Bonino: «Quelle telefonate con l’Iran per fermare il blitz in Siria» (Corriere della Sera)

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In one hour and a half of conversation Emma Bonino smoked only two cigarettes (“only”, according to her standards) and answered one short phone call: “They are telling me that the hearing of those four marines has concluded. We are on the right path to closing this incident with India”. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, 65 years old, attended a forum of Corriere della Sera journalists yesterday, responding to questions on major dossiers ranging from Iran to Syria, and from Europe to the Orient. “Sometimes I wonder if it’s just me that attracts every possible crisis…”.

Italy’s international role often appears marginal. In Iranian nuclear negotiations, to cite an obvious case, we haven’t been much more than a spectator.

«We were among the first to recognise the importance of Rowhani’s election in May. I would point out that only a few months ago many of my European colleagues looked askance at me when I suggested inviting Iran to the table on Syria. In late August, after the massacre of civilians with chemical weapons, I telephoned Iranian foreign minister Zarif several times to get him to convince Assad to let the UN inspectors in. And at the UN General Assembly on 26 September there was a line to speak with Zarif and Rowhani; you practically needed a ticket, like visiting the MOMA».

But Italy is not part of the 5+1 group negotiating with Iran and, as a result, would risk being left in the wings were the sanctions to be lifted.

«We are well aware that if the sanctions were to be lifted the race would be on toward Iran – we haven’t got “dumb” stamped on our forehead – the meeting with Zarif scheduled for next Thursday has only been postponed, and we are putting together a plan on exchanges and cooperation, and not only in the field of energy».

Do you think that, in the end, Iran will give up the atomic bomb?

«I don’t know, but it is smart and reasonable to look at the cards on the table. And it is worth waiting even longer than a week, having already waited some 30 years, to see if a good agreement can be reached. There’s plenty of time to explain to Israel and the other countries on alert».

Discussion of Iran naturally leads to Syria: here negotiations for a peaceful solution to the civil war are, if it were possible, even more difficult. The opposition is calling for the ouster of Assad; Saudi Arabia is moving to recruit a parallel army with 50,000 rebels to oppose the Jihadists. What do you predict?

«In the first place, let's say we are in the presence of a proxy war: a war fought on Syrian soil but with solid links to regional powers and with lines of confrontation that are splitting the Sunni world – Qatar and Turkey on one side, and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Emirates on the other. The rebel front is fragmented, with 43 groups fighting amongst themselves and refusing to have anything to do with the Idris rebel army, not to mention the Al Nusra groups and the Jihadists. But that is precisely why there are peace conferences, otherwise we'd just text ourselves …»

OK, but will Assad go in the end?

«In the end, yes, but we have no idea when that end will come».

The Americans do not seem to have appreciated your stance against military intervention in Syria.

«Really? Not to my knowledge. They want to make me out to be anti-American – me, anti-American? Come on, I say what I think. In Egypt, for example, I am not convinced of this international relief over the "return to order" imposed by the military. I don't like seeing 3,000 persons imprisoned without a trial. Order is not enough, cemeteries too are perfectly orderly».

The war in Syria is also sending refugees to the southern shores of Europe. There are those who are proposing that asylum requests be processed in the Italian embassies of the countries from which the migrants are leaving.

«I'm doubtful: what would happen if a crowd lined up at the Italian embassy in Tripoli? I think that would make an awfully easy target for a terrorist attack».

And what if the Italian embassy were to do that in Sudan, one of the main countries that migrants are leaving from?

«This too does not seem like a good solution to me. As a general rule, dictator countries do not like seeing people lining up for visas at foreign embassies ».

Over the past two months immigration has been the clearest issue by which to gauge the urgency of bolstering the European Union. Elections will be held in 2014, and Italy will then take over the Union's presidency in the second half of the year. Letta has proposed at least unifying the presidency of the Commission with that of the European Council. Do you agree?

«In general, yes; but we have to keep in mind that the new Commission is going to be seated in 2015. Our presidency, therefore, will be a political one for the most part. In terms of foreign policy we will seek, in particular, to “Europeise” positions and proposals that normally stem from the Franco-German axis, as happened in the case of the covert American interceptions».

France and Germany, however, are making the most important moves on their own; in China, in India. What about Italy?

«Forget the delays, errors and underestimations of the past; forget also the lack of resources. I understand all the budget cuts, but the Italian Foreign Ministry’s diplomatic network is half those of France, the UK and Germany. We have to resume relations with Russia, an undeniable global actor, and get past a recent phase of personal relations accompanied by some rather messy episodes. Then there’s China. We will be going there in February to prepare for Letta’s visit scheduled for the first half of 2014».

Relations with India are still burdened by the affair involving the marines. There was a hearing yesterday of four military personnel from Italy. Will this help?

«We have spent months getting to the point of holding a distance hearing. Now the trial has to go to the special court. We are expecting to close the book on the incident soon and to resume trade relations with India, a country that we cannot lose».

Meanwhile Indian Premier Manmohan Singh is talking up Italy’s diplomatic flops in international forums.

«I promised myself not to argue about the management of cases that we inherited until the marines have returned to Italy. However, the Indian government is also in a hurry to end this».

Speaking of diplomatic flops, what lessons came out of the Shalabeyeva case, the Kazakh women unjustly expelled from Italy?

«I realised how little the government considered the foreign ministry in affairs involving foreigners in Italy. We continue to monitor Ms. Shalabayeva, and I would like to point out that the foreign ministry is dealing with many personal cases; we are assisting 10,000 Italians in difficulty in foreign places, 3100 of whom are incarcerated».

But do you speak with the Minister for the Interior?

«Oh, yes, now we are speaking. There is continuous pre-consultation…».

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2013/11/20131112_boninoiransiria/