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“The Red Threat”. Eurocommunism in Italy as a Security Problem for the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany 1969-1980. PhD Project.¹

The keyword “Eurocommunism” quickly established itself as a generic term for reform efforts towards a Western understanding of democracy in the communist parties of Western Europe after the Yugoslav journalist Frane Barbieri first used the term in this context in the Milan daily newspaper *Giornale Nuovo* on 26th June 1975. Mainly as a result of the spectacular electoral success of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the possibility of a left-wing government in France during the communist-socialist *Union de la gauche*, and the uncertainty about the results of the Partido Comunista de España in the first free elections after the Franco-dictatorship in June 1977 an intense scientific and political dispute took place in the mid-1970s about the complex of “Eurocommunism”. The consequence was a flood of mainly political science publications in the 1970s and early 1980s.

This work is concentrated on the perception of Eurocommunism by the governments of the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany and their foreign and security policy strategy to deal with the Italian version of Eurocommunism. The PCI, on the one hand, represented the most influential party of Eurocommunism. On the other hand, the perception of Italian Eurocommunism by the governments of the United States and Western Germany led to two completely different foreign and security policy strategies. In my thesis I am going to describe, compare and evaluate these strategies.

Until during the Second World War, the foreign and security policy of the United States of America showed only a marginal interest in Italy, particularly in the PCI. This changed radically with the entry of the USA in the Second World War 1941. Due to its new strategic military position (e.g. Italy’s role as a bridgehead to Africa and the Middle East and as a potential front-line state against the communist countries of Yugoslavia and Albania after the war) Italy was now vital for the security policy of the United States and the NATO, founded in 1949. From the liberation of Italy from fascism to the end of the Cold War, American and also Western German policy was to embed this strategically important country into the Western alliance. This included a security policy of curbing the influence of the Italian communists. Since the early 1960s, this system, in which the Italian Communists were supposed to be kept out at any price from any government involvement, fell into a crisis. The previously seemingly safe structural majority of the Christian Democrats (DC), in conjunction with small parties of the right or center-left, became endangered through the continuous expansion of the PCI. With the continuous growth of Communist influence not only at all levels of the political system of Italy, but also in cultural, social and media spheres, the United States and Western Germany were faced with the problem that a participation of Communists in the government of a strategically important NATO member state was possible. The defeat of the Christian Democrats in the divorce referendum in May 1974 and the Italian regional elections on June 15 1975 had indicated what might happen in the coming parliamentary elections in June 1976. The parliamentary elections of 20th June 1976 showed a great success for the PCI. The party obtained 33.4% of the vote and reduced the distance to the DC to only 4.3

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percentage points. Following the elections, the PCI took over the chairmanship of seven parliamentary committees, including the chair of the defense committee, and PCI-member Pietro Ingrao became President of the Chamber of Deputies. Similarly, a massive increase in membership up to 1.81 million members was recorded. Moreover, in 1976 the Communist Party newspaper *l'Unità* became one of the biggest newspapers in Italy with 280.000 daily copies. The Communists also succeeded in local elections.

The Italian situation alarmed the U.S. administration in the early 1970s. The key security and foreign policy actors did not believe the Italian Communists to be willing and able to become independent from Soviet influence. As a result of this negative perception of Italian Eurocommunism in the context of a potential communist participation in the government, the formation of a confrontational strategy in dealing with Italian communism, similar to the containment strategy of the postwar period, were implemented by the U.S. administration. Even after the election of James E. ("Jimmy") Carter as U.S. president in 1976 there was little change in the attitude of the U.S. government.

In contrast to the American strategy the Federal Republic of Germany established a cooperative strategy in dealing with Italian Eurocommunism. After first contacts between PCI and SPD politicians in the late 1960s, the executive committee of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) developed and implemented a long time secret strategy to support the reformers in the PCI around General Secretary Enrico Berlinguer on their way from Soviet orientated communism to Western European Social Democracy. Following the election of Willy Brandt as President of the Socialist International (SI) in 1976, the SI was incorporated into the strategy of cooperation with the Italian Communists. While in the U.S. case the strategy in dealing with the Italian Eurocommunism was determined by the U.S. administration, the cooperative strategy of the Social Democrats in Germany could not be run by the state in the long term. An official state cooperation with the largest communist party in the Western world would have lead immediately to massive negative consequences on a national and international level. Therefore, the contact with the PCI took place in the form of a so called *Nebenaußenpolitik* at party level by the SPD.

This study is primarily based on archival material in the three participating countries (in particular the National Archives and Presidential Libraries of Nixon, Ford and Carter in the United States, the Political Archive of the Foreign Office and the Archive of Social Democracy in Germany, the Fondazione Istituto Gramsci in Italy) and interviews with former politicians.