

Quaderni del Dottorato in Storia d'Europa

Direzione scientifica

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Questo volume costituisce con *Variazioni geoculturali europee* uno dei risultati delle attività di ricerca e di partecipazione a convegni e seminari dei dottorandi in Storia dell'Europa nel corso dell'ultimo anno. Mentre tante attività di incontro e scambio sono state interrotte a causa delle contromisure messe in atto per contrastare la pandemia da Covid-19, il Dottorato in Storia dell'Europa ha ritenuto di dover collocare nella serie dei suoi "Quaderni" questa raccolta di scritti, segno di una caparbia volontà di non fermarsi, di andare avanti e di guardare al futuro. *Iconografie europee* raccoglie una serie eterogenea di contributi che vanno dalla metodologia a tematiche più specificatamente di storia europea. La variegata natura dei capitoli restituisce una serie di immagini che hanno ispirato il titolo. L'espressione *Iconografie europee*, spiega Roberto Valle nella 'Presentazione', fa riferimento al concetto di *iconographie régionale* forgiato dal geografo francese di origine ucraina Jean Gottmann (1915-1994). Nella peculiare spazialità geografica dell'Europa, l'iconografia è quell'insieme di immagini e di visioni del mondo scaturite da differenti religioni e tradizioni, dal passato storico e dalle organizzazioni sociali. L'iconografia è il 'nodo di Gordio' delle comunità nazionali e la circolazione delle iconografie consente sostituzioni e/o riproposizioni di immagini dello spazio geografico.

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In Quest of a New International Communist Alliance: The Yugoslav Mediation in the Renewal of Relations between the Communist Parties of Italy and China (1977-1979)

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**IN QUEST OF A NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST ALLIANCE:
THE YUGOSLAV MEDIATION IN THE RENEWAL OF RELATIONS
BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST PARTIES OF
ITALY AND CHINA (1977-1979)**

Bogdan Živković

1. Introduction

For the biggest part of the Cold War, the Chinese communists were the antipode of their Italian and Yugoslav comrades. During the two decades between the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), held in 1956, and the death of Mao Zedong, in September 1976, the Italian Communist Party and the League of Communist of Yugoslavia (LCY) had a strongly conflictual relationship with Beijing. Among various viewpoints within the International Workers' Movement, the Chinese and the Yugoslavs/Italians were representatives of two completely different and antagonistic visions for the future of communism. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) represented a conservative and Stalinist standpoint, rigid and dogmatic, oriented on sharp class conflict and zealous in propagating a military confrontation with the capitalist West. On the other hand, the Yugoslav and Italian communists were the most 'liberal' parties within the movement. Their vision included the wish to preserve peace and collaborate with different political forces, as the best way of leading the global population towards a socialist future. Hence, with the de-Stalinization efforts in 1956, a strong conflict between Mao and Tito/Togliatti was initiated. In the following years, it was not rare that the Italian and Yugoslav communist were labelled as 'revisionists' and 'opportunists' in Beijing's official declarations.

The opposition to the radical and dogmatic CCP was a crucial connecting factor in the reconciliation between the Yugoslav and Italian communists in the early sixties. Firstly, the opposition to China

had brought together the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, in 1962, after four years of conflict¹. With the Soviet permission and encouragement, the PCI was then free to follow Moscow's example and pursue a reconciliation with the Yugoslavs. Secondly, as Aldo Agosti pointed out, Togliatti understood the growing Sino-Soviet conflict and Moscow's reconciliation with Belgrade as an implicit vindication of PCI's policies². Thus, it was the position towards China, i.e. opposition towards Beijing, which enabled the full renewal of the relations between the PCI and the LCY.

China remained an important topic in the first years of the renewed friendship between the Yugoslav and Italian communists, from 1962 to 1964. Negative views on Mao's foreign policy dominated both Tito's letter to Togliatti, written in November 1962, and Tito and Togliatti's conversations in Yugoslavia, in January 1964. It is worth underlining that these two episodes were the most important events in the interparty collaboration in the early sixties. However, they were not only the most important contacts in that era, but crucial for the entire history of LCY-PCI relations. During the two final years of Palmiro Togliatti's life, a friendship and alliance between the Yugoslav and Italian communists was founded, determining the rest of the interparty collaboration. Hence, after decades of conflict, in the early sixties Togliatti and Tito created a strong connection between their two parties, which lasted for decades to come. This alliance was founded on similar, more 'liberal' interpretation of communism, which strengthened the inclination of both parties to limit the Soviet hegemony³. One of the important pieces of that foundation, which led to years of fruitful collaboration, was the strong mutual opposition to Chinese dogmatism and warmongering.

In his letter from November 1962, while asking for an urgent meeting with Togliatti, Tito identified China as one of the gravest threats to global peace. In order to explain such a strong statement, the Yugoslav president used two examples. Firstly, he stressed out how Mao had criticized Khrushchev's moderate management of the Cuban

¹ Dimić 2014: 266-271. China was the main preoccupation of the Soviet foreign policy of that era - Westad 2005: 159. Hence, in light of such relations in the triangle Moscow-Beijing-Belgrade, Chinese attacks on Yugoslavia could be seen as Beijing's proxy war with Moscow - Banac 2017: 584.

² Agosti 2008: 279.

³ More about the visit and the forging of the inter-party alliance in Galeazzi 2005: 244-248; Galeazzi 2011: 100-107.

missile crisis, which Yugoslavia fully supported. Secondly, he underlined China's aggressive attitude towards India, strongly condemning it⁴. The conflict between Mao and Tito was substantial, deriving from their irreconcilable foreign policy perspectives. While Yugoslavia fully supported and propagated the principle of peaceful coexistence, Mao's China vehemently opposed to it. In Mao's view, this was not the way towards the global victory of socialism, but just a means for Moscow and Washington to divide the world among themselves⁵. In his letter to Togliatti, Tito addressed this issue, stating that peaceful coexistence did not exclude a forceful takeover of power in a country, nor did it prevent class solidarity. Chinese counter perspective, that of imminent war with capitalism, Tito dismissed as something very similar to Trotsky's «permanent revolution»⁶.

As it was mentioned earlier, Chinese foreign policy was also one of the most important topics during the last meeting between Tito and Togliatti, in January 1964⁷. On this occasion, Tito repeated his critiques, particularly stressing out how Chinese radicalism was not attractive in the Third World countries, and therefore by no means beneficial to the cause of socialism. However, although both Togliatti and Tito were fully and strongly opposed to Chinese policies, they were not concordant with the Soviet plans on how to counter them. Both were convinced that a global communist conference aimed at excommunicating China would not be useful. They feared that a repetition of the 1948 scenario, when Moscow used its hegemonic position to impose the anti-Yugoslav views on the entire communist movement, would be detrimental to the future of communism, serving only to expand the Kremlin's power⁸.

Opposition to a global communist conference was a mutual stance, often discussed by the two parties in the following years. It was a complex but principal position. Although the Chinese policies were viewed extremely negatively by the PCI and the LCY, the Soviet hegemony was a more important issue. Hence, China slowly faded

⁴ The Yugoslavs had blamed China for the Sino-Indian war, supporting Nehru - more about it in: Čavoški 2009.

⁵ Service 2011: 403-404.

⁶ Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (AJ), Komisija za međunarodne odnose CK SKJ [Commission For International Relations CC LCY] (507/IX) - 48/I-240.

⁷ Aldo Agosti points out China as the main topic of the conversations in Belgrade - Agosti 2008: 287.

⁸ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-257.

away as a topic in the PCI-LCY discussions. When it was mentioned, it was always in the context of a global communist conference, which was eventually held in 1969, despite the opposition of both parties. The negative sentiment toward Mao's policy was still present in the views of the Yugoslav and Italian communists, whereas the Soviet positions were viewed in a more positive light. However, it was evident that both parties were not going to allow the Soviets to use their critiques of Beijing in order to strengthen their hegemony. Both the PCI and the LCY were not willing to become Moscow's uncritical allies, despite their profound differences with China.

Although the previous paragraph sums up the situation in the relations between PCI/LCY and China in the period from Togliatti's death in 1964 to Mao's death in 1976, there was one exception, a period in which China was viewed differently by the two parties. This period is not only significant as an aberration from the general tone of cold and distant relations with Beijing, but also helps us better understand the PCI's and LCY's overtures towards the CCP in the late seventies. The episode in question occurred after the Soviet military invasion in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Yugoslav and Italian parties were the fiercest opposition to the intervention, after previously strongly supporting Dubček. The three parties had a lot in common, sharing crucial values and aspirations. Hence, when the Soviets attacked Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslavs and Italians were perfectly aware that this was an attack on them also⁹. China also opposed the intervention, although for completely different reasons. However, the PCI, the LCY and the CCP found themselves 'on the same side'. The Yugoslavs and Italians, although aware of their difference with Beijing, acknowledged this fact. Therefore, during a conversation in September 1968, the two parties entertained the possibility of contacting the CCP. The mutual sentiment was that they could not be more critical towards China than towards the USSR, in the light of the Soviet intervention¹⁰. However, nothing came out of this idea, and no progress was made in reconciling with Beijing, as the mutual differences were still too deep¹¹.

⁹ Dimić 2014: 309-354; Pons 2014: 259-262; Pons 2010: 45; Gozzini 2017: 604-605.

¹⁰ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-416.

¹¹ Just a couple of months after this meeting, in April of 1969, PCI official Carlo Galuzzi spoke of his party's intention to group various communist parties against both the USSR and China. AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-430. Hence, it was obvious that neither the USSR was perceived as a lesser evil compared to China, nor it was vice versa.

Despite the lack of result, this was an interesting prelude to the events in the late seventies, showing how being opposed to Moscow could bring together three very different actors: communist parties of Italy, Yugoslavia, and China.

2. *The 1976 Watershed*

Two important events occurred in 1976, creating the prerequisites for a new kind of relationship between the PCI/LCY and China. The first one was the conference of the European communist parties, held in Berlin in June. It was a seeming victory for Berlinguer and Tito, as the principle of autonomy of national communist parties, the value they deeply shared and strongly propagated at the conference, was accepted. It was, at least on paper, accepted even by the Soviets, and included in the final conference act. In reality, it was only the beginning of a new conflict with the USSR. Shortly after the conference, an attack on this principle and on Eurocommunism was initiated by Moscow¹². Not willing to step back, but determined to defend this value globally, the Yugoslavs and Italians were in need of new allies. Therefore, just like in 1968, a contact with China emerged as a possible way out.

This leads us to the second important event that occurred in 1976 and enabled better communication between the three sides - the death of Mao Zedong in September. If it was not for the death of the Chinese leader, hardly would there be a change in Beijing's relations with the Italian and Yugoslav comrades. The scenario would, probably, be like in 1968 - despite the goodwill of the PCI and LCY, the chances of a rapprochement would be slim. However, with the death of the dogmatic Chinese leader, new possibilities emerged. Although not much was commented regarding China, in a meeting with the Yugoslav Aleksandar Grlićkov on December 20th 1976, Enrico Berlinguer briefly expressed his strong wish to collaborate with Beijing, and stated that the Soviets have informed him that the new Chinese leadership was going to be more pragmatic in its policies¹³. In a restrained manner, the leader of the Italian communists expressed

¹² Pons 2014: 288-289; Pons 2010: 54-60; Valli 1976: 54-56; Marović 1983: 397-412.

¹³ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-554.

his awareness of the possibilities that emerged with the change in the leadership of communist China.

3. Pajetta's Trip to Belgrade - Request for Yugoslav Mediation

Soon these possibilities seemed more viable. Firstly, as the Soviet attack on Eurocommunism was under way, the PCI was in dire need of new allies. And secondly, as Tito was preparing to make a tour in the East, visiting the USSR, China and North Korea, there was no better intermediary for the PCI than the Yugoslavs, allies from the Berlin conference¹⁴. At a meeting of the PCI directorate, held on July 18th 1977, Gian Carlo Pajetta spoke about the upcoming Tito's visit, showing the importance the PCI gave to it. Speaking of China and the Italian party's wish to have better relations with Beijing, Pajetta stressed that it was important to see how the interparty LCY-CCP relations were going to develop after the visit, particularly having in mind that China was seeking for anti-Soviet allies¹⁵.

Hence, in late July 1977, Gian Carlo Pajetta visited Belgrade with the intention to seek Yugoslav mediation in reestablishing PCI's relations with the Chinese party. On his mission to Belgrade Pajetta brought a letter Berlinguer wrote personally to Tito, which was followed with a PCI's note on China. The leader of the Italian communists expressed his party's strong interest for Tito's upcoming visit to the USSR, China and North Korea, wishing him success. Berlinguer added that the visit was important both for world peace and for the struggle of the progressive forces. In the additional note it was elaborated how the PCI wanted and tried, with no success, to establish a contact with Beijing. The wish for collaboration was still present, although the PCI wanted to remain excluded from Chinese conflicts with third parties (i.e. the USSR). Finally, it was stated that

¹⁴ This visit was part of a broader Chinese policy of reestablishing ties with Eastern Europe, initiated in the late seventies, and Romania and Yugoslavia were the first Beijing's partner in this activity. Jian 2010: 192.

Tito's visit to Beijing eventually proved to be of special importance for the PCI, as it paved the way for Berlinguer to also visit China, in 1980 - Pons 2014: 292. The rapprochement between Yugoslavia and China was not only closely followed but also propagated by the PCI. For instance, when Hua Guofeng congratulated Tito on the occasion of his birthday, on May 25th 1977, this was underlined in an article published in *L'Unità* - Fondazione Istituto Gramsci, Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano (APCI), Esteri, MF 298: 2264-2265.

¹⁵ APCI, Direzione, MF 299: 130.

the Italian party was willing to enter into a dialogue with the Chinese, which could include critiques and even negative judgments, but not aggressive attacks and excommunications. The note underlined that the PCI had the same standard for China, not allowing other parties to attack it in the described manner, for instance during the preparations of the Berlin conference¹⁶. As Pajetta explicitly explained to Grličkov, it was, in fact, Berlinguer's appeal to Tito to advocate for a contact between China and the PCI during his visit to Beijing¹⁷.

Upon delivering the letter, Pajetta and Grličkov had a conversation on various international topics. Although the Yugoslav was more interested in other issues, primarily the conflict between the Spanish and Soviet communists, Pajetta initiated the meeting by addressing the situation in China. In his words, the Italian communists were confused by the fact that China was opening itself up to the world, but remained harshly anti-Soviet. He added that the Chinese were so anti-Soviet that, to his astonishment, in a conversation with the Italian minister of foreign affairs Forlani, they had not used the name Soviet Union, but referred to it as «polar bear». Also, the Chinese (ironically) added that they had changed their stance on the PCI. They stopped calling the Italian communists «servants of socialist imperialism», but described them as only «revisionists». Since Forlani talked about the PCI's wish to establish contacts with Beijing, the Chinese ironically asked him if he was a member of the communist party, as he was defending it so much¹⁸.

4. Berlinguer's Visit to Yugoslavia - October 1977

Upon Tito's return from his 'Eastern tour', Berlinguer was eager to visit Belgrade and meet with the Yugoslav leader¹⁹. It was a chance for the Italian communist leader not only to find out what was the result of Tito's mediation, but also to be informed about the new situation and political course in China. Still, it should be noted that the main aim of Berlinguer's visit to Belgrade (and Budapest) was to strengthen the relations with the moderate leaderships in Eastern Europe. His intention was to solidify the principles of the Berlin conference, as

¹⁶ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-568; APCI, Esteri, MF 299: 1167.

¹⁷ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-567.

¹⁸ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-567.

¹⁹ The visit was organized on PCI's suggestion - APCI, Esteri, MF 304: 1976-1977.

Eurocommunism was being severely endangered by the crisis of the détente²⁰.

The first thing the Yugoslav president underlined when talking about China was that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese objected to the fact that he was visiting both countries. Tito's wish was to bring the two strongest socialist countries together, and he therefore implicitly advocated for their reconciliation during the visits. Both in Moscow and Beijing Tito underlined that the United States would not have such a powerful position if the communist world was united. This intrigued Berlinguer, and he was curious to see how the Chinese and the Soviets reacted to such statements, and what were their views on the possibilities of a future collaboration. Tito's answer was that, in his opinion, the chances for an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations were slim at best. However, he was optimistic regarding the future, and believed that one day the situation would be different. In his opinion, a reconciliation between Moscow and Beijing was going to happen, and it will lead towards the unity of the communist movement²¹.

After shortly commenting on his visit to North Korea, Tito talked about his impressions from Beijing. He was very well received, Hua Guofeng personally welcomed him and promised a return visit to Yugoslavia. In Tito's opinion, the Chinese leadership was more flexible than earlier. The country was, undoubtedly, aimed at opening itself up to foreign actors, primarily due to economic reasons²². Even when he criticized the Chinese, always in a very polite and implicit manner, Guofeng accepted those remarks. For instance, Tito implicitly criticized their actions in Africa by saying that Yugoslavia was always careful not to support the reactionary forces in the continent, mentioning the case of Angola²³. On Berlinguer's question if Hua

²⁰ Pons 2006: 78.

²¹ AJ, Kabinet Predsednika Republike [Cabinet of the President of the Republic] (KPR (837)), I-3-a/44-61.

²² Tito talked extensively about his impression that, with its new leadership, China had become oriented on economic growth. However, that shift in orientation, from revolution to development, was initiated in the final years of Mao's reign, setting the direction for his successors. Jian 2010: 181-185.

²³ Strangely, this was one of the rare mentioning of Angola in the LCY-PCI relations, despite the strong Yugoslav involvement in the country, and despite it being one of the crucial international issues of that era. The Soviet actions in Angola, fueled by the US defeat in Vietnam and the subsequent attractiveness of the Soviet model, initiated a

Guofeng defended the Chinese involvement in Angola, Tito responded that the conversation on this issue was rather indirect. However, Tito elaborated on Beijing's dissatisfaction with the increased involvement of the USSR in Africa. In response to this, the Yugoslav president suggested that the Chinese should support the same movements as the USSR, in order to combat the Soviet influence. Eurocommunism was also one of the topics discussed between Tito and Guofeng. Tito explained to the Chinese leader how the PCI and other Eurocommunist parties were focused on the local conditions, and in order to gain support of the 'masses' they were implementing a broader approach in their policies. Hence, he suggested that the CCP should get in touch with the PCI, but the Chinese remained silent on this issue. However, Tito's impression was that the PCI would succeed in establishing party relations with the CCP, as the Chinese had become more flexible and open. The Yugoslavs, who maintained only inter-state relations with the PRC, were just on the way of establishing the party relations²⁴. During the conversations in Beijing Tito also addressed the Chinese theory of the imminence of a global conflict. Although he unsuccessfully tried to dissuade the Chinese, the Yugoslav president noticed that now it was at least possible to discuss this issue, unlike before. In general, his impression was that Mao's legacy was a formality, kept alive more due to propaganda reasons than as a true belief of his successors. Berlinguer was very interested in this assessment of the Yugoslav leader, and Tito assured him that the times in China were changing. Finally, Berlinguer asked whether the Chinese were fearing a possible Soviet attack. Tito responded that, unfortunately, this was the case. However, he thought that the Soviets would not venture upon anything similar, as they had become financially overstretched by having too much troops on the eastern border, and were at the same time focused on increasing the standard of living in the USSR²⁵.

competition between the superpowers in the Third World and signaled the end of the détente - Savranskaya, Taubman 2010: 156.

²⁴ When talking about this issue, Tito and Berlinguer had a witty exchange of remarks. Tito laughingly added that «If they have such an attitude towards us, then they will go further with it, because we both have the same sins». Berlinguer responded in a similar manner, saying: «When it comes to revisionism, you remain the first», and Tito ironically concluded: «That is true, we are the first in that».

²⁵ AJ, KPR (837), I-3-a/44-61.

5. 1978, Waiting for Beijing's Response

After the fruitful conversations between Tito and Berlinguer, 1978 was the year in which the PCI had to wait for the results of Tito's mediation attempts in Beijing. During this year China was not mentioned that often in the contacts between the PCI and the LCY. However, there were some important exceptions. The first one was on March 1st, in a conversation between Aleksandar Grlićkov and Gian Carlo Pajetta. During the meeting dedicated to various international topics, the Yugoslav informed his Italian counterpart that the LCY had made significant progress in reestablishing formal interparty relations with Beijing (the relations were, hitherto, only ones of diplomatic interstate level)²⁶. Consequently, Yugoslavia was becoming closer to China, and its chances of successfully mediating a rapprochement between the Italian and Chinese communists were becoming stronger.

The second important mention of China occurred in October, when Berlinguer met with Tito once again. This eventually proved to be the final meeting of the two communist leaders, an event which showed their great closeness and the strength of their alliance. The visit was organized on PCI's initiative. Berlinguer wanted to visit Yugoslavia after his trips to France (4th-5th October) and the USSR (6th-9th October). On his return from the Soviet Union, on October 10th, at a medical resort on the Montenegrin seaside, Enrico Berlinguer had his final conversation with the aging Yugoslav president, discussing various burning issues of the international communist movement²⁷. One of

The relations of the USSR with the West were marked by the same rationale Tito exposed here. Moscow wanted to cut its military expenses and strengthen trade, as remedies for the unsatisfied consumer needs in the USSR. Njolstad 2010: 137-138.

²⁶ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-574. The PCI had already closely monitored this progress in the LCY-CCP relations. On January 25th 1978 *L'Unità* published an article describing the visit of the Chinese ambassador, Ciang Hai Feng, to the LCY. As it was underlined in the article, this was the first time after twenty years that a Chinese diplomat was visiting the Yugoslav party, thus a demonstration of the reestablishment of inter-party relations. APCI, Esteri, MF 317: 1037. On the occasion of the Eleventh LCY Congress, held in June, *L'Unità* once again dedicated attention to the LCY-CCP relations. In his detailed article on the congress, correspondent Silvano Goruppi underlined how the Chinese sent a greeting message, and justified their absence by stating that the CCP does not send its delegation to foreign congresses, nor invites foreign delegations to theirs. Goruppi also quoted Aleksandar Grlićkov, who stated that normalization of relations with the Chinese party was one of the LCY's foreign policy goals. APCI, Esteri, MF 330: 1968.

²⁷ A Yugoslav report made prior to the visit demonstrates the LCY's sympathies for the PCI. In the report it was claimed that the Italian communists were under strong and

those issues was China - this was an occasion for Tito to personally inform Berlinguer on Hua Guofeng's recent visit to Yugoslavia, which took place less than three months earlier²⁸.

Berlinguer talked extensively about his negative impressions from Moscow, describing various disagreements he had with the leadership of the CPSU²⁹. Relations with Beijing were a divisive point during the conversations in Moscow, as the two parties had different perspectives on this issue. Brezhnev was very critical of the PCI-CCP rapprochement, and he underlined to Berlinguer that a renewal of relations between the two parties would not erase their differences. The Soviet leader had also expressed his hope that the PCI would not change its views. In answer to this, Berlinguer pointed out that, although the negative aspects of China's foreign policy still prevailed (primarily, Beijing's willingness to collaborate even with 'reactionary' forces³⁰), there was progress in Chinese internal policies, which implied its evolution in a more 'positive' direction³¹. Responding to Berlinguer's exposition on his visit to Moscow, Tito was very supportive. In his view, it was better to go to the Soviet Union and discuss the problems directly, than to have a discussion in the press.

unscrupulous attacks from various actors, who unfoundedly questioned their autonomy and dedication to democracy. According to the Yugoslavs, the European and Italian right used every possible mode to attack the PCI, including terrorism. The PSI and its new leader Craxi were also used to attack the PCI. The Yugoslavs believed that the great powers acted against the communist party, but also against the development of democracy and sovereignty in Italy. AJ, KPR (837), I-3-a/44-62. The sympathies were mutual as Tito at that time represented «a privileged interlocutor and indispensable support» for Berlinguer - Pons 2006: 92.

²⁸ When Berlinguer arrived in Yugoslavia, he had a short encounter with the Italian press, prior to the meeting with Tito. One of the journalists asked him was the normalization of the PCI-CCP relations the main motive for the visit, and Berlinguer responded that it was going to be discussed, although the situation in the International Workers' Movement in general was the crucial topic. APCI, Esteri, MF 365: 1306.

²⁹ As Silvio Pons put it, the visit was «a dialogue of the deaf». Pons 2014: 290.

³⁰ According to Silvio Pons, such readiness of China, a communist country, to collaborate with various capitalist forces against another communist country was one of the strongest evidence of the definitive downfall of communism. Although Berlinguer and other communists were not aware of it, unable to detach themselves from their intimate beliefs, these kind of actions signaled that communism had lost its *raison d'être* - Ivi: 282.

³¹ As he underlined at a meeting of the PCI directorate held on October 19th 1978, Berlinguer could not fathom why were the Soviets so adamantly opposed to the PCI's reconciliation with China, or to Guofeng's visit to Belgrade. For the PCI leader, Yugoslavia and Romania were clear examples that a party could reconcile with Beijing without being anti-Soviet. APCI, Direzione, MF 365: 37-38.

The Yugoslav president mostly talked about China, underlining the great progress in the LCY-CCP relations. This process was not looked upon favorably in Moscow. Tito denied certain claims published in the Soviet press, like the ones that Hua Guofeng was acting inappropriately towards the Soviet Union during his visit to Belgrade, or that Yugoslavia was selling weapons to China. The Yugoslav president was very frustrated by such statements, especially as Yugoslavia did as much as it could for a reconciliation between Moscow and Beijing. Regarding the Chinese, Tito's impression was that they were evolving, even in foreign policy. The most important for the Yugoslav president was the fact that China was opening to the world, and he thought that this process should be helped. One of the aspects of this new diplomatic course in China was strengthening the diplomatic and commercial ties with Western countries. In order to do so, Beijing had to avoid irritating the parties in power, thus neglect the Western communist parties. Tito expressed his understanding for such actions of the Chinese diplomacy, thus implicitly suggesting to Berlinguer not to be frustrated by the fact that the PRC was developing relations with the Italian government and timid in its contacts with the PCI³².

6. 1979, Success of the Yugoslav Mediation

After the two successful visits, Tito's to Beijing and Guofeng's to Belgrade, China and Yugoslavia were developing their relations rapidly. In addition to fruitful bilateral contacts, a crisis in the international communist movement brought Beijing and Belgrade even closer. When an armed conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia broke out³³, the Chinese and Yugoslavs were on the same side, opposing the Vietnamese and their Soviet patrons. The Yugoslavs were so engaged in this issue that they launched a diplomatic offensive. As a part of this activity, Zvonko Grahek, deputy at the LCY's foreign affairs department, visited Rome, Madrid and Paris,

³² AJ, KPR (837), I-3-a/44-62; APCI, Direzione, MF 365: 37-45, 83-90.

³³ Essentially, it was an ideological conflict within the communist movement in Indochina. On the one side were the Vietnamese, who in alliance with Moscow propagated internationalism, and on the other the Cambodians, allied with Beijing and inspired by nationalism. Pons 2014: 280. The Vietnamese intervention succeeded in overthrowing the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot, in January 1979. Service 2011: 512-513.

from January 16th to 20th, and talked with the officials of the national communist parties. In Rome he talked with Segre, Rubbi and Pajetta. Grahek explained how Yugoslavia closely followed the confrontation between the two countries, not taking sides but advocating for a peaceful solution. However, Belgrade was fully aware that the Vietnamese policy was one of hegemony. Therefore, when the Vietnamese attacked, supported by the East European socialist bloc (Romania excluded), Yugoslavia decided to publicly express its position. Belgrade considered the attack an indefensible breach of the principles of noninterference, independence, autonomy and territorial integrity. Although the Yugoslavs were also critical of the situation in Cambodia, they underlined that the Cambodian mistakes could not serve as justification for a foreign intervention³⁴.

The Italian communists agreed that the intervention would have negative consequences on international relations and global peace, primarily by provoking divisions within the Non-Aligned movement and a rift between the socialist countries. However, the PCI officials underlined how Yugoslavia assumed its position as a state, and that they, as a party, have to take other aspects into consideration as well. Grahek opposed to this interpretation, saying that the LCY assumed this position as a party, deeply caring about the cause of socialism. The PCI officials also informed Grahek how, due to the old pro-Vietnamese sentiments among the Italian communists, the «bourgeois» press in the country used this issue to launch an anti-communist and anti-Soviet campaign. Finally, Pajetta spoke of the USSR's right to have equal military power, as there was a danger of a global conflict³⁵, and gave a rather loose interpretation of the principle of non-interference. In the report he wrote after the conversations, Grahek concluded that the PCI: 1) was not convincing; 2) thought that the situation in Cambodia was already resolved, and therefore evaded to let this issue endanger its relations with the USSR and with other communist parties of the socialist bloc, or endanger global peace; 3) had not canceled its visit to Vietnam (although the Italian communists added that the delegation was going to criticize certain aspect of Vietnamese policies); 4) spoke little of Pol Pot's regime, which was the reason Grahek thought that

³⁴ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-587.

³⁵ He informed Grahek of two letters Brezhnev sent to Andreotti, asking Italy not to sell arms to China.

they also were not convinced that Pot's regime was the main cause of the intervention³⁶.

Although the Yugoslavs were somewhat disappointed by the PCI's stance (which, in fact, meant that they were siding with the Soviets and Vietnamese against China), their mediation between the PCI and Beijing soon bore result. Just a half a month after the previously mentioned meeting, on February 1st Budimir Babović traveled to Rome and met with various PCI officials, Berlinguer included. The main aim of his mission was to deliver a Chinese message to the PCI, which the Yugoslavs received a week earlier. In short, the Yugoslav embassy in Beijing was contacted by Chiao Shi (or Qiao Shi), a deputy in the foreign affairs department of the Chinese party, who told that the CCP had finally decided to reinitiate its contacts with the PCI. The Chinese proposal was to organize a direct meeting, as this was considered as a better option than meeting at the Chinese embassy in Rome. Beijing's intention was to organize it promptly, in the second half of February, or even before if the PCI wished so. He mentioned that Wu Hsueh-chien, also a deputy in the same department, was going to be in charge of the meeting, as he knew Berlinguer personally, from their collaboration in the days of Youth activism in the fifties. The proposed topics of the meeting were the activities of the two parties in their countries, the international communist movement, etc. Due to the current state of the PCI-CCP inter-party relations, the Chinese asked to treat this proposition discreetly. Babović added that the LCY was ready to transmit the PCI's response, and continue with the mediation that had proven successful. His impression was that the Italian communists were more than interested in having contacts with Beijing, especially prior to their congress³⁷.

Although Belgrade was on Beijing's side in the early stages of the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, the situation changed soon. The Chinese attacked Vietnam³⁸ and the Yugoslavs opposed to this, as

³⁶ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-587.

³⁷ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-590.

³⁸ In February 1979 China had a military intervention in Vietnam. Fearing of Vietnamese influence in Laos and Cambodia, and frustrated by the discrimination of the Chinese in Vietnam, Beijing invaded its neighbor shortly. This situation caused constant conflicts of lesser scale during the eighties. One of the key aspects of the conflict were the foreign policies of the two countries - China looked negatively on Vietnamese alliance with the USSR, and the Vietnamese were critical of Beijing's rapprochement with the United States. Jian 2010: 193.

they were principally against any foreign intervention in a sovereign country. In a meeting between Grličkov and Luciano Barca, held in February, the Yugoslav underlined this stance to his Italian comrade. In Grličkov's words, both the Vietnamese intervention in Cambodia and the Chinese one in Vietnam were unacceptable breaches of sovereignty and of the Charter of the United Nations. He added that although the PCI looked at the situation differently, the LCY could not accept any justification for an aggression. Barca responded that the Italian party was also opposed to both interventions, but added that millions of Italians, especially young ones, were very emotional towards Vietnam³⁹.

7. First Contacts Between the PCI and Beijing

Despite the aforementioned criticism of China, both the Yugoslav and the Italian communists were very optimistic about their future relations with Beijing, and dedicated a lot of attention to this issue. Such a stance was particularly demonstrated during the Fifteenth congress of the PCI, held in late March 1979, where the Chinese guests were given a special treatment. The Yugoslav delegation to the congress followed this issue with great attention. In its report written to the authorities in Belgrade, it was firstly underlined that, alongside with the Soviet and the Yugoslav delegates, the Chinese ambassador was given most attention out of the 102 foreign delegations. Secondly, the Yugoslavs noted that Berlinguer had openly reproached the Vietnamese for their intervention in Cambodia. This change in the PCI's stance, after the previous support to Hanoi, was viewed favorably by Belgrade. In the report it was also noted that the Soviets reacted negatively to such critical remarks of the Italian communists towards Vietnam. And finally, the report underlined the part of Berlinguer's address regarding China. Although the Italian communist leader had appealed to Beijing to change its flawed perception of the USSR, and cease perceiving it as the main enemy, the rest of his speech was positively intoned. In fact, Berlinguer was encouraging the Chinese to enter a fruitful and peaceful dialogue with the world. In order to achieve this, he underlined that a modern and strong China

³⁹ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-593.

was not a danger to peace, and urged others, including the socialist countries, to change their negative perception of Beijing⁴⁰.

Finally, in the Summer of 1979, the first PCI delegation visited China. As a sign of appreciation for the Yugoslav role in this positive development, the delegation visited Belgrade on its return from Beijing, on August 1st. The delegates were Antonio Rubbi and Angelo Oliva, and although their visit to China was not yet made public, they shared certain information with their Yugoslav comrades. Not much detail was given regarding the conversations, but both expressed their satisfaction with the fact that future contacts were arranged. Rubbi thanked the Yugoslavs for their mediation, and asked the LCY to help this dialogue further. His request was that the Yugoslavs, in their future contacts with the Chinese party, emphasize the complex conditions in which the PCI operated and its «obligations towards the public». Rubbi and Oliva also talked about their impression that positive processes were taking place in China, primarily the emergence of more realistic and adjustable economic policies. However, they feared that the «de-dogmatization» process could become more violent and less democratic. For the two PCI officials it was unusual that the Chinese had not mentioned the United States. On the other side, the fact that the Chinese had talked a lot, and with enthusiasm, about Yugoslavia, made the PCI delegates pleased, and was viewed as a sign of CCP's ideological evolution⁴¹.

8. The Subsequent Development of PCI's Relations with China

Prior to Tito's death in May 1980, when the Yugoslav global influence started to wither away, the Italian communists continued to regularly inform the LCY on the state of their relations with Beijing. China became even more important, as both parties started to strongly distance themselves from Moscow, due to the USSR's aggressive and interventionist foreign policy. Despite Soviet military victories, the remnants of Kremlin's prestige were being torn to pieces, and the PCI and the LCY were deeply opposed to its actions.

In September 1979, a Yugoslav delegation led by Vlado Janžič visited Rome and talked about several international topics with Paolo

⁴⁰ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-594.

⁴¹ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-598.

Bufalini and Antonio Rubbi. In the first meeting, with Bufalini, China was not a topic of great importance. However, there were some important exceptions. Firstly, it is worth noticing that Bufalini stated that the PCI had changed its view regarding the conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia, and even regretted not condemning Vietnam earlier. Secondly, he informed Janžič about the conversations Berlinguer had with Brezhnev⁴². China was mentioned during that meeting, and the Soviet leader was very critical towards it. Brezhnev was doubting that the Soviet negotiations with Beijing could bring anything substantial, although the USSR was making great effort in this regard. The Soviet leader also implicitly criticized the PCI for its eagerness to maintain contacts with Beijing, stating that it only encouraged the Chinese anti-Sovietism⁴³.

The conversations with Rubbi were primarily focused on the PCI's relations with China. Rubbi firstly informed the Yugoslavs that two Chinese journalists were going to visit *L'Unità* and *Rinascita* in the second half of October. Secondly, he stated that a meeting between Guofeng and Berlinguer, during the visit of the Chinese leader to Italy, seemed possible. And, thirdly, Rubbi underlined that the relations between the two parties were going to be formally established in the Spring of 1980. However, despite a general consensus on the principles of collaboration, one problem remained. Namely, the Chinese wanted that the differences between the two parties be affronted only in private and closed meetings, not publicly. This was difficult to accept for the Italians, as they strongly defended the right of public criticism in their relations with the CPSU and other communist parties. In addition to this, the PCI was not content with certain aspects of Chinese foreign policy. The first problem was the Chinese belief that global war was inevitable, although the Chinese officials slightly changed their perspective on this issue. At this point they were willing to work with progressive forces all over the world in order to evade a

⁴² The visit was primarily motivated by the 'Euromissile Crisis', i.e. the intention of NATO to deploy new missiles in Europe. Despite the earlier tensions in the PCI-CPSU relations, Berlinguer wanted to find an agreement on this issue with Moscow - Pons 2006: 111-112.

⁴³ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-599. The Yugoslavs faced similar obstruction from Moscow, and the PCI was aware of that. A few weeks prior to this meeting, in a conversation in Havana during the conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Yugoslav Miloš Minić confessed to the PCI's delegate Renato Sandri how the pro-Soviet countries in the NAM hampered the movement's relations with China. APCI, Esteri, MF 427: 1944.

global war and enable China to have its «four modernizations»⁴⁴. Secondly, China saw Western Europe as a bloc aimed against the Eastern Europe, while the PCI saw it as an autonomous actor⁴⁵. As for the Sino-Soviet relations, just like Brezhnev, the Chinese were skeptical regarding the outcome of the negotiations. However, they hoped to at least resolve the issues of economic and trade relations⁴⁶.

The Yugoslavs met with Bufalini once again soon, in January 1980 in Belgrade. Various international topics were affronted during the conversations, but, expectedly, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was the most important issue. The intervention was broadly discussed, as both parties strongly opposed it. Bufalini also informed the Yugoslavs on the state of his party's relations with Beijing. He informed them that Hua Guofeng had met with Berlinguer during his stay in Italy. During the meeting, the Chinese leader stated how he hoped that he and Berlinguer would meet again soon in Beijing. The Italian communists understood this as an invitation to visit China and were going to accept it in the first favorable moment in the future. Bufalini was pleased to underline that, evidently, the Chinese now saw his party as an autonomous actor, one that does criticize China, but not for Soviet interests. Also, he informed the Yugoslavs about the results of a recent visit of the PCI Youth's delegation to China. Their impressions were that unemployment was a big problem, and that while Mao's legacy was being «de-mythicized» Mao, personally, was not. Also, they noted a strong interest for the Yugoslav system of self-management, and saw certain experiments that were already being undertaken in this direction. Finally, regarding the global situation, once again it was noted that the Chinese saw global war as imminent and the USSR as a bigger enemy than the United States. This last point was caused by their perception that the Soviet hegemony was rising, while the American one was in its downfall⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ As China was becoming integrated in the international relations and global economy, particularly by establishing formal interstate relations with Washington in 1979, Beijing started to gradually renounce of the principle of imminence of war. At that point, Deng Xiaoping allowed the possibility that there will be no war for a certain time. Jian 2010: 188-190.

⁴⁵ Viewing Europe as a third and autonomous actor in the internal relations was one of the core values of Berlinguer's PCI. Pons 2010: 50.

⁴⁶ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-599.

⁴⁷ AJ, 507/IX - 48/I-603.

Conclusions

With Tito's death, Yugoslavia lost its prestige and influence, thus leaving the further development of the PCI-CCP relations to these two parties. However, in the initial phase of their rapprochement, up to Berlinguer's visit to Beijing in April 1980, the Yugoslav contribution was crucial. Such a statement is not purely a conclusion deduced from research, but also the strong impression of the participants in this process. For instance, the aforementioned Antonio Rubbi, one of the most important PCI foreign policy officials of the era, stressed the crucial role played by Tito⁴⁸. The fact that the Yugoslav communists were an important part of the successful PCI-CCP rapprochement could lead to various interesting and complex conclusions that touch upon the political activity of all the three parties in question and on the general political history of the Cold War. However, if we focus our attention more on the LCY and the PCI, three conclusions emerge from the history of this Yugoslav mediation.

Firstly, the process analyzed in this article testifies to the unquestionable Yugoslav diplomatic prestige. The mediation between the PCI and CCP shows that Belgrade was not only a mediator for various Western and Eastern actors in the Third World (primarily in Africa and the Middle East), but used its diplomatic advantages to successfully connect various actors within the international communist movement. Hence, despite being an otherwise small and poor country (by European standards), Yugoslavia was a diplomatic power. This was an unusual trait in an era dominated by superpowers, and a characteristic that saved Tito's regime from internal collapse. The fact that Yugoslavia was a communist country but autonomous from the USSR was the foundation of its prestige, and in the case of contacting Beijing it was a great advantage. Secondly, the fact that Tito was given such a sensitive and important mission for the PCI testifies to the strength of the PCI-LCY alliance in the late seventies. This alliance was not only based on mutually shared principles, but on the joint struggle for those ideas - during the Berlin conference, or by initiating

⁴⁸ In an interview given in November 2018, Rubbi underlined that Tito was the bearer of Berlinguer's messages to Beijing. V. Lecis, *Rubbi: il Pci di Berlinguer, i sovietici, i cinesi, Tito, l'eurocomunismo. E quando Enrico si arrabbiò davvero*, Fuoripagina, 2018, accessible online at: <URL: <http://www.fuoripagina.it/2018/11/20/rubbi-il-pci-di-berlinguer-i-sovietici-i-cinesi-tito-leurocomunismo-e-quando-enrico-si-arrabbio-davvero/>> (11/20).

rapprochement with Beijing. In both cases the PCI and LCY were eager to oppose the Soviet hegemony within the communist movement and develop the autonomy of the national parties.

And finally, the story of the Yugoslav mediation in the PCI-CCP rapprochement also shows great importance that both the PCI and the LCY gave to China in the late seventies. The reasons for this interest in Beijing were various. On one hand, China was important in the context of the struggle to limit the Soviet hegemony and develop the autonomy of the national parties within the communist movement. Beijing was a potentially strong ally in defending these principles. Just the attempts to establish relations with it were a defiance to the Soviet diktat and monopoly over the reconciliation with Beijing. On the other hand, if we put the PCI/LCY relations in a broader, global perspective, the rapprochement with China reflected other foreign policy principles of the Italian and Yugoslav communists. Namely, the two parties were firm believers in global peace and dialogue between politically different and even opposed actors. The Yugoslav and Italian communists showed their dedication to these principles on numerous occasions, and for them dialogue was the only way to prevent conflict. Unlike the major part of Cold War actors, who delegated the resolving of burning issues to the superpowers and often succumbed to the logic of the bloc division, Berlinguer and Tito looked East, West, North and South of the Iron Curtain, searching for interlocutors and partners. In that context, a country as important and big as China was not an actor to be neglected, but a crucial partner in promoting global dialogue and peace. Hence, both parties and their leaders had the political wisdom to understand the magnitude and global impact of the changes that were occurring in Beijing after the death of Mao Zedong. The PCI and the LCY believed that it was important to seize this opportunity and interact with the Chinese. Their aim was to influence the new CCP leadership through dialogue and support its orientation towards peace and collaboration, even when it was only timid and nascent. The importance of their contribution to the Chinese political evolution remains to be evaluated, but it is worth noting how, in the early stages of this process in China, both the PCI and the LCY dedicated their forces to help it.

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