German equality. For the German side, we can thus attest the loss of sensibility regarding Italian on-equal-term –wants and –needs.

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48 Corriere della Sera 17.09.1984, p. 1.

49 During an interview with the authoress in Bonn, April 2009.

50 During an interview with an Italian diplomat.

This absence indicates a new gap in Italian and German perceptions of their relationship's composition: while the Italians stick to a symmetric setup, for Germans this is no longer the case.

In sum, changes in meaning are about changes in degrees. Still the relationship is regarded as important for the partners, still significant frames of reference are the European/Western alliance, and still they even speak about "Italo-German friendship". However, a closer look reveals that within these constructions, changes have indeed occurred. It becomes most obvious in the dimension of relationship setup, where roles nowadays are more contested. But also regarding importance, foundations, and partner orientation, a shift from value-based to rather utilitarian constructions has taken place.

## **4 Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrated the necessity to broaden our understanding of bilateral relations by including constructivist perspectives. In the Andreotti and the Berlusconi case, changes on the interaction level – in the sense of shifts from solution to escalation – are quite evident when comparing the two empirical cases. But they do not tell much about the depth of that very change. Going one step further, however, also in the dimension of meaning changes in degree can be found: constructions of the relationship shift from idealistic to rather pragmatic notions. From undisputed alliance loyalty, the "why's" and "how's" of Italo-German cooperation have become more contested and ambivalent. These results point to an enduring and substantial character of change that has taken place, since structures of meaning are intersubjective and hardly reducible to personality or particular circumstances. The analysis, thus, challenges prevailing beliefs on continuity in Italo-German relations and provides further empirical evidence in support of Rusconi's estrangement-hypothesis. Furthermore, it refutes simplistic explanations of Italo-German difficulties as caused exclusively by an Italian Prime Minister being unpopular in Germany. In contrast, merely superficial developments are accompanied by and embedded in deeper changes in the relationship's meaning.

Although the results of the presented case comparison convey a clear message, they have to be treated somewhat cautiously. In the end, the analysis was about comparing two single anecdotes, which do not (and neither aim to)

represent the total sum of Italo-German contacts. They may still serve as first illustration of the usefulness of systematic comparative analysis. However, further research has to be undertaken in order to prove whether results hold true in other settings and broader frameworks of Italo-German cooperation.

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## **Annex: List of Interview Partners**

- Andreotti, Giulio, interviewed on March 4th, 2009 in Rome  
*Italian politician, lifetime Senator. In 1984, Italian Foreign Minister*
- Auer, Stefan, interviewed on January 15th, 2009 in Berlin  
*German diplomat. In 2003, Deputy Head of the EU Coordination Group, German Foreign Ministry*
- Bottai, Bruno, interviewed on October 23th, 2008 in Rome  
*Italian diplomat (rtd.). In 1984, Head of the Directorate-General Political Affairs, Italian Foreign Ministry*
- Buccino Grimaldi, Giuseppe interviewed on March 4th, 2009 in Rome  
*Italian diplomat. In 2003, Head of Division VI (Legal and Institutional Affairs) in the Directorate-General European Integration, Italian Foreign Ministry (involved in the Intergovernmental Conference on the EU Constitutional Treaty)*
- Calamia, Pietro, interviewed on October, 21st, 2008 in Rome  
*Italian diplomat (rtd.). In 1984, Permanent Representative of Italy to the EEC, Brussels*
- Cerboni, Guido, interviewed on March 5th, 2009 in Rome  
*Italian diplomat. Currently Head of Division I (countries of central-northern Europe, including Germany) in the Directorate-General Countries of Europe, Italian Foreign Ministry*
- Fagiolo, Silvio, interviewed on October 7th, 2009 in Rome  
*Italian diplomat (rtd.). In 1984, First Counsellor (Political Affairs), Italian Embassy in Bonn; in 2003, Italian Ambassador in Berlin*
- Ferraris, Luigi V., interviewed on June 7th, 2005 in Rome and on March 12th, 2009 in Hildesheim  
*Italian diplomat (rtd.). In 1984, Italian Ambassador in Bonn*
- Genscher, Hans-Dietrich, interviewed on April, 6th in Bonn  
*German politician (rtd.). In 1984, German Foreign Minister*

Mariani, Pio, interviewed on January 26th, 2009 via telephone  
*Italian diplomat. In 2003, Head of Division I (countries of central-northern Europe, including Germany) in the Directorate-General Countries of Europe, Italian Foreign Ministry*

Neubert, Klaus, interviewed on December 5th, 2008 in Berlin  
*German diplomat (rtd.). In 2003, German Ambassador in Rome*

Poensgen, Gisbert, interviewed on November 28th, 2008 in Berlin  
*German diplomat (rtd.). In 1984, Permanent Representative of Germany to the EEC, Brussels*

Schlaga, Christian, interviewed on January 20th, 2009 via telephone  
*German diplomat. In 2003, First Counsellor (Political Affairs), German Embassy in Rome*



**About the author** Dörte Dinger, \*1981, PhD Candidate in “Global Politics” at Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Bremen. 2008 Research Stay at Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome. 2007 Visiting Fellow at Graduate School for Social, Economic and Political Sciences, Milan. 2005 Graduated at Philipps-Universität Marburg with the thesis “Zwischen Furcht und Bewunderung? Italienische Haltungen zur neuen deutschen Außenpolitik” (published in Peter Lang Verlag, Italien in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Vol. 27); 2000-2005 Studies in Political Sciences, Sociology and Contemporary History at Philipps-Universität Marburg and Università degli Studi di Bologna. Main fields of interest: Italo-German relations, Foreign Policy Analysis, Constructivist Theory in International Relations.

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