



An EU Survey on Whole-of-Government Approaches to External Conflict and Crisis

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# Italy Report

*Luca Giansanti*

## 1 | Introduction

Italy is likely to be peculiar among EU member states, as it has not formally adopted a whole-of-government approach (WGA) to external crises and conflicts. However, since the 1990s, it has increasingly felt the need to ensure coherence among different dimensions of its foreign and security policy in the framework of crisis-management initiatives, and it has pursued a WGA on a case-by-case basis without significantly upgrading or adapting the relevant administrative structures and coordination arrangements.

The absence of national-level documents explicitly outlining a WGA can be explained by the absence of a national security strategy and some peculiarities of Italy's political and institutional system, such as historical and political difficulties in dealing with the concept of 'national interest' and the ambiguity surrounding that concept. Despite some recent improvements, the prime minister (or, according to the constitution, the 'president of the Council of Ministers') remains a relatively weak figure from an institutional point of view compared to analogous positions in other major EU member states. There is weak national sentiment for historical reasons, and a track record of coalition governments with relatively short stays in power (despite some exceptions) does not facilitate the emergence of a sense of a shared purpose. What's more, as foreign policy has grown closely connected to domestic politics and its intricacies, it has been losing what has traditionally been its largely bipartisan nature.

As a consequence, there is no real tradition in Italy of cross-government joint analysis and strategies. Indeed, there is little institutionalised coordination within the government (and even less when relevant ministers belong to different parties in a coalition government). And there is a lack of institutional memory at the level of political leaders and of an institutionalised lessons learned process.

Since WGA is both a matter of national culture and a highly political concept that can be better defined and implemented when there is a broad consensus on a shared vision of crises and conflicts and of the country's role in responding to them, the above-mentioned details explain why a WGA has yet to find its place in official government documents. Nevertheless, the shortcomings of Italy's political and institutional systems have still not prevented the country from implementing an ad hoc WGA. What's more, with its own distinctive features, this WGA has been providing added value to both national and international initiatives.

In the last 20 years, the Ministry of Defence has been increasingly embracing the concept of employing a 'comprehensive' or 'integrated' approach. This has created greater space for WGA initiatives and – by joining forces with the foreign service, local governments (at the regional and municipal levels), and civil society – it has contributed to defining a special Italian 'species' of a WGA for dealing with external conflicts and crises.

Italy remains a committed supporter of the strategies adopted in multilateral fora, such as the EU Global Strategy, the UN Integrated Approach, NATO's CIMIC concept, the OECD's WGA and the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. Furthermore, it also supports increased cooperation among international organisations (EU-UN, NATO-UN, EU-NATO, EU-UN-AU, etc) aimed at establishing a more comprehensive approach at the international level.

In fact, inputs for a gradual and case-by-case implementation of a WGA in Italy first came from NATO and then, more substantially, from the EU. Indeed, the EU played a key role in raising Italy's awareness about the WGA concept and in influencing and shaping its related activities. Even before the adoption of the joint communication by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the 'EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises' in 2013 and of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016, the EU's debates and documents on the comprehensive/integrated approach to external conflicts and crises had a clear influence on policies and behaviours at the national level.

On the other hand, the impacts of the strategies of other international organisations have been rather sectoral and limited in scope to date. For example, NATO's evolving doctrine on enhanced civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) initially had a positive impact on the Ministry of Defence's approach to such cooperation. However, the military-driven nature of the doctrine creates certain limitations, and it mainly plays a role in security-related efforts. For this reason, its potential for moving in the direction of a broader WGA strategy are limited.

## 2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

Elements of a WGA can be found in some Italian policy documents. For example, early EU debates on the comprehensive approach were the main influence behind the initiative taken by the ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs to draft a joint paper in 2011 and 2012 defining a national multi-dimensional and multilateral approach to crises (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence 2012). This was an informal conceptual document that required follow-up at the government level, which did not take place.

Then, in 2014, a new law on development cooperation confirmed that “international cooperation for sustainable development, human rights and peace [...] is an integral and qualifying part of Italian foreign policy” (Italian Parliament 2014: Art. 1.1). Italy’s development-cooperation efforts, it continued, will pursue, among other things, “preventing conflicts, supporting peace-building and reconciliation processes, as well as post-conflict stabilisation and the consolidation and reinforcement of democratic institutions” (ibid.: Art 1.2(c)).

Furthermore, the White Paper for International Security and Defence of July 2015 (Ministry of Defence 2015), which was endorsed by the government, acknowledges the role of the armed forces in the context of a comprehensive approach (SSR, capacity-/institution-building, stabilisation, reconstruction), the need for more active non-military participation in order to achieve a global approach to crisis management, the increasing need for better coordination and integration at the national system level, and the need to work closely with diplomatic personnel, personnel from other ministries, and representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organisations. Then, a law passed the following year (Italian Parliament 2016) concerning Italy’s participation in international missions and operations confirmed a comprehensive approach to crises and conflicts by bringing together the participation of armed and police forces in missions and initiatives abroad with participation in humanitarian missions, CIMIC initiatives, development-cooperation initiatives and initiatives aimed at supporting peacebuilding and stabilisation.

However, the above-mentioned laws and documents neither provide for clear commitments nor contain guidelines for implementation or lessons learned processes. Thus, their actual contribution to the concrete implementation of a WGA is limited.

Policy coherence has been furthered mainly by the procedure aimed at approving and allocating for the coming year (but sometimes for a shorter period of time) the special budget needed to fund both military and civilian initiatives abroad. Since there has historically been little room within the regular defence budget for funding missions abroad, a special procedure was put in place, and the regular national budget now provides for a specific fund to finance international missions and initiatives. However, the allocation of this fund to different initiatives is dealt with via a separate, specific procedure.

Until 2016, this procedure provided for a decree with the force of law to be adopted by the government and then debated and enacted into law by the parliament within 60 days. Since 2017, however, the new provisions concerning Italy’s participation in international missions and operations from the 2016 law mentioned above (Italian Parliament 2016) provide for a different process. According to this process, a detailed proposal concerning initiatives to be continued, adapted or newly launched during the coming year is adopted by the government,

and then it is discussed (together with a detailed report to be presented by the government on the previous year's initiatives) and authorised by the parliament (by adopting resolutions that can provide for comments and amendments). Then, one or more decrees are drafted by the prime minister to allocate the authorised funding. And, lastly, the parliament has 20 days to provide its advice on such decrees before they can be formally adopted.

Whatever the procedure being followed, it has become usual practice to present parliament with a package covering various initiatives: military and police missions abroad; specific humanitarian and development-cooperation initiatives related to the crisis areas where those missions are deployed to or where conflicts are ongoing (N.B. The core of the funding for development cooperation and humanitarian assistance comes from the regular budget); and stabilisation, peacebuilding and other initiatives related to the same areas. This package, which bears general resemblances to a WGA to crises and conflicts, is meant to make the proposal of military/police missions more palatable to parliament by taking into account the concerns of the centre/ left political parties and their preference for civilian instead of military initiatives and, if necessary, for military initiatives that are limited in scope and duration.

In recent years, Italy has made progress towards a WGA approach to external crises and conflicts that focuses on countries where Italian military assets (including Carabinieri) are deployed under a national or multinational mandate and, in some cases, as the consequence of a long-term national commitment to a specific country (e.g. Afghanistan or Lebanon).

Italy's experience with implementing a WGA also includes its contribution to international responses to natural disasters, namely, the 2004 tsunami in South-East Asia and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. These humanitarian crises provided an opportunity for Italy to transfer abroad the well-established coordination mechanism from the national level led by the Protezione Civile, Italy's national body for predicting, preventing and managing exceptional events. In particular, the WGA that characterised Italy's contribution to the international relief efforts in Haiti provided inspiration to then-EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton for her subsequent work on the comprehensive approach when establishing the EEAS.

Italy's WGA covers countries in its former colonies and in the broader southern neighbourhood, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Niger, the Palestinian territories and Somalia. The fields of action can vary from country to country, depending on their specificities. However, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, stabilisation, cultural heritage, training and providing support to civil society and to the most vulnerable (e.g. women, children, migrants, people with disabilities) are always part of Italy's WGA.

Among Italy's main thematic priorities, the following are worth mentioning: First, so-called stability policing (SP) is one of the distinctive features of Italy's contribution to the comprehensive approaches of the EU, NATO and the UN. The Carabinieri had a hand in developing the SP concept, and Italy has assumed a leading international role in developing its doctrine, in training and in actual deployments on the ground. This has also led to the establishment of structures and organisations based in the north-eastern Italian city of Vicenza: the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU) for the UN and the African Union, the NATO Stability Policing Center of Excellence, and the European Gendarmerie Force (EGF/EUGENDFOR).

A second joint priority is women, peace and security. For example, Article 1 of the 2016 law concerning Italy's participation in international missions and operations (Italian Parliament 2016) explicitly provides for initiatives aimed at implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (and subsequent resolutions) as well as the national action plans on women, peace and security. Among the many initiatives, a Mediterranean Women Mediators Network was established in 2017.

A third priority is the protection of cultural heritage. In the belief that defending cultural heritage is key to fostering peace and sustainable development, Italy's WGA always includes initiatives – also in cooperation with the UN and UNESCO – aimed at protecting cultural heritage from terrorism and mass atrocities; supporting Italian archaeological, anthropological and ethnological missions abroad as well as local cultural institutions; and countering the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts and recovering illegally exported artworks.

Lastly, training is also one of the main priorities of Italy's WGA. This embraces a number of different fields, including: police and military training; training of local workers (including transfer of technologies) in archaeology, restoration and historic conservation; and technical and legislative assistance in various fields (e.g. anti-corruption).

### **3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?**

The main actors that cooperate in Italy's WGA-like activities are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of the Interior, and the intelligence services. A special role is played by the embassy/ambassador in the country concerned. Parliament has to be fully involved in any decision-making.

The core of Italy's WGA lies in a joint approach of the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, and it also depends on the political and personal relationships between the two respective ministers. When in agreement, they can be the driving force behind most WGA initiatives, under the guidance and supervision of the prime minister. Both ministries have been directly involved in the debates in Brussels concerning the EU's comprehensive approach and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), which has clearly had an influence on their approach to crises and conflicts.

At the government level, inter-ministerial coordination on external crisis management should in principle take place within two bodies established at the level of the Prime Minister's Office as part of the national organisation for crisis management created by decree in 2010 (Prime Minister's Office 2010): the Political and Strategic Committee (CoPS) and the Inter-ministerial Team for Situation and Planning (NISP). However, coordination can also take place within the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Security of the Republic (CISR) established by law in 2007 as part of a reform of the intelligence sector, as well as within the Supreme Council of Defence (CSD), a body set forth by Italy's constitution to debate and analyse issues concerning national security and defence.

In practice, however, decisions on external crises and conflicts (including those involving a WGA) are mainly taken by small groups of ministers meeting informally at the initiative of the

prime minister. These meetings, which are chaired by the prime minister, bring together the relevant ministers (Foreign Affairs, Defence, the Interior, etc), the chief of defence (CHOD), and representatives of the intelligence agencies to deal with specific crisis situations. For example, in recent years, this was the case concerning Libya.

In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an established practice of convening regular coordination meetings – both formal and informal – with other ministries. This happens regularly with the Ministry of Defence (at different levels), less regularly with the Ministry of the Interior, and informally with the intelligence agencies. These meetings provide for concrete coordination. Their usefulness, however, depends on their level (a higher/political level usually ensures a concrete follow-up), on the personal relationships between the respective ministers (such as whether they belong to the same political party), and on their relationships with the prime minister.

In principle, formal and informal coordination mechanisms within each ministry work smoothly. But their effectiveness in practice differs according to the administration concerned, as it also depends on the roles assumed by individual leading figures, even among civil servants. In this context, some peculiarities have to be taken into account. For example, coordination between the CHOD and the Defence General Staff, on the one hand, and the minister of defence and his/her cabinet, on the other, can require some efforts at times. And, within the Prime Minister's Office, coordination is not made easier by the differences in the bureaucratic backgrounds of the actors involved, the presence of both political appointees and permanent staff, and the presence of members of the various political parties in the governing coalition. Lastly, coordination in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is more informal, as it involves a limited number of actors and is often based on personal contacts, emails and telephone calls.

#### **4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?**

Because there are no national documents on an Italian WGA, there are also no guidelines, joint financial instruments, joint lessons learned processes, special units or inter-departmental structures of coordination related to the country's WGA. However, this has not prevented the establishment of some coordinating bodies that could provide for a potential 'WGA architecture'.

The provisions of the 2010 decree concerning the national organisation for crisis management (Prime Minister's Office 2010) have only been partially implemented so far, which could also be attributed to the fact that they were adopted by decree rather than by law. On the other hand, both the CoPS and the NISP could provide for the core of a national WGA architecture. But the CoPS has never convened and, even though it meets regularly, the NISP has mainly been dealing with the protection of critical infrastructures (responding to NATO and EU inputs), hybrid threats (in response to EU inputs), and EU-NATO exercises rather than with real-time political and security crises and conflicts. The secretariat of both the CoPS and NISP is provided for by the Office of the Military Adviser to the Prime Minister. This could explain why their activities have so far been limited to a few sectoral issues, since it is very difficult to implement a WGA when military officials are in the lead.

There are two major problems with having small, informally meeting groups of ministers make decisions on external crises and conflicts. First, no formal records are available regarding their outcomes. And, second, the civil servants who are actually in charge of the issues being discussed at these meetings are only involved in preparing them to a limited degree.

A significant institutional change that could strengthen Italy's commitment to a WGA would be the establishment of a National Security Council within the Prime Minister's Office and the appointment of a national security adviser (who could potentially be the diplomatic adviser to the prime minister). Such a change should be discussed by parliament and provided for in a law, as this would ensure that the WGA will benefit from broad political and institutional support and be sustainable over time. For the time being, however, the implementation of political decisions related to a WGA is entrusted to individual ministries and follows their respective procedures.

A number of enablers have facilitated this process. For example, there is the fact that development cooperation has always been part of what was recently renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Development Cooperation as well as an integral part of Italy's foreign policy.

Second, there is the fact that the Carabinieri, who are one of the main features of Italy's WGA, are under the leadership of the Ministry of Defence when deployed abroad, whereas they (and other police forces) are coordinated by the Ministry of the Interior when operating within Italy.

The third enabler involves a bit of administrative reshuffling. In 2010, a few steps in the direction of ensuring better policy coherence were taken in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the one hand, most of the WGA-relevant geographical desks were brought under the leadership of the political director. On the other hand, the CSFP/CSDP desk was shifted from the EU Department to the Political Affairs Department and upgraded to the level of a unit under the direct leadership of the political director. These moves have enabled increased coordination among the structures dealing with the EU, NATO, the UN and the OSCE and the geographical desks dealing with Italy's neighbourhood, and they have made it possible to have a single individual in a leadership position (i.e. the political director) interact with other ministries (primarily the Ministry of Defence). That said, one should note that this remains a tactical rather than a strategic change. Furthermore, despite these improvements, one thing is still missing: bodies to deal with stabilisation and peacebuilding issues while taking a horizontal approach. In theory, one unit could be established within the Foreign Ministry (Political Affairs) to deal with policy, and another unit could be set up in the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation for implementing concrete projects.

The fourth enabler is the process, involving both the government and parliament, through which Italian participation in international missions and operations is agreed and funded. This process, as well as the parliament's process of reviewing the previous year's initiatives, provides for a coherent and transparent overview of both military and civilian initiatives undertaken with regard to external crises and conflicts.

The procedure being followed in this context facilitates the design and implementation of a WGA, as a single decision-making process provides for the allocation of financial resources to different ministries and to both military and civilian initiatives.

However, the 2016 law concerning Italy's participation in international missions and operations (Italian Parliament 2016) was a missed opportunity in terms of a national WGA to external crises and conflicts. This piece of legislation originated from parliament and was only meant to better define its role in this field. As such, it mainly deals with the process and not the substance of the issue, nor does it contain explicit obligations or commitments in terms of a WGA.

As Italy does not have a formal strategic framework for ensuring a coordinated approach for all stakeholders involved in responding to crises and conflicts, there is also no strategic framework for its development-cooperation efforts (e.g. those of the newly established Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) that would ensure a cohesive approach to its initiatives, contribute to synergies with other actors, and facilitate a coordinated approach at the country level. This leads to a situation in which competing priorities are resolved in a pragmatic way: through trade-offs.

Furthermore, to this day, the Ministry of the Interior seems reluctant to be a full partner of the foreign and defence ministries in designing and implementing a national WGA. Since it was less involved in the relevant debates within the international fora, it is somewhat of a missing element in Italy's contributions to the WGA strategies of the EU, the UN, NATO and the OSCE. In this case, getting the Ministry of the Interior to become more involved would require more of a change of cultural mindset than new institutional arrangements.

Since the initiative and political input for a WGA often come from cooperation and coordination among individual ministers, a major 'disabler' in terms of WGA is when relevant ministers (foreign affairs, defence and the interior) belong to different political parties in the governing coalition and do not enjoy good personal and/or professional relationships.

## 5 | Conclusions

Italy's WGA tends to be pragmatic and based on a case-by-case approach with a limited conceptual basis. Despite some institutional weaknesses, it has been successful in ensuring greater policy coherence between different ministries and departments as well as in building mutual trust and confidence through the real-world cooperation of military and civilian personnel.

In terms of its success factors, one can say that dialogue and cooperation with and ownership by the local authorities (at all levels) play a central role. Another factor is the role de facto entrusted with the embassy/ambassador in the country concerned, which continues to be crucial when it comes to designing a vision for Italy's engagement and to bringing various national and local actors together.

Since the political and institutional system does not provide for clear and permanent leadership or guidance, the role of individual personalities (both members of the government and civil servants) matters more than formal coordination mechanisms in the decision-making process. When the right network of the right people has been in place, the guidance provided

has been effective in enabling a WGA, despite the fact that a lot of follow-up work has remained to be done at the administrative and working levels.

Owing to the absence of national documents, guidelines and procedures, almost every initiative requires additional efforts to be designed and implemented as well as daily monitoring to ensure that coordination continues to be practiced by all actors involved. Once put in motion, the push for a WGA is usually sustained over time, even when there are subsequent changes in the political leadership.

Since the EU played a significant role in raising Italy's awareness about the WGA as well as in influencing and shaping Italy's WGA-related activities, Italy has high expectations of the EU and it has been consistently pushing for an EU WGA in Libya, on migration issues, and in the Horn of Africa. Regarding Libya and the migration issue, Italy has provided inputs and leadership to the relevant EU CSDP initiatives. What's more, via the so-called 'Global Compact for Migration', Italy has made a written contribution to a comprehensive and long-term strategy for EU external action on migration, which has influenced subsequent European Council conclusions and European Commission proposals in this field.

A WGA approach also characterises Italy's participation in the Global Coalition Against Daesh. Italy supported a multidimensional approach identified in the coalition's different lines of action (military progress, stabilisation, counter-financing, preventing the movement of foreign terrorist fighters, and countering propaganda) and the subsequent involvement of a multitude of actors at the national level. Italy is also among the top contributors to the Global Coalition in Iraq, supporting its efforts in all lines of action and developing a multi-dimensional strategy that integrates international and national engagement in order to maximise effectiveness and coherence.

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