



Ressort: Politik

The Holy See and Italy: a relationship out of the ordinary

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Holy See–Italy relations refers to the special relationship between the Holy See, which is sovereign over the Vatican City, and the Italian Republic. Due to the dimension of the Vatican City State, embassies accredited to the Holy See are based on Italian territory. Treaties signed between Italy and the Vatican City State allow such embassies making Rome unique, because of the international institutions and embassies

located in this city. The Embassy of Italy to the Holy See, for example, is unique amongst foreign embassies in that it is the only embassy based on its home territory.

In the last twenty years, at the papal cathedra in Rome, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis followed each other. With Karol Wojtyla, after a promising start with Italian government, things got problematic because of the Gulf War, then with the ancillary involvement of Italy in the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Since the bishop of Rome is Jorge Mario Bergoglio, relations between Italy and the Vatican have a trend similar to a succession of waves: good, for example, with the governments guided by Enrico Letta and Paolo Gentiloni who were very close to the Catholic world,

not optimal today.

The lack of emphasis given to the celebration of the 90 years of the Lateran Treaty, also called Lateran Pact of 1929, makes it clear from the beginning what a cold relationship there is between the Holy See and the Government of the League and the Five Star Movement. Anyway, the will to approach the Catholic vote is not lacking in government parties. Matteo Salvini, leader of Lega, more than once winked on the followers of Pope Francis exploiting in his favor the fractures inside the Vatican itself. The image of Matteo Salvini with crucifix and Gospel was among the most iconic of the electoral campaign for the polls of March 4, 2018. It was a political choice the League leader made that was neither casual

nor creative. Actually, acquiring the Catholic voters to get support is a usual practice in Italy. Salvini, at least, has been partly successful. The political strategies of the League, especially in the areas of immigration, have often found their way with the encouragement of the traditionalist faction of Catholicism. In a more or less hidden way, the Minister of the Interior has "elective affinities" with those who have been opposing, for years now, the open and progressive papacy of Pope Francis.

With Pope Bergoglio, who on February said "Closing in on ourselves is a sign of defeat and increases our fears towards 'the other', the unknown people, the marginalised, the strangers" however, the relationship broke off.

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There's apparently no chance of progress with the 5 Star Movement, which has often tried, particularly through the diplomatic engagement of its political leader, the Minister Luigi Di Maio, to appear in dialogue with the Vatican. In any case, even if the question has been partially ignored by the Italian government, the reclamation of the direct tax asset type (IMU) on the buildings of the Church has always been a backbone of the Five Star Movement. Furthermore, at the opening of the electoral campaign the Five Star Movement called for the abolition of Lateran Treaty of 1929 and undoubtedly, it was not a respectable visiting card for the executive. On the international issues the relations between Pope Francis

and the Yellow-green government diverge diametrically. Above all, it is the migration that raised the pivotal question. The pontificate of Bergoglio endorses a policy of openness, inclusion and integration of the neighbor. And certainly it doesn't make the mistake of reducing the phenomenon and its solution to Italy alone. The Secretary of State Pietro Parolin said it is a global question, and it must be a united Europe to lay down the law for policies that tend towards a global approach to the migratory phenomenon. This is the distinctive feature of the "geopolitics of the spirit" of Saint Peter's successor, which makes multilateralism the benchmark for measuring - and solving - international crises.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding between the Catholic Church and the Lega-M5S executive. Ant it all depends on conceptually antithetical ways of seeing foreign policy. In Italy, international politics has never had great importance and, today, at the time of sovereigntism, it seems to have lost significance. The government of the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte is for its essence addressed to domestic political scene. International dossiers - from Venezuela to Libya, from Brexit to the relationship with Washington – seem to be negligible in governmental dynamics, and tend to isolate Rome from European and international partners.

On the contrary, the Holy See is by its nature devoted to internationalism and, in particular, to the so called peripheries of the world. That is quite normal for a transnational empire that has more than a billion faithful scattered around the world. Vatican has a peculiar international aptitude, that Italy has often not been able to exploit. Vatican could be an amplifier for the international action of Italy, which as a medium power should take more advantage of the means and soft power that the Vatican possesses. The Catholic Church must "rebuild, repair and pacify" Italy and Europe, Italian Bishops Conference (CEI) chief Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti declared at the end of february to the Vatican daily L'Osservatore Romano .

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