Bonino: «All’Onu c’è un’atmosfera nuova Dobbiamo esplorare i segnali dall’Iran» (Corriere della Sera)

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NEW YORK – Right at the start of their bilateral meeting yesterday, Mohamad Javad Zafir thanked Emma Bonino. “We greatly appreciated the fact that you were the first to firmly emphasise the need to involve us in the diplomatic process in Syria”, commented the Iranian Foreign Minister. “You showed political courage and leadership”. It was, indeed, the Italian Foreign Minister who, just days after the chemical bombing, aired the possibility, with the Friends of Syria group, of bringing Iran into the loop. The country is keenly sensitive to the chemical weapons issue, given that in the first Gulf War, when they were used by Saddam Hussein, such weapons cost Tehran more than 100,000 lives. “The Iranians are the last people that need an explanation from us of the gravity of using chemical weapons”, said Bonino in her interview with Corriere. “We suggested separating out the Syria dossier. The condemnation of the use of chemical weapons has been so universal, it has created an opening for diplomacy once again. It has given the inspectors the task of identifying, albeit indirectly, those responsible”.

The week that’s just opened at the UN in New York will be a very intense one week for the Italian Foreign Minister. A week where two major dossiers high on the international agenda, Syria and Iran, will be discussed alongside other important issues for our diplomacy. Issues like Libya, where Italy intends to push for a national dialogue in the run-up to the December conference our country will be coordinating. Or Somalia, in the light of the massacre in Nairobi, which once again raises the issues of regional terrorism perpetrated by al-Shabab. Then there are more specifically Italian issues, such as the launch of Expo 2015 and the presentation of the Destinazione Italia project. This is designed to increase our country’s appeal for foreign investors, and will see Prime Minister Letta engaged in person. And lastly, the preparations for Italy’s bid to join the Security Council. Voting will take place in 2016 but this week already sees Minister Bonino taking part in 20 bilateral meetings.

We met the Foreign Minister in her New York hotel, just after her meeting with her Persian counterpart.

How much can we trust Tehran’s new, more open position?

“If you think of the atmosphere that surrounded Ahmadinejad’s speeches, with delegations leaving the room, there is without doubt a new feeling in the air, a feeling of expectation and

hope. The signals to emerge thus far – the release of political prisoners, the declarations of a readiness to talk about the nuclear issue – are signals of more openness. The sceptics object that this is all pre-General Assembly posturing. But I believe it's necessary to explore this signal. In the Friends of Syria group I've always said that, from the perspective of Geneva2, Iran should in some way be involved. Because it's not by keeping them behind a locked door that we eliminate the problem of their influence in Syria. My view is that a window of opportunity has opened for politics and diplomacy. A window we need to exploit with conviction and strong commitment. It's an uphill road, starting with the chemical weapons issue, but it's a road we need to take".

On what conditions?

"We have two parallel roads open to us. First, if we're serious about applying the chemical weapons convention – inventory, location and destruction –, we need a political channel that is open and guaranteed by a ceasefire. Otherwise, it would be impossible to ensure that the arsenals can be eliminated. The other approach is humanitarian. I would like to see access opened for international organisations to bring help to the refugees inside Syria".

But will a Security Council resolution be needed?

"In my opinion, regardless of the content of the negotiations, we need to see a legal framework, an 'umbrella' of commitments that applies to all concerned".

Through Chapter VII, or in other words by envisaging the use of force in the event of non-compliance?

"That's part of the negotiations, it's the uphill part".

What merit do you claim for the role played by Italy?

"The merit of having pointed out the three stages: inspectors' report, Security Council and applying the Convention. And that's what happened".

And what role we will have from now on?

"We're still members of the Friends of Syria group, so we can be a part of the diplomatic pressure. Brahimi told me that there's a chance of the date of the new conference being set during the meeting on 28 September. We also have a role, which I need to verify with my colleague Saccomanni [Economy and Finance Minister] and Prime Minister Letta with respect to the financial commitment involved. We have a role because our specific experience in chemical weapons issues enables us to provide know-how and assistance during the application of the Convention. Lastly, I would also like to see commitments by our country on the humanitarian front".

Did you discuss the nuclear dossier with Zarif?

“No. We’re not members of the 5+1 group. It’s clear that the issues are intertwined, because Zarif has also been appointed as negotiator on the atomic dossier. So the two dossiers could indeed be addressed together in certain fora. Today we have the speeches by President Obama and President Rouhani. And then we’ll probably have the meeting. We’ll see”.

Source :
https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2013/09/20130924_bonino_onu_atmosfera_nuova/