



OBAMA NEARING THE END OF HIS FIRST MANDATE

During the last months of his first mandate, President Barack Obama has been focusing his attention on the Eurozone countries and on the developments of the financial and economic crisis whose backlashes have inevitably also struck the United States. Yet, Obama is unable to act as he probably would want to. Too busy with the electoral campaign for the November 6th elections and facing a Congress and White House in their final days in office, the US President is labelled as a "lame duck".

The contagion

Barack Obama fears the contagion between the two financial systems - European and US - in a deteriorating political context. Since November 2010 Republicans have gained the majority at the House of Reps; rating agencies have downgraded two major banks (Bank of America and Citygroup) and could do the same with other financial institutions (JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs). This would mean higher borrowing rates and lack of liquidity on the market.

In this context, the Eurozone has become the epicenter of all evil for the United States. And even if we're talking about a global financial crisis, financial deregulations has:

- enthused capital mobility,
- increased the power of banks with respect to politics
- caused a series of "speculative bubbles" in developed countries (US, Europe, Japan)
- the rise of China's role in global economy has had serious social (increase in inequality, impoverishment of the middle class, weakening of democracy) and economic consequences.

The threat of a contagion has lead US President Barack Obama to ask Europe for a series of actions before the European meeting focusing on the financial crisis in Brussels on June 28 and 29. Ahead of the summit, Barack Obama had asked for decisive actions in interrupting the negative spiral linking banking and sovereign debts and a greater flexibility in dealing with Greece's rescue plans, thus sending a strong signal to the markets regardless of Germany's opposition to the Eurobonds.

Despite Greeks' pro-Europe vote, the June 29 meeting in Brussels did not produce any considerable result, but rather minimal objectives to-be-completed with adequate rules to avoid further recession and risks for the Euro.

A vicious circle

It is worth mentioning that the first step to separate the banking crisis from the one linked to the sovereign debts will go through the guidelines adopted by the two Rescue Funds:

- the ESM (“European Stability Mechanism” that will take over the ESFS (“European Financial Stability Facility”)) will be capable of intervening directly in the emission of government bonds that the BCE - European Central Bank - and the ESFS will be able to purchase on the secondary market. By doing so a country facing difficulties will be able to finance itself using a formal procedure (a memorandum of understanding) and not at market conditions anymore, especially when interest rates are too high;
- there is no more talk of the Troika (IMF, European Commission, BCE), but of the Doika (European Commission, BCE);
- the Fund will be initially worth 80 billion euros and could be raised up to 500 billion, part of this sum has already been committed (100 billion to recapitalize Spanish banks, 100 billion for Ireland and Portugal, plus further requests from Cyprus and Slovenia, respectively 10 and 5 billion);
- the purchase of government bonds on the primary market will have to follow the conditions imposed by the European Commission;

It is worth noticing that the entire procedure will be influenced by the setting up of a "unique vigilance mechanism" whose role, together with the two Funds and other measures for the banking sector, will be fundamental for the European Banking Union, the ultimate objective to complete the already existing European Monetary Union and European Economic Union.

Italy, according to Prime Minister Mario Monti, will not activate the afore mentioned stability mechanism because it does not deem itself in the same situation of Greece or Portugal. We will have to wait and see for the definition of how the rules will have to be applied, as the US observers watch over the process. This will have to be followed, as in school, by the homework each country will have to do: a spending review, a reform of the labour market (unacceptable in countries like Italy where youth unemployment is 36%) and fiscal discipline.

In short, US observers have the benefit of the doubt on the decisions taken during the Brussels summit and are worried about the following:

- Germany's opposition to the Eurobonds (for Chancellor Merkel, Eurobonds mean a sharing of sovereign debts to the detriment of Germany);
- doubts over the Eurozone countries capability of filling the competitive gap with Germany without devaluating their currency!

Domestic policy

On the home front, last June President Barack Obama issued two measures regarding immigration and the health care reform. The “Dream Act” is an amnesty for 800 thousand illegal immigrants

who were granted - through Presidential decree - legal papers for a period of 2 years based on their age and stay in the US (younger than 30 years old and living in the United States no later than their 16th birthday), civilian and military conduct (studied or served for the US military) and good conduct (no criminal offenses). The main beneficiaries were mainly “Latino” migrants whose support to President Obama in November will be crucial; their votes will make a difference in States such as Florida, Colorado, Virginia and Nevada. Even though the rhetoric is all over “migrants stealing jobs”, Obama is sending a strong signal to voters: “It is not wise to expel people we need”. And this is so even if during his first mandate the expulsions of illegal migrants have doubled if compared to the same period under George W. Bush.

The second measure is the Health Care Reform. Through a surprising verdict – five to four in favor – the Republican dominated Supreme Court (five conservative judges as opposed to four democratic) has approved the law. The biggest surprise came from the President of the Supreme Court, John Roberts, nominated by George W. Bush and who voted together with the “democratic minority”, thus allowing the approval of the law. On health insurance President Obama stated: “It not possible that in the richest country in the world the pre-existence of a sickness or an incident can cause severe damage to a family”. As opposed to the universality of the new law, until yesterday the young and healthy would not subscribe a health insurance, thus shifting the rising costs on the oldest and more at risk part of the population.

Yet, the Supreme Court has also rejected the fines imposed on those States that refuse to extend medical assistance to the poor, the so called Medicaid. The Court has respected the autonomy of those States that are reducing funding to hospitals under pressure from budget cuts. Overall, the measure is pretty unpopular: most people accuse the Health Care Reform of having lead to an increase in insurance costs (up 20% as opposed to a 2% rise in inflation); polls show that a third of Americans are in favor, while another third is against. Nonetheless, Obama can claim this victory even though his success in November's elections will depend on factors such as the Tea Party, who shared Republican's vote against the reform in the Supreme Court.

Foreign policy

In foreign policy, President Obama claims that the United States “cannot solve all the problems in the world”, but without the US “no problem can be solved”. Barack Obama has showed great determination against Iran to avoid the closure of the Hormuz Strait oil route, doubling his fleet and increasing the fast fleet in the Gulf. With regard to Pakistan, after seven months of dispute (following the November 2011 NATO air raid that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers) the two countries have come closer once again (even though Hillary Clinton had to formally excuse herself) and the supplies to NATO troops in Afghanistan can now transit again through Pakistan.

After an uncertain debut, State Secretary Hillary Clinton has taken the necessary steps to face the challenges to America: a focus on the Pacific (to contrast China) as opposed to the Atlantic ocean in a 60 to 40 ratio. Even though an admirer of Beijing's economic and financial development, Clinton is not shy in criticizing China's treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, women and, more generally, their stance on civil rights. The same can be said for the Russian Federation. The US Secretary of State has openly criticized the rigged presidential elections in March, the repression of dissent by President Putin against opposition demonstrations and his support for Bashar al Assad in Syria.

While in Kabul (July 8), Hillary Clinton has announced to President Hamid Karzai that Afghanistan has obtained the status of 15th non-NATO major ally of the United States. A significant trip was also made to Vietnam, the first one by a US Secretary of State since the reunification of the country under Hanoi on July 2nd 1976. The 1995 reopening of relations with Vietnam has led to a first military cooperation agreement in August 2011. The aim is the opening of US military air bases in Vietnam and in neighboring countries, just as for the Airfield U-Tapao 150 km south of Bangkok, currently an emergency airstrip in case of a tsunami.

Last July the US were also on the first official visit in Laos. The last one went back to 1957 by Forster Dulles. This confirms the US interest for former Indochina countries. During the Vietnam war Laos was heavily bombed by the Americans to cut the supplies during the Vietcong's advance on Saigon along the Ho Chi Minh route. We're talking about 2 million tons of bombs, including 270 thousand tons of cluster bombs, many of which remained unexploded and are still cause of mutilations among the civilian population. Clinton's visit to Laos lasted four hours during which the US Secretary visited a charity that produces bamboo prothesis in case the real ones never arrive. Hillary Clinton's tour in Indochina will end in Cambodia for the ASEAN summit – South East Asian countries – during which political, economic and social partnerships will be finalized. The aim is also the creation of a free trade area among the AFTA countries.

As far as Syria is concerned, following the tour by UN Special Envoy, Kofi Annan, in Damascus, Teheran and Baghdad and the Geneva peace conference organized together with the Arab League on June 30th, Annan's proposals were dropped:

- no intention to accept a role for Iran in the search for a peaceful solution to the standstill
- no intention to accept the name of a current member of the Syrian regime as a potential interlocutor for future transition governments

Kofi Annan has also asked the UN Security Council to send a strong message menacing “serious consequences in case a cease fire is not negotiated” to both sides in conflict (the government in Damascus and the opposition). There are dim hopes that the end of the civil war in Syria is anywhere near. Before the UN Security Council meeting and the landing of Kofi Annan in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, has said:

- an external military intervention in Syria is not realistic since most Syrians are still in favor of the regime;
- the radical stances of the opposition (Syrian National Council) are unacceptable: Lavrov insists for a simultaneous withdrawal of both forces.

In the mean time, the National Council is closing onto the capital (the operation has been named “Volcano”) and has occupied neighborhoods in the outskirts of Damascus and is holding onto key spots at the top of residential area buildings after its inhabitants were evacuated. During an attack by infiltrated troops in the Rawda neighborhood in Damascus on July 18th the rebels killed the minister of defense, Rajha, and his deputy, General Shawkat, brother-in-law of President Bashar al Assad.

A fresh “New Deal”?

Back to the United States, in conclusion we are during the so called “lame duck” period for President Barack Obama. The President in charge is having a hard time taking/modifying decisions taken over the last few months because of the head to head competition for the November 6 election day:

-the economy has slowed down once again: any further worsening could mark a point of no return for Obama;

-the US President is facing difficulties in obtaining the consensus of “white electors”, especially the less educated. The working class (traditional democratic electorate) has began voting Republican, whose main interest are not battles for civil rights. The loss of 3 to 5% of votes during the last elections could influence the outcome of November's clash.

-Several “white” laborers are keen to believe that the policies favoring “blacks” are taking jobs away from them and worsening social services.

On the other hand, there are those who claim that Mitt Romney:

-Represents the 1%, the rich. As opposed to the 99% facing economic hardship as the “Occupy Wall Street” movement claims.

-Would have built his fortune through private equity companies that usually acquire financial companies in bad waters, restructure them through heavy lay offs and sell them on the market making huge profits;

-Would have benefited from the privileges granted by former president George W. Bush (tax cuts for profits not considered as revenue; capital gains taxed at a mere 15%); 2011 Mitt Romney's revenue of 22 million dollars was taxed at 14%.

Looking at past presidential mandates and at well known economic doctrines, it is possible to state that the US electorate - while choosing between Obama and Romney - will also pick either a “New Deal” type economic solution (as during Franklin Delano Roosevelt) or austerity. As John Maynard Keynes said: “During such periods, it is for the State to favor growth through public investment programs and through the welfare state (public pensions; more workers' rights and measures against poverty)”. Yet, there is a difference between the two historical periods:

- during the FD Roosevelt time, the Soviet Union was the menace;

- in Obama's time the menace, taking the form of a contagion, comes from the Eurozone that Romney defines as a “society lacking dynamism, oppressed by taxes and dependence culture”.

We should also add that starting in 1937 Roosevelt adjusted the “New Deal” and brought the country back into recession that was overcome only after World War II. Unlike Roosevelt, Obama does not have many alternatives. In the light of the new downturn (decrease in Democratic members in Congress and of popular consensus) Barack Obama could try to foster private investments on “Green Economy” and go ahead with his reform of the welfare state.

OPTIONS ON SYRIA

The paths that could have been undertaken in order to influence and/or interfere in the Syrian unrest were essentially two:

Option 1: a direct military intervention - as in Libya - with the open support to opposition forces

Option 2: an indirect support to rebel militias with the supply of weapons, training and financing without a direct intervention

As far as the first option is concerned, lately the US Secretary of State, with veiled Turkish support, has relaunched the idea of a No-Fly zone over Syria's sky. In order to be applied without significant risks, this choice would imply the destruction of Syrian command and control system and of its anti-aircraft defense. Such an initiative would be hard to enforce, dangerous and easily replaceable, as has already been done, in favor of a CIA support to rebels. Anyway, Russia's opposition (with Chinese support) to the first option has determined an international convergence on the second one.

To be honest, the first option has been sidelined not only to give into Russia's uncritical support of the Syrian regime. Moscow's only ally in the region is one of the first clients of Russian military supplies and allows the Russian fleet to station in the naval base of Tartous. Western powers also had other fears: the increasing instability in the region, Iran's nuclear ambitions (its contrast would have been put de facto on stand-by), the fate of the Christians (that have always benefited from Assad's dictatorship), Israeli fears of the rise of yet another radical islamist leadership in Syria (not as far fetched as it seems since, historically, the Muslim Brotherhood has lead the opposition to the regime), the lessons learnt from Libya where support to rebels has lead to social chaos and instability and, finally, Syria's military apparatus that would have required a heavy and risky intervention in case of attack.

All the above have allowed the Syrian regime to survive to date counting on both the Russian support (that has blocked all foreign interference) and the strength of its military and internal security apparatus. But all options, as evaluated by the different actors, can have both advantages and disadvantages.

The first draw back in pursuing an external support instead of a direct intervention (Option 2) - as Western powers have done to date - is that Syria has slowly, but inevitably slipped into civil war. The collateral damage is: ruthlessness on both sides, exponential rise in civilian victims, destruction, revenge and endless clashes. There has been no room for negotiations and dialogue (as has been for Kofi Annan's useless efforts). As a matter of fact, the final solution will have to be imposed and will have to come through the conflict and - in its final act - the loser will inexorably be eliminated.

There is no room for future national reconciliation, no space for piety. At the end of this path, in the future of the country, the radical social components that have achieved military victory will emerge. If we observe the evolution of the situation in Syria from this point of view, it is easy to gather how the short term objective of the overthrowing of the regime goes to the detriment of what could happen in the near future. Another draw back of indirect support is that all those countries that have

supported one of the two sides will end up being marginalized by those that have actually fought the war.

Syria's arsenal, chemical weapons included, is also worth a comment. During a civil war, whose final phases will be fragmented with sacks of resistance and clashes in urban centers, the control over delicate infrastructures (weapons, missiles and WMD depots) will not be guaranteed, nor can we know who will take over them. In the light of the Al Qaeda mujaheddins fighting in the ranks of the insurgents, such an issues becomes extremely relevant. The transhumance of international terrorists from one hot spot to the next has become an ordinary scenario. They are war professionals, experts in popular uprisings, without any ideological background except the religious one, they contribute to the destabilization.

External Actors

Syria is to Russia what Israel is to the United States. Same support, equal strategic quotient, same determination to accept deeds and misdeeds. There is no room for an objective analysis of events. Strategic interests prevail over anything else. From this point of view it is unthinkable that Moscow will allow any UN resolution that could damage or be hostile to the regime in Damascus. If anything, Russia could accept an honorable exit of Assad from his country. But this option is hard to pursue because, as in Yemen through Saudi mediation, there is no regional actor that could assure the painless passing of the regime.

Turkey is the country the most involved in Syrian affairs. It supports the opposition, welcomes refugees, offers logistical support, allows the training of the guerrilla, provides weapons (or rather: it does not oppose the landing of weapon supplies to the rebels) and is strongly dedicated to intelligence gathering in tight collaboration with Western intelligence agencies. Turkish involvement has increased exponentially after the downing of a Turkish fighter jet by Syrian anti-craft.

Following Erdogan's pro-islamic foreign policy, Turkey has been cultivating strategic interests in the Arab world. From this perspective, the Syrian crisis provides a specific opportunity. Ankara's moderate view of islam is instrumental in strengthening Turkey's role in the Middle East. Through the events in Syria, the Turks are defending the interests of the Sunnis to the detriment of the Halawis and of their closest theological relatives, the Shiites.

But along the political gains, Ankara is also facing a series of risks: the instability in Syria can spill over into their country, a possible resurfacing of the Kurdish issue could find support in the Diaspora living in Syria whose ranks fight alongside Bashar al Assad. There is also another imminent threat and that is Iran's support to Syria, considered the only and irreplaceable ally in the region. Teheran is tied to Damascus by a military agreement and loosing Syrian support would make them feel isolated. They would also loose the territorial contiguity with the Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran's radical armed wing in their fight against Israel. And this is definitely a luxury Teheran cannot afford also given the incumbent threat of an Israeli attacks against its nuclear sites. Iran will do everything to stop the fall of Assad, including the use of all those forms of destabilization it is capable of: terrorism in all its forms, support to Shiite minorities in the Arabian peninsula, the Kurds.

There is yet another actor - currently silent - watching events in Damascus. It's Israel. To Tel Aviv, Bashar Assad is the lesser evil with respect to the threat of a fundamentalist regime replacing the Halawites. The idea of having Israel surrounded by islam fundamentalist regimes with a common hatred against the Jewish State are a non-desirable scenario. The gains Israel could obtain from interrupting the direct link between the Hezbollah and Teheran could backfire if the new fundamentalist regime in Damascus decided to support the Lebanese Shiites in their fight against the Israelis.

There is also a domestic threat to Tel Aviv: the Syrian Druzes that could reunite with the ones in Israel. The two communities that live across the Golan have strong ties. An increase in the Druze population living in Israel - whose national cohesion is based on theocratic parameters - is not seen with favor. Furthermore, the Syrian Druze community has been tightly linked to the Assad regime and could bring inside the Israeli territory a feeling of hostility against Tel Aviv.

The United States and Western powers are strongly in favor of a regime change in Damascus. Their reasoning is strictly pragmatic and not ideological or ethical. If the geo-strategic gains are immediate, a traumatic change in Syria could affect the balance of the entire region. When a political and/or military void is created, the balance is broken. A new one will come about through a lengthy and unstable process. It has already happened with the destruction of Saddam Hussein's military might. And it is not granted that the end result of the process will favor Western interests and/or the neo-ottoman aims of Ankara and/or Wahabi expansionism in Ryad.

Both in the Gulf and in the Middle East power is based on force. Authoritarian regimes prevail over democracy and consensus. The overthrow of the balance of power between Sunnis and Shiites will not automatically grant renewed stability in the region. Actually, the opposite is true if we put the clash on a theological level. If Wahabi Sunnis and their Saudi counterparts were to prevail this would mean greater religious fanaticism, less civil rights, less civil liberties and less religious freedom for those who dissent. We should not forget that Osama Bin Laden, Zahawiri, Hassan al Banna and Sayyed al Qubt have all based their ideas and behavior on Wahabi ideology. Lastly, we should ponder whether a fundamentalist religious regime is in any way better than a secular authoritarian one as the Syrian Baath is.

State of play

History teaches that when a regime's cruelty reaches the point of no-return and global public opinion becomes a hostile majority, the regime is set to fall. History will repeat with Bashar Assad. The only technical detail is whether his entourage will leave or be eliminated. In the Syrian case it is not clear how long it will take for this to happen.

Assad can still count on his army and his security services while the opposition, both political and armed is weak and divided. Russia and China have blocked all external military interventions and this has granted the Halawites and the other minorities supporting the regime to keep their strength. The more the civil war will advance, the greater will radicalism be. The lack of alternatives will lead to irreversible choices.

Currently the Syrian regime can count on the support of the most radical Palestinian factions, the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Kurds, the Druzes, the Christians. This will last as long as relevant

defections will not affect the regime and the deserters will not reach a tipping point. The generals that have fled thus far are not significant and cannot cause the fall of the regime.

When in June 2000 Hafez Assad died and power was handed over to his son Bashar. The event was marked by international media as one that would have led to an improvement in Syria's autocratic regime. A young doctor, who had studied abroad and with little or no love for the military had been chosen to replace his father after the unpredicted death of his brother Basil. Bashar was the signal of a shy opening to democracy in a country that had been ruled until then with the iron glove. Predictions proved wrong. The legacy of power is also in the way it is kept.

Under several points of view, the Syrian question lies outside the clichés of the so called Arab Spring. This is because mainly external interests and relationships are at stake. They have taken over the legitimate will to prevail over an autocratic regime. It is not an hypothetical search for freedom or democracy of an oppressed people that is at stake. There is something bigger, more complex as are the strategic interests of the super-powers, the hegemonic aims of the countries in the region, theological disputes, power struggles, the radicalization of the fight against Israel, the Palestinian issue, the Kurdish problem, Jihadi terrorism, the role of Iran and the stability of the Arabian peninsula, the control of oil reserves. These are all elements that could prolong the agony of the Assad regime and, at the same time, trigger more crisis, more instability, more suffering.

THE JOURNEY OF AN ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT (PART 2)

The hellish journey of illegal immigrants has developed for years on the basis of the parameters and circumstances described in the previous article (Journey of an illegal immigrant part 1). Immigrants are exploited, arrested, freed, arrested again, robbed, expelled and so on. To these vexations we must add the spite for the poor and a fervent racism that easily turns repression into slavery, with women becoming mere objects. The subjects that enact this heinous practice are the following: the police, the army (the border was previously under the responsibility of the armed forces, while the contiguous 15/20 km were under a mixed army/police jurisdiction. The rest of the territory was controlled by the police alone), prison guards, coast guard and security services.

The violation of human rights has never embarrassed Khaddafi's Libya, nor has the government ever tried to change its ways. There was sometimes a bit of uneasiness for the tainted international image of the regime. Nobody – at the international level – has ever wanted to acknowledge or raise the issue. The only grounds for confrontation with Khadafi's Libya has been on market or oil issues.

It was a de facto situation of collusion that has prevented our country (Italy) from exercising – at least after the beginning of the repatriations – any forms of pressure on the Libyan authorities so that the suffering of the repatriated be alleviated. Italy was fully conscious of this state of affairs (the Interior ministry had/has full-time representatives in Tripoli) but was busier trying to play down the situation rather than emphasizing it. There was a guilty confusion between the terms “illegal immigrant” and “refugee” (in part because Khadafi's Libya has never accepted the term “refugee” - and has never officially recognized the UNHCR – because the term “political” was used in conjunction with the term “refugee”).

It must be noted that such an enormous amount of illegal immigrants in its territory has sometimes caused problems of security for Tripoli's authorities. So long as the illegal immigrants would transit through Libya to board boats bound for Italy, the demographic problem had a minor incidence. Yet with the policy of repatriations there was a huge amassment of illegal immigrants that could not leave the country anymore.

Khadafi's regime has faced this problem by hardening its line of repression, trying to push the immigrants into leaving the country and convincing others into not coming. Yet now the situation has changed.

The last act of this drama took place during the recent civil war, when many of these african immigrants were taken for mercenaries hired by the regime and persecuted or killed. Right now in Libya the number of illegal immigrants has greatly decreased.

It is not clear whether in the new Libya the traffic of illegal immigrants transiting towards Europe will still take place as it did. It will depend on the newly installed authorities of that country.

THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Recently the Italian interior minister of the Italian government has travelled to tripoli and – without

excessive media coverage – has signed new accords regarding illegal immigration. Such agreements have been kept secret to the general public.

The interior ministry officially stated that the accords were regarding the formation of Libyan police forces, the patrolling of the coasts, the reinforcement of the surveillance on Libyan borders and the voluntary repatriation of the immigrants to their countries of origin. The insistent requests by Amnesty International to learn the details of the accords were all but ignored.

Either way – and this is the most significant and worrisome side of it all – there is a substantial continuity in the illegal immigration policy of the past Italian governments: the phenomenon is fought by proxy. The government focuses on the means to contrast immigration but does not take into consideration those humane aspects that are still lacking even in the new Libyan leadership.

As we've ascertained (although it was not officially stated), Italy has offered to use once more the 5 coast guard vessels that had been offered to Libya in Berlusconi's time. For the sixth vessel, that has been sunk during bombing by international forces, Italy will be evaluating the possibility of recovering or substituting the vessel with a new one. Thus everything points to a continuity with the past based on joint patrolling and on the repatriation of the illegal immigrants.

Also, the Italian interior ministry will soon be sending three functionaries in the ports of Tripoli, Misurata and Benghazi.

The suggestion that the immigrants will be granted “voluntary” repatriation means that the IOM (International Organization for Migrations) will be enacting an old initiative (that has reaped modest results in the past while costing abundant amounts of money to the Italian interior ministry) which aims at convincing the immigrants to return home in exchange for a modest financial offer (we speak of modest results in the light of the fact that it wasn't the money that convinced the immigrants to leave Libya as much as the abuses of the Libyan authorities). It is evident that Italy intends to continue in the same path, in part because that's what the Libyans want (the Libyan authorities do not want to keep the immigrants in their country after they have been expelled from Italy) and in part because Italy needs absolution on moral grounds (i.e. Italy does expel illegal immigrants, but also gives them a little cash for the return trip). Everything that happens to the illegal immigrant between the expulsion and the internment will once again be hidden under a veil of silence. The IOM will once again keep silent since it receives ample financing from an Italian institutional body that has no interest in letting these aspects emerge.

The so-called formation of police forces was a recurrent initiative with the previous Italian government as well and it served the purpose of winning the favor of their Libyan counterpart.

On a similar note, the patrolling of Libyan borders is an old cliché of the Italian-Libyan relationship. Khadafi asked for a radar system to monitor Libya's southern border with the excuse of wanting to intercept illegal immigration (obviously radars are not able to monitor the movements of immigrants but the Italians were willing to disregard such an aspect in order to gain the dictators' favors). Also, the Italian government was keen to assign a rich contract to a company owned by Finmeccanica. There were – on the Italian side – 350 million euros to spend for such an operation, part of which would be financed by the EU.

Yet if the rules of the game haven't changed, if the accords are still the same, if the Italian

government is still striving to enact the same immigration policy, have there been changes on the Libyan front?

The answer is easily discernible from the continuous reports of human rights violations by the new Libyan leadership. In the change from Khadafi's regime and the present leadership, this aspect has remained unchanged. And in such circumstances, so long as Libya remains a territory of transit for illegal immigrants traveling to Italy and Europe, the predestined victim of all this will still be the poor and defenseless illegal immigrant.