Chapter 3
Italian trade unionism and the ETUC: in favour of a European social actor

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1. Italian unions and European integration

The history of relations between the Italian and the European trade union movement is connected to the foundation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which cannot be understood without considering the need for participation and union representation that since 1950 has developed within the process of European integration. The asymmetries and dynamics of this history thus seem to be paradigmatic with regard to reconstruction of the evolution of the ETUC, given the nature of European trade unionism. In fact, if within the Italian labour movement we can find positions initially different from those of the major European democratic trade union confederations, a (sometimes exhausting) process developed later that aimed to favour the inclusion and expansion of ETUC membership. The Italian trade union experience assumed a position of special importance in the European scenario. Along with the German trade unions they endorsed the Schuman Plan and belonged to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC); while, like the British unions, they belonged to the European Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Union (ICFTU).

1. The Italian leaders of the CISL (founded in 1950) had participated in the founding of the ICFTU and its regional body, to which the UIL became affiliated immediately (1951). The social communist unionism of the CGIL, adhering to the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), contrasted sharply with ‘free’ trade unionism; only in 1992 did the CGIL request and obtain affiliation with the ICFTU. In Italy, therefore, no union belonged to the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ICCW/WLC), and most Catholic workers belonged to the CISL. The post-fascist confederation CISNAL remained outside international trade union confederations, as did the UGL union, which inherited this organisation when it was founded in 1996.
those international trade union contexts that the Italian trade unions CISL and UIL made a significant contribution to the German, French and Benelux unions, among the Six Countries that were members of the common market (ECM), while the British and Nordic trade unions worked under the aegis of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Ciampani and Gabaglio 2010).

The role of Italian trade unions in the life of the ETUC was thus rooted in the attitude of these unions when they were called upon to take a position on the process of integration and its social and political implications at the national and international levels. Only in this perspective can we fully understand CISL and UIL’s objectives when they promoted the birth of the ETUC in 1973 and CGIL’s request to become affiliated in 1974. After that, Italian unionism became one of the largest bodies of national employee representation at European level.

Each of the major Italian confederations tried to promote convergence on common positions in order to play a meaningful role in the evolution of the ETUC. For a long time, CISL and UIL, the two unions that had the most experience in Community life, were a driving force with regard to the central and eastern European unions that joined the European democratic trade union movement in a transitional process from the 1980s onwards. This process was also influenced by the development of national syndicalism. However, there is no doubt that the European union experience made it possible to support the proposals of democratic trade unionism that had taken root thanks to workers’ associations that were independent from political parties and the state, centred on contract negotiations and social regulation in order to participate in the implementation of labour market reforms (Ranieri 2007). From a historical perspective, moreover, the complex conjunction of interests and strategies of union actors at the European level that aimed at tipping the scales in favour of a more social Europe originated when unions chose to participate in the international bodies created in the post-war period (Carew 1996).

In Italy, it was Giulio Pastore, leader of the CISL, who on 18 April 1950 took the floor at the Third Conference of the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the European Recovery Programme to clarify the role of European trade unionism in relation to the problems of the labour force arising from the integration of international markets. He underscored that it was ‘necessary to face the general problem of trade liberalisation, which is the first step towards creating a single European market’. Supported by Mario Romani, the principal scholar of industrial relations in Italy, Pastore noted that the coordination of investments in Europe could not be left ‘to the exclusive jurisdiction of governments or, even worse, to the initiative of interested industrial groups’, because if this occurred, all the difficulties that would ensue would weigh exclusively on workers. This meant that in relation to all labour-related issues, democratic western European trade unions should be allowed to participate in a direct, albeit advisory capacity in all organisations and international negotiations that deal with this issue, eventually entering also into direct agreements with one another, both bilateral and multilateral in nature, on all issues that, technically, are their responsibility, with the aim of contributing their solidarity to these negotiations.2

By adopting these positions, the CISL did not hesitate to take an openly pro-European stance and developed an approach to the process of European integration in a trade union perspective.3

While CISL and UIL were playing an important role in the European integration process and pushing the Italian government in this direction with their criticisms (Ciampani 2000; Tosi 2008; Craveri and Varsori 2009), the Communist current of the CGIL trade union opposed all aspects of European integration, in accordance with the slogans of the WFTU. The limits of the CGIL approach in the Italian trade union debate were fully revealed in 1956; during 1957 the CGIL and its socialist current, in particular, redrew their European approach for the first time (Ciampani 2010). In the early 1960s, the pressure of national and international political changes contributed to giving a new role to the minority socialist components within the CGIL and they urged the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to assess the political consequences of the recognition of European integration as a ‘fact of life’. In the second half of the 1960s, the PCI began to ask the Italian government to implement its policies in the context of European institutions – the same institutions they had hitherto condemned, in accordance with Soviet policies. Meanwhile, CGIL was ready to draft an international policy (which until then was lacking due to its ties with the PCI and the WFTU) (Maggiorani 1998; Del Biondo 2010). In this context, the first talks – in 1963 – between socialist Fernando Santi for the CGIL and European Commissioner Levi Sandri paved the way for the CGIL’s decision to open an office in Brussels.4

At the same time, CISL and UIL recognised clearly the instrumental nature of CGIL’s policy shift with regard to European institutions: the stance taken by the democratic unions concerning the Communist unionism present in western countries and affiliated to the WFTU was to reject any form of agreements or arrangements, even if they were limited to the European level. The goal was to pose as a pre-condition for any sort of relations the explicit approval of the pan-European project and to facilitate the detachment of a significant part of Italian trade unionism from the international organisation linked to Moscow. Thus, while pressure was being applied to reunify the many Italian socialists spread across the various national political parties, the Vice President and European Commissioner for Social Affairs, Social Democrat Lionello Levi Sandri (Mechi and Varsori 2008), did not attend the CGIL Congress in March 1965. On the contrary, after the signing of the Treaty that merged the executive branches of the Community, the following April he brought the greetings of the Community bodies to the CISL Congress (CISL 1965: 50–51). While the European Trade Union Secretariat (ETUS) was being developed, CISL leader Bruno Storti was nominated by the German and Belgian trade unions as the Community countries’ candidate for the ICFTU presidency. In July 1965, for the first time an Italian Catholic union leader was elected as the head of a democratic international trade union organisation (Ciampani 2000; Friso 2001).

This stalemate prompted CGIL to denounce its exclusion from the Community institutions as ‘discrimination’, despite the fact that until then it had claimed its radical choice was a struggle ‘against monopolies’ (a term they had used previously to stigmatise European

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4. See the newspaper Le Drapeau Rouge, 29 March 1963, conserved in ASN CISL, Carte Balboni, 6 CESL, Rapporti CGIL-CGT. In the autumn, Ilario Tabarri was introduced to the Information and Documentation Centre of the Community as a trade unionist and journalist of L’Unità, the newspaper of the Communist Party; A. C. Rocchi, Deputy Secretary of the CISL, 29 November 1963, therein. On Tabarri’s work between 1963 and 1966, see Del Biondo (2010: 140–164).
integration). The first suggestions of disaffiliation from the WFTU, which began to appear within CGIL on the eve of the Warsaw Congress of the international Communist trade union, were however set aside in favour of ‘orthodox’ proposals to establish regional structures in western Europe with ‘broad autonomy’ with respect to the Soviet Union. Thus, in December 1965, in compliance with the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the WFTU (which imposed ties with the French CGT) (Del Biondo 2010: 82), the CGIL enunciated the change of policy: ‘The European dimension, in short, is the contemporary and modern dimension, and is the necessary path of the CGIL in the Sixties’ (Scheda 1965). Following the request made by the two western unions with a communist majority to join the Economic and Social Committee, in May 1966 the European Commissioner for Social Affairs gave CGIL a formal hearing for the first time. The meeting encouraged the foundation of the Comité Permanent de liaison et d’initiative syndicale CGIL – CGT (Del Biondo 2007; Ciampiani 2010), which opened a secretariat office in Brussels only in May 1967.

In this context, it had become urgent for the unions already present at the Community level – among them CISL and UIL – to establish a European trade union body that could play an active transnational role in the face of the socio-economic policies being promoted by the European Commission. In the second half of 1968, the Commission itself – and in particular Levi Sandri, who had been confirmed Vice President – exerted further pressure (supported by De Gaulle) to obtain participation in Community affairs on the part of the western communist trade unions, which provoked a reaction from the democratic trade unions. Théo Rasschaert, ETUS General Secretary, then remarked to Levi Sandri that international relations between trade union organisations were not a matter for the Commission and that besides, the Commission would obtain the support of the free trade unions only on the basis of the concrete measures it implemented.

In July 1969, as is well known, the free trade unions took note of the resolution of the Christian Trade Unions in Europe (with which they had made a public declaration at Community level already in 1967) to negotiate not only a common programme with the EFTUC, but also the hypothesis of a ‘collaboration organisée et structurée’. To proceed in this direction, contacts with Cool and Kulakowski ensued at the top level of the OE-CMT: it was the start of the process that would lead to the birth of the ETUC. Faced with the prospect of the ‘process of unification of the free trade unions of the Six Countries’, Storti opened up, so to speak, to collaboration with the CGIL-CGT Committee, on two conditions: its independence from the WFTU and the ‘creation of an organic structure of the two trade union centres at European level’. This raised problems that seemed insurmountable. Nevertheless, the need for a solemn statement about the nature of their
response to European integration as a precondition appeared less urgent. CISL and UIL seemed to take their time, as did CGIL, before evaluating the consequences of trade union unity, which for different reasons many in Italy were betting in favour of; the overall framework of the European policies of the Italian trade unions, however, had already undergone a radical change.

2. National unions for the ETUC or inside the ETUC?

The political and institutional crisis of the Italian governments in the late 1960s and early 1970s was intertwined with the social crisis that erupted for the trade unions in autumn 1969 (Ciampani 2013). The fundamental differences that were preventing the Italian trade unions from converging on a common position at the European level emerged after 28 February 1969, when Krasucki of the CGT and Lama of the CGIL had met with the leaders of the European Commission, Rey and Levi Sandri (Del Biondo 2007: 231). The significance of the event was highlighted by the almost simultaneous entry into the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg of the first members of the Communist Party nominated by the Italian government (Ferrari and Maggiorani 2005).

The Congresses of the CGIL, CISL and UIL held in 1969 dealt with the issue of the unity of Italian trade unions. The idea that the process of Italian union unification could change CGIL’s strategies began to circulate in European trade unions. Meanwhile, the unitary trade union response to the intensification of the conflict over contract renewals in October established the joint action of CGIL, CISL and UIL as a custom in Italy. Thus, even if at that time no agreement was found that would have permitted a joint declaration of the three confederations in relation to international and European policy, a unique initiative was organised, and though it had no direct reference to Community dynamics, it represented a public signal of the change under way in trade union action. In unofficial proceedings at a meeting of European trade unions with the EEC, ‘les représentants des trois Confédérations Syndicales italiennes’ organised a press conference on the ‘Conflits sociaux en Italie, leurs caractères, leurs perspectives, leurs significations dans le contexte européen’ at the Plaza Hotel in Brussels on 17 November 1969. The process of Italian trade union unity was thus expressed for the first time at the European level. Moreover, the differences between the Italian trade unions on the issue of European integration emerged again in the long-awaited triangular European Conference on labour issues (Degimbe 1999: 197–199; Savoini 2000: 41–43) held in Luxembourg in April 1970. After the first proposal for the unification of CGIL, CISL and UIL was made in October 1970, the three national secretariats met on 1–2 February 1971 to outline a road map for unification and to face the knotty problem of international trade unionism. Although certain significant objections to the process towards unity were publicly organised within the trade unions the following spring, a unitary conference was held on European trade unionism on 21–22 June 1971 to express the desire for increased ‘union power’ in the European Community, while contrasting ‘nationalist and isolationist pressures’.

At that time however, further ‘significant differences’ surfaced, as was seen shortly thereafter at the meeting of the CGIL, CISL and UIL secretariats at Ostia on 25–26 June. In

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13. See IISH, ETUC 1268.
any case, at the beginning of 1972, the push to form a single union in Italy came to an end. The process of unification got stranded and fell back on the formation of the CGIL-CISL-UIL Unitary Federation.\footnote{The ‘Unitary federation CGIL, CISL, UIL’, formed in 1972, entered a period of crisis at the end of the 1970s and was finally abandoned between 1984 and 1985 (Ciampani 2006: 222–223).} Abandoning the planned unification allowed the Italian trade unions to participate more peacefully in the ETUC formation process.

As is well known, after the conclusion of the informal talks held in Frankfurt, Oslo and Geneva, the foundation of the European trade union made progress with the Luxembourg meeting of December 1972 (Dølvik 1999: 56–58).\footnote{The documents on the relations between ETUS and the European organisation of IFCTU/WCL are in KADOC, ICV/WVA, 78.} Faced with the problems inside ICFTU and the contrast between the unions of the EFTA and those of the ECM, the Christian trade unions accepted the procedure that was designed to establish the ETUC in two stages: the foundation of the ETUC in Brussels on 8–9 February 1973 (attended by 17 trade unions from ICFTU) and the extraordinary congress in Copenhagen, 23–25 May 1974 (with the membership of the seven European organisations of the WCL). Once again, CISL and UIL were among the founders of the ETUC: they confirmed their belief in free and democratic trade unionism and their commitment to supporting a European representation of workers, particularly in relation to the European institutions.\footnote{See ASN CISL, CES, A85/1 and A85/2.} In this process, the question of CGIL’s membership was raised once again – it was still a member of the WFTU.

The CGIL Congress in July 1973 modified the Constitution with the intention of asking the WFTU to allow the transformation of CGIL’s status as member to the status of ‘associate’, thereby avoiding any emphasis of the significance of this international choice (Loreto 2010; Del Rossi 2010). At the WFTU Congress in October 1973, in fact, there was widespread consensus on the meaning of a statutory amendment that sought to strengthen the proselytism of the communist trade union.\footnote{In reference to the WFTU congress in Varna, 15-22 October 1973, see also the article by A. Bonaccini (1974b).} The position that CGIL asserted proudly, in effect, was based on two fragile elements: the political approach and subordination to the choices of the other Italian confederations. First, CGIL’s attitude was the result of a political compromise within the context of the internal dynamics of the PCI. The commitment of CGIL representatives who in the 1970s were preparing to take on responsibilities at European level was rooted in the dialectic of the Communist Party, unlike their predecessors, who due to their predominantly socialist orientation were thus a minority voice in CGIL’s decision-making. In the early 1970s, the reformist wing of the PCI had developed the idea that ‘Europe is not only a geopolitical and institutional model, but an alternative solution to the bipolar world’. In this perspective, Aldo Bonaccini (CGIL confederal secretary, responsible for international relations) proposed Giancarlo Meroni as secretary of the CGIL-CGT Standing Committee in Brussels. He had two objectives: ‘to ensure that the CGIL as such was a partner in dialogue with the European institutions’ and ‘to advance dialogue with other European trade unions’.\footnote{Giancarlo Meroni’s interview with the author, 4 January 2013/13 May 2013.}

Secondly, the entry of the union led by Lama in the ETUC was inevitably mediated by CISL and UIL, which acted as guarantors of CGIL in Europe. At the 1973 CISL Congress, Storti stressed the need ‘to promote worker unity at the Community level, starting with the Economic and Social Committee, in order to counter the unity of employers with a unitary stance of the representatives of the interests of the European and Trade union
movement, thereby going beyond previous discriminations’ (CISL 1973: 119–123). The experience of the ‘unitary Federation’ of the three major unions seemed to be the national basis in Italy of this ‘international policy’, but problems remained at a European level, as the CGIL was still a member of the WFTU. Despite this awareness, Lama wrote to the Secretary of the ETUC on 20 July to state that CGIL, as a member of the Federation CGIL, CISL, UIL, would welcome an initial exchange of views to establish possible relations aimed ‘at encouraging the unity of the European workers in the ETUC’. This passage was framed in cautious language to be acceptable to the WFTU.

Moreover, a letter of 10 October had already announced that the ETUC was open to an initial meeting with the CGIL. On 20 November, in London, the delegation of the European trade union consisting of Feather, Storti, Vanni and Rasschaert listened to the intentions with which CGIL intended to approach the ETUC. New documents aimed at clarifying things were drafted at the two subsequent meetings on 3 March and again on 10 April 1974. Within the ETUC the guarantees of other Italian unions with regard to CGIL did not seem sufficient to overcome the widespread reservations, prompting the European trade union to ask the ICFTU for its assessment on the eve of the extraordinary congress of 7 March 1974 (Ciampani 2006: 224). The outcome of the three meetings that were held between delegations of the ETUC and CGIL was discussed at the Executive Committee meeting of 9 May 1974. DGB, TUC, CISL and UIL shared the idea that, in any case, the Congress could choose to give a mandate to the subsequent Executive Committee to decide on the possible affiliation. The postponement of the decision to the executive meeting scheduled for 9 July was confirmed at the ETUC Congress (Sepi 1974; Meroni 1974a). Lama sent an explicit request to join the ETUC on 10 June 1974. Having abandoned WFTU membership status, CGIL dissolved the Standing Committee with the CGT and asked to join the ETUC on equal terms with the other organisations that were already members. At the ETUC Executive Committee meeting on 9 July, CISL supported CGIL’s application, and recommended affiliating CGIL without waiting for ratification at the congress, when the DGB asked to postpone the decision because of CGIL’s role in WFTU. It was the vice president Storti, with the support of the Vice-Presidents, who decisively rejected the opposition proceedings. Also part of the debate were the German objections, supported by Kersten for ICFTU and shared above all by Bergeron of FO and Houthuys of CSC, who feared communist infiltration in the organisation of the ETUC, which was still in the process of getting settled. In favour of admitting of CGIL were the FGTB and the Danish LO; the representatives of the Irish ICTU and the Austrian ÖGB were also in favour. For the CFDT, CGIL was taking on a role that was increasingly independent of WFTU and was now ‘capable of playing a responsible role at the heart of the ETUC’. His confederation counted on his Italian colleagues’ ‘guarantee’ that ‘CGIL will democratically accept the policies pursued by the ETUC’. UIL was in favour of accepting CGIL “not only to strengthen its policy at Italian level but above all because it wishes to strengthen the ETUC’s unity of action at the European level’. Storti also confirmed the affirmative vote of CISL, supported by the TUC. Strategies and expectations of transversal orientations that broke with the traditions of Labour, Social Democratic and

22. Executive Committee of the ETUC, 9 July 1974, ASN CISL, CES, A96/1.
Christian unions all overlapped in the vote on the question of CGIL’s affiliation (Ciampani 2015). The proposal required two-thirds of the votes to pass; in other words, the approval of 18 of the 28 representatives present at the ETUC Executive Committee meeting: there were 21 votes in favour. Among the contrary votes, besides the three members of the DGB there were also the representatives of CGT-FO, LCGB of Luxembourg, CSC of Belgium and CNG of Switzerland.23

The size of the Italian component of the ETUC thus increased considerably. There were also significant consequences for the three confederations themselves. ETUC membership forced CGIL, among other things, to take the size and the strategy of the European body into consideration and become more detached from the exclusively national debate for which it had been designed.24 An article by Bonaccini in Rassegna sindacale in July 1974, announcing the event, retraced the rationale of the application for ETUC membership that Lama had signed and emphasised that now the unitary Federation CGIL, CISL, UIL had ‘a common and immediate centre for international organisation’ (Bonaccini 1974a). Still missing from the article was an explicit reference to European integration. An article written later by Meroni made up for lost time: ‘However, the European dimension is now indispensable in order to solve any national problem. The constitution of the ETUC has become in this sense a reference model, but its activation depends on the capacity for initiative and the political will of its members’ (Meroni 1974b). Without sparing criticism of the activities of the other unions and the United States, Meroni did not hesitate to use a new language for CGIL as he evoked a ‘revival of Europe’ (an expression used by CISL and UIL since the mid-1950s).

For the first time, a few CGIL leaders participated in the ETUC Executive Committee meeting of 25 October 1974: Lama, Boni, Didò and Bonaccini. At the operational level, the Italian trade unions began working together. In October, the international offices of CGIL, CISL and UIL announced the participation of their union representatives as delegates of the unitary federation to a meeting with the EEC Economic policy committee.25 Despite this effort to gain more weight in European dynamics, the political platform of the unitary federation proved to be its weak point. On 19 December 1974, Storti wrote to the General Secretary of the ETUC announcing that the CGIL, CISL and UIL Executive Committee meeting of 12 December had adopted its report on relaunching trade union unity in Italy. In what was the last attempt at unification, he could not define a shared European programme for Italian trade unions. He stated that they actively promoted

shared commitments to peace, to peaceful coexistence, to the fight against residual colonialism, against dictatorships, in favour of trade union freedoms. We need to fully evaluate the results of unity at the international level; that is to say, within a framework where tensions and conflicts are certainly not inferior to those we experience at the national level.26

23. In this sense, it should be noted that against the entrance of CGIL in the ETUC was a significant minority group that had supporters in various unions, including the ‘free’ trade unions (4 votes) and Christian trade union representatives (3 votes).
25. In the presence of the vice-president of the Commission Haferkamp, Baduel Glorioso (CISL) and Meroni (CGIL) had spoken for the unitary federation. See the document in ASN CISL, CES, A96/2.
26. The letter in IISH, ETUC 1269.
The mediation of the CISL had thus led to very modest results, especially in light of the guarantees offered to European trade unions as recently as the previous 9 July.

In the world of Italian trade unions, therefore, the original ‘choice for Europe’ expressed by CISL and UIL was now joined by the ‘European choice’ of CGIL (Ciampani 2010; Del Biondo 2010). An asymmetry remained, however, due to different historical paths and strategies. In the following years all this would produce contradictions – thinly veiled by public rhetoric – in the action of the national trade unions (where CGIL had the most members) and in the action of the European trade unions (where CISL and UIL could rely on a dominant position). Of course, the entry of CGIL in the ETUC did significantly raise the representative (and financial) weight of the Italian trade unions. For this reason, UIL and CISL could cultivate ambitions of an increasingly decisive role in Europe. The policy of the trade union led by Lama with regard to European initiatives appeared to be subject to Labour and Social Democratic initiatives, but a path leading to new alliances for CGIL was now open. Considered as a whole, the different paths followed by the Italian trade unions to arrive at a common representation in Europe and the common political push to gain positions of power within the ETUC posed the same question again for Italian trade unionism: are we in favour of the ETUC or only inside the ETUC?

3. ETUC and Italian unionism in the European crisis

Beginning in 1974, the Italian trade unions contributed to the efforts of the ETUC to achieve internal cohesion and, simultaneously, to appear effective in their relations with the European institutions. CISL, CGIL and UIL worked together on the question of ‘European energy policy’, which was a priority for the ETUC as soon as it was formed and had strong political connotations (although it also highlighted the difficulty the European unions had in implementing concrete action following their analysis of the situation). In 1975, moreover, they participated with other unions in the debate on the creation of the Dublin Foundation and the CEDEFOP, as well as in the discussion of the ETUC regarding the creation of the European Trade Union Institute. Furthermore, the Italian trade unions worked together again for the new Tripartite Economic and Social Conference, preparing a document as the unitary Federation CGIL, CISL and UIL in November 1975. Granting space to CGIL’s demanding attitude, the central demand to associate the unions with the processes of economic decision-making, both at the political and business levels, demonstrated the force of attraction of CISL’s cultural perspective.

The three Italian unions took on a political and organisational role within the ETUC, competing at the European level with the unions of France and the Nordic countries. Following the death of Alfred Misslin, at the end of March 1975 Storti, in the role of vice-president,
initiated the process of replacing him in the secretariat of the ETUC. The following May, Vanni, for UIL, proposed Dario Marioli, a union representative active in Switzerland. The nomination was made in agreement with CISL and CGIL, and was thus presented as an Italian proposal. The debate on the nominations officially began in the ETUC on 30 September. The idea of nominating Kulakowski to the general secretariat soon appeared impractical, though on November 20 he was proposed by CFDT and CSC as deputy secretary in light of the possible withdrawal of Carlsen at the next congress. At that point, the position of CISL became crucial as a bridge between the Christian and free trade unions of the ETUC and as an ambitious reference point for unions in the Mediterranean region.

Storti, however, had worked in conjunction with CGIL, CISL and UIL in order to take an important step. Once the procedures for the European Trade Union Congress the following year had begun, on 18 November 1975 the three Italian confederations proposed Baduel Glorioso, who had a long history as head of the International Department of CISL, as General Secretary of the ETUC. On 3 December 1975, the General Secretary of CISL wrote to Salanne and Houthuys to confirm support for Kulakowski and reiterate the nomination of Baduel made by CGIL and UIL: ‘This nomination ... will be confirmed if at the next meeting of the Executive Committee no nomination is submitted of a leader elected by any other national Confederation’. The Italian position emphasised the need for strong leadership and did not seem entirely satisfied by the role of president of the union in Luxembourg. After Rasschaert’s official opening message, Assistant Secretary Carlsen took over the secretariat until the congress. The Italian candidate was withdrawn in December and the Italians endorsed the candidacy of Hintersheid that was to be proposed at the congress. Kulakowski accepted the post of General Secretary of the CMT. The British Peter Coldrick had obtained entry into the ETUC secretariat, and at the congress he was joined (with unanimous consent) by the Frenchman François Staedelin and by Dario Marioli of UIL. Storti was confirmed vice-president of the Executive Committee. The Italian position had a significant political role and could now benefit from being an operator in the union structure in Brussels. CGIL, which still appeared dependent on the two other Italian confederations at this level, increased its political weight in western Europe and established new relationships, while maintaining the existing ones with the unions of socialist countries.

Soon, however, the dissatisfactions of the Italian trade unions resurfaced concerning the compromise on the General Secretary, which did not satisfy their push for a stronger leading role of the ETUC with regard to institutions, employers and political forces in Europe. In October 1977 the criticism of Hinterscheid’s bureaucratic management of the European trade union had already been manifested publicly in two articles published in CGIL’s

32. See ASN CISL, CES, A97/4.
33. About the position of CISL in the Mediterranean area see Nota interna dell’Ufficio Relazioni internazionale della CISL in ASN CISL, CES, A97/1.
34. As demonstrated by the correspondence between Storti and CFDT and CSC from November–December 1975, in the archives of the CGIL. ASCGIL nazionale, Segreteria confederale, Atti e corrispondenza, 1975, Rapporti con i Paesi dell’Europa occidentale, 157.
35. See the documents in ASCGIL nazionale, Segreteria confederale, Atti e corrispondenza, 1975, Rapporti con i Paesi dell’Europa occidentale, 172, and in the dossier of Executive Committee meeting of 27 February 1976, ASN CISL, CES, A99/2.
36. See the debate in Executive Committee meeting of London, 21 April 1976, in ASN CISL, CES, A99/4.
37. See the articles of Bonaccini, Meroni and Magnani into special issue of Rassegna sindacale of 29 September 1977.
Rassegna sindacale and CISL’s Conquiste del Lavoro. The General Secretary of the ETUC appeared clearly affected by the method and content of the public attack. In practical terms, the Italian trade unions had launched a political signal to ensure that ETUC decisions were not made without their participation. This Italian need derived principally from the political value attributed to it by Bonaccini, who was pushing the Communist current of CGIL towards European social democracy, and by Gabaglio, who sought to manage the change in balance of the two ‘souls’ of CISL.

In January 1977, Storti resigned at the CISL General Council. His position as Vice-President of the ETUC passed to his successor, Luigi Macario, former leader of FIM, confirmed as head of the Italian confederation at the Congress held the following June. In July, Gabaglio was ‘put in charge of international activities’: in the following years he signed the confederal secretariat’s report on CISL’s ‘international union policy’ (CISL 1981). The activities of the International Department, which had until then been carried out under the tacit authority of the General Secretary, soon took on a more political character. On one hand, he favoured unitary action at the European level, while on the other he promoted greater CISL participation in the international arena through initiatives increasingly articulated and coordinated within the unitary confederation. At the beginning of 1978, the CISL, on behalf of the unitary federation, also proposed Domenico Valcavi as the first Director of the ETUI. The application was withdrawn the following April to contribute to a unitary decision in favour of Koepke, from Germany. On 18 October 1978, however, Baudel Glorioso left CISL – not without some friction – when she was elected President of the European Economic and Social Committee.

Lama’s speech at the II ETUC Congress of April 1976 had left the impression that CGIL, in its relations with the free trade unions, was seeking the credibility and the political legitimacy that it did not have in its own country, where it lived in the shadow of the PCI (ICFTU 1979: 322–326). On the occasion of a conference sponsored by the Gramsci Institute and CDRL on ‘the participation of workers in business decision-making’ (Milan, 4–5 February 1978), Meroni presented a report on European experiences of participation, drawing attention to the European economies and indicating a new path towards social democratic trade unionism (Ferri et al. 1978). CGIL’s withdrawal from WFTU, which had been prepared on the basis of socio-economic dynamics, finally occurred in March 1978, on the eve of the first European Employment Day, 5 April 1978. For part of the CGIL leadership it was necessary to go beyond the stage of an instrumental policy concerning the European Community and to adhere to the idea that ‘the unity of Europe on the basis of specific economic and social policies is an essential condition for resolving the crisis in Italy, but also for raising the question of the methods and objectives of the development, at national and international levels, in correct proportion to its current dimensions’ (Meroni 1979: 93–95).

The original CISL approach made headway in the wing of CGIL that aspired to a social

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38. See the articles in IISH, ETUC, 1269.  
39. The attention paid to the Italian initiatives by the Secretariat of the ETUC are in IISH, ETUC 1273.  
40. In support of his political action, in January 1979 Gabaglio requested all the previous documents missing from the archives for the period 1973 to 1978, IISH, ETUC, 1269.  
41. Gabaglio’s international initiative was reinforced between 1977 and 1978, when Angelo Gennari, Antonio Miniutti, Franco Chittolina, Giacomina Cassina and Luigi Cal joined CISL’s International Department (Ciampani 2000).  
42. See the documents of Executive Committee meeting of 13–14 April 1978 in ASN CISL, CES, A103/4.  
43. Also participating in the important meeting were Bassetti, Carli, Signorile, Giugni, Trentin, Benvenuto and Merli Brandini; their speeches were cited in the concluding remarks made, on behalf of the PCI, by Giorgio Napolitano.
democratic approach, after the 1976 Congress of the ETUC: trade union independence, the centrality of sectoral and company-level bargaining and participation in socio-economic decision-making (Meroni 1978).

In view of the third congress of the ETUC in Monaco (14–18 May 1979), however, the difficulty in achieving a unitary representation of CGIL, CISL and UIL in the European trade union was again evident, which had considerable political and statutory implications (an Italian representation under the formal pretence of a single affiliation was unthinkable). Anyway, between 1978 and 1980 the idea began to spread among the leaders of the three Italian unions that the ETUC should not be merely a bureau of officials, but a real union association structured as a confederation. In summer 1979, the beginning of open talks between ETUC and UNICE to explore the possibility of bilateral agreements at the European level contributed to progress in this direction. Meanwhile, the Italian union movement had launched a new joint initiative that created great difficulties for the ordinary management of the ETUC. A letter from the unitary federation CGIL-CISL-UIL of 15 June 1979 supported the idea of a rotation among the three Italian confederal secretaries in the office of Vice-President of the ETUC, creating a serious problem for the meeting of the ETUC Executive Committee in Geneva of 27–28 June 1979. The Executive Committee took note of the decision of the ‘Italian federation’, but chose to put on record that ‘the principle of rotation of ETUC vice-presidents has not been adopted’ when Carniti was elected unanimously as one of its vice-presidents. A year later, however, at the Executive Committee meeting of the ETUC of 9–10 October 1980, Carniti presented his resignation, declaring that the previous non-adoption of the principle ‘does not mean a refusal’ and proposed the candidacy of Lama on behalf of the federation CGIL, CISL, UIL. The Italian attitude had become a model: even Thomas Nielsen (LO, Denmark) resigned to make way for Tor Halvorsen (LO, Norway). This time the new situation did not give rise to debates on the rotation of vice-presidents and thus, for the first time, in December 1980 CGIL had its leader, Luciano Lama, within the decision-making bodies of the ETUC.

The apex of possible collaboration between the Italian trade unions at the European level was reached, perhaps, in June 1980, when maximum publicity was to be given to events related to European trade unionism in a crowded square in Venice packed with members of the three Italian trade unions. Participating in the event was the President of the ETUC, Wim Kok, in the context of the first EU summit meeting with a delegation of the European trade union. In the meantime during the so-called Anni di Piombo (Years of lead) – characterised by terrorist attacks and the consequent policy of ‘national solidarity’ (after the PCI failed to overtake the DC at the polls) – tensions between the unions stemming from their links with political parties were renewed on the eve of the first elections of the European Parliament. In April 1979, Baduel Glorioso informed the ETUC of her European candidacy as an independent PCI candidate and on 2 May 1979, Macario announced to Hintersheid his decision to run for DC with the intention of electing figures from the world of trade unionism to the European Parliament. Furthermore, during that
same period Mario Didò, too, left CGIL to become a PSI candidate, as did Aldo Bonaccini as PCI candidate.49

In 1980 the unitary federation entered a period of crisis in Italy due to CGIL’s opposition to CISL’s participatory and anti-inflationary policy, led by Pierre Carniti (who had overcome the internal divisions with Franco Marini, Deputy General Secretary)50 and the energetic anti-government protests of the PCI (Saba 2000: 273–296). The CISL, with Carniti and Gabaglio representing all the Italian trade unions in the Finance and Management Committee of the ETUC, in 1980 became the central force in anchoring unified Italian trade unionism to a European perspective, a concept that it had developed together with CGIL and UIL in the three previous years. At the beginning of 1981, when a replacement had to be found for Marioli as secretary of the ETUC, the unitary federation CGIL, CISL, UIL proposed the candidature of Antonio Miniutti, to which a British objection was made, requesting that qualified candidates should be considered and not only those sustained by affiliated organisations. The Executive Committee did not sustain the British objection, finding it appropriate that confederation members should be responsible for the appointment of the political secretaries of the ETUC: in February 1981 Miniutti was elected unanimously, except for three British abstentions,51 UIL prepared for the succession of Giorgio Benvenuto from Lama as Vice-President of the Executive Committee, which occurred at the meeting of 8–9 October 1981.52

The repositioning of the Communist Party in Italy after the European elections called into question the trends that had favoured CGIL’s unitary European presence. The crisis between the Communist majority and CGIL’s reformist tendencies exploded publicly after 17 December 1980: FLM (the unitary body of metalworkers, members of CGIL, CISL and UIL) decided to affiliate with the International Metalworkers’ Federation, related to ICFTU. The tormented approval of CGIL led FIOM and FLM to implement the initiative, but provoked the condemnation of L’Unità in an unsigned article published in the PCI newspaper and the strong protests of communist activists and trade union leaders.53 This serious dissent put a strain on the policy of the coordinator of the CGIL International Office. The birth of Solidaność and developments under way in Poland also emphasised the limits placed on the reformist current in CGIL, which had confidence in Communist reformism in eastern Europe countries.54 The proclamation of martial law imposed on Poland against the union of Lech Walesa provoked a crisis in the Ostpolitik of Italian trade unions, which, although selective, had CGIL as its natural protagonist. In Brussels again in September 1981, Meroni decided to withdraw from the union after further disagreement on economic and international policy. Following the X Congress of the CGIL (16–21 November 1981) Michele Magno became responsible for the International Office, accompanying Militello to the ETUC meetings.55 It fell to Magno to defend his organisation against the accusations of CISL concerning CGIL’s

50. Speaking against the solidarity fund launched by CISL was, for the IRES CGIL, M. Magno, Per la crisi dell’accumulazione il sindacato holding non è una risposta, Rassegna sindacale, 6 November 1980, 9-10.
52. ASN CISL, CES, A109/2. It had been Benvenuto, General Secretary of UIL since 1976, who had established a real international office in the union; interview with Antonio Foccillo, 10 December 2012.
54. See the articles by G. Meroni in Rassegna sindacale of 18 June and 30 July 1981.
presence at the XVII Congress of Trade Unions of the USSR, three months after the repression of the Polish trade union.\(^{56}\)

On the eve of the ETUC Congress in 1982, the unitary Federation retained its ability to represent the Italian unions in Europe, successfully opposing the independent trade union CISAL’s request for affiliation, which had applied for membership to gain international recognition that could be used at national level.\(^{57}\) The heads of the international activities of CGIL, CISL and UIL, Emilio Gabaglio, Michele Magno and Renzo Canciani, in ‘making an assessment of the international policy of the federation’ had to acknowledge the existence of ‘differences in dialectics, opinions and emphasis’ regarding the global bipolar situation, and (in CGIL’s revived language) in regard to western Europe (Wittemberg 1982: 29). The necessary confirmation of the unitary tradition of Italian trade unions in the ETUC therefore did not prevent CGIL and CISL from supporting, along with the British unions, the admission of the Spanish union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) to the ETUC, despite the reservations of UIL and the opposition of the socialists of UGT. CISL, in any case, called for a new leading role of the ETUC: ‘We want to discuss the relaunch of the Community at the next Congress of the ETUC; if the ETUC did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it.’ (Wittemberg 1982: 30) Of course, the ETUC had to refine its tools and its representativeness: at the assembly of its leaders in 1981, CISL, referring to the unitary dimension of the European experience and the strength of additional affiliations, reiterated the belief that the ETUC would ‘become a real trade union organisation – and not just a linking organisation’ (CISL 1981, 423).

Keeping the focus on proposed amendments to the Constitution and policies aimed at promoting stronger claims-based union action on the part of the ETUC, the CISL proposed a form of greater cohesion between the confederations that was not limited to seeking the lowest common denominator between the different positions. In this way, this initiative managed to unify not only the Socialist protagonism of UIL under Benvenuto (Nenci 1982), but also the concerns of CGIL, whose efforts led them to ask a question that had been repressed until then: ‘And what are we going to do in favour of Europe?’\(^{58}\) A journalist from Rassegna sindacale who had long followed the international relations of the trade union tried to provide a summary of its activities during the 1970s, while its leaders were still at the Hague Congress of 19–22 April 1982, writing: ‘And does the CGIL ... also have what it takes?” ... What we want to know is how much have we really done to instil trade union consciousness in millions of Italian workers.’ Following the reasoning of Gabaglio explicitly – on the need for the ETUC – CGIL’s magazine now observed the ‘detachment of the ETUC from the real problems of the people’ and the ‘responsibilities of the national unions’, in order to conclude: ‘We must look at ourselves critically.’ Moreover, the inadequacies of the ETUC appeared evident, and the work of the congress did not dispel any doubts.\(^{59}\) ‘The Hague Congress did not meet expectations’, wrote Gabaglio in the CISL newspaper. It was necessary that the ETUC could ‘be progressively transformed into a real trade union centre with a European dimension, able to identify and pursue common objectives, but also to promote and guide the struggles required to achieve them’

\(^{56}\) See the issue of Rassegna sindacale of 14 January 1982 and the special issue of 1 May 1982, ten years after the birth of the unitary federation, which appeared in the magazines of CGIL, CISL and UIL.

\(^{57}\) ASN, CES, A111/1.

\(^{58}\) This was the title of the article by Raul Wittenberg, the Rassegna sindacale journalist, in accordance with the direction taken by Meroni, in the issue of 22 April 1982.

\(^{59}\) Interview between G. Lauzi and G. Debonne, in the socialist newspaper L’Avanti, 23 April 1982.
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(Gabaglio 1982). In this direction, the Italian trade unions were determined to play a greater role in European trade unionism.

4. Unions and social dialogue in Europe

The way in which the policy proposed by the Italian union movement in the early 1980s was determined is evidenced by two factors. At the top level of the European trade union, which in June 1983 accepted the principle of rotation of the three Italian trade unions, proposed ‘on a regular basis’ by the unitary federation for the office of vice president after having elected Carniti at the Congress.60 At local level, the start of a European regional policy had favoured the creation in 1976 of the first Inter-regional Trade Union Council (IRTUC) involving the border regions of Germany, France and Luxembourg. In 1982 the first Italian cross-border trade union council was established to address issues related to inter-regional work in Lombardy and Canton Ticino. CGIL restrained a similar initiative that had been launched in Piedmont and Rhône-Alpes by CISL and CFDT, which would take form only in 1992 with the IRTUC Piedmont, Rhone-Alpes, Valle d’Aosta (Ciampini, Clari 2012: 10–15). The growth of the IRTUCs was brought to the attention of the Executive Committee of the ETUC in autumn 1982, but the debate over their relationship with the trade union organisation in Brussels began only in December 1983.61

This correspondence between Italian unionism and increasing local implementation of European initiatives,62 however, was accompanied by difficulties between the national confederations and the ETUC, which acknowledged in September 1982 that the demands made at the national level rarely made ‘evident the European dimension of its demands’.63 Moreover, relations between Italian confederations had begun to deteriorate. Between 1983 and 1984, CGIL had taken part in the negotiations between unions and the government to lower inflation, refusing at the last minute under pressure from the PCI to sign a cooperation pact with the Craxi government. This fact led to an internal conflict with the socialist current of CGIL and the final break-up of the CGIL-CISL-UIL unitary federation: the communist current, having supported a referendum in 1985 to abolish the decree passed to freeze the sliding-scale mechanism, was disoriented by the negative result obtained. In CISL, which had attempted to accelerate towards the creation of European trade unionism as the ETUC celebrated its tenth anniversary, the entry of Gabaglio in its national secretariat in the summer of 1983, along with other political duties, seemed to weaken the confederation’s commitment regarding Europe.

New expectations of a revival of European initiatives were thus created also in the Italian unions following the acceleration called for by the French presidency in the first half of 1984 and especially after January 1985, thanks to the contribution of Jacques Delors and his colleagues in the European Commission (Degimbe 1999: 202–203). A rethinking of the strategies of the European trade unions was required to cope with the requests of the European Commission that had initiated the first talks in Val Duchesse. At the Congress of Milan,

60. ASN CISL, CES, A112/5-6.
61. ASN CISL, CES, A111/10 and A112/10.
62. The drive to Europeanisation now emerged from regional and local dynamics, as seen by the presence of Nino Sergi in the CISL’s International Office in 1982.
63. See the documents of ETUC Executive Committee of 30 September and 1 October 1982, ASN CES, A111/7.
13–17 May 1985, despite posing certain conditions, the ETUC decided to continue the dialogue with European entrepreneurs and Community institutions, on the eve of the European Council that concluded with the approval of the Delors White Paper (Dølvik 1999: 115–116). The Italian trade unions, who hosted the ETUC Congress in 1985, re-examined and relaunched the ideas set forth in The Hague. Though CGIL, CISL, UIL prepared several amendments to the ETUC Constitution up until the eve of the congress, they were unable to put the question of bargaining at a European level on the agenda.64 If they no longer limited themselves to drafting documents commenting on the proposals of Brussels or to proposing lobbying initiatives, it appeared possible finally to give European trade unionism legs (Irace 1985).

Benvenuto, for UIL, demanded ‘greater bargaining power for the EC’; Del Turco, for CGIL, asked the ETUC to be ‘increasingly more like a trade union’; Carniti, for CISL, had a heated clash with a representative of Force Ouvrière, arguing ‘that it was necessary to give the ETUC the power to negotiate’.65 In response to those who felt that the time was not ripe for a discussion of this issue, the Germans seemed open to the prospect if it would in some way support their contractual and participatory model. Finally, it all came to nothing. Once again, however, CISL, at its X Congress (8–13 July 1985) pledged to revive the ETUC by developing ‘action that aims to let it take on a negotiating role, both in regard to Community institutions and to European employers, through the delegation of powers necessary to promote the growth of a true European dimension in the trade union movement’ (CISL 1989: 117–119).

New paths seemed to open up soon afterwards with the joint declaration of 12 November 1985 in Val Duchesse (Degimbe 1999: 208-210). With the introduction of Article 118 B in the EEC Treaty, defined in the Single European Act of February 1986, the Commission took it as its responsibility to ‘develop a European-level dialogue between the social partners, which could lead, if they consider it desirable, to conventional relations’. This passage of the Single European Act, which Savoini helped to formulate, recognised the right of European social partners to negotiate among themselves. For the Italian trade unions the goal was clear: stronger European unionism was needed to follow the path taken by the process towards European economic and monetary union. It was in this context that the Italian trade unions arrived at the ETUC Congress in Stockholm, 9–13 May 1988, where Delors spoke in a climate of optimism about the progress of European integration.66 After the Congress, the ETUC had to deal with the acceleration of the integration process prompted by Delors by stimulating the social partners in different ways. In particular, the political Steering Group for Social Dialogue (which met for the first time on 21 March 1989) was created, with which the political governance of European organisations, and not only the social partners’ experts, was offered the opportunity to reach decisions that were binding for all players.67

Overall, the Italian trade unions were unable effectively to influence the policies of European trade unionism after the push of the early 1980s. At the end of 1985, Miniutti resigned from the secretariat of the ETUC, but the proposal of an annual rotation for a political role, such as that of member of the secretariat, was rejected and specific nominations were requested from the confederations. In the end, the candidacy of socialist Ettore Masucci of

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64. ASN CISL, CES A90/6 and A114/2-5.
66. ASN CISL, CES A91/7.
67. The foundation process of the committee in IISH, ETUC, 700.
CGIL was successful, and he joined the secretariat of the European trade union. After the Single European Act, CGIL, CISL and UIL supported the campaign in favour of social Europe and participated together in the final demonstration promoted by the ETUC in October 1989. While CGIL was still disoriented by the changes in the internal secretariat and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, CISL resumed an initiative dedicated to European policy along with Foccillo for UIL. However, the Italian trade unions consolidated once again to take on a more proactive role in the ETUC between 1989 and 1992. In particular, after the 11th CISL Congress (14–18 July 1989), which confirmed Franco Marini as General Secretary, CIL created a Department of Community Policies, distinct from the international department, which was headed by Gabaglio.

The adoption of the Social Charter, subjected to the approval of the Community institutions in September and adopted in December 1989 by the European Council in Strasbourg, strengthened the principles of participation and consultation in decisions regarding social dynamics. Thus, while the political attention of the Italian trade unions was rekindled around the Charter, in the ETUC Hinterscheid did not seem to push towards a repositioning of unionism at the European level concerning the institutional evolution that the process seemed to involve. The executive committee of the ETUC seemed more like a sort of union academy and the debate was in danger of not keeping up with the evolution of the situation. Therefore, in that same month of December 1989 the ETUC created a Working Group, significantly named ‘For a more efficient ETUC’. This group was chaired by Stekelemburg and was promoted by the Germans and the Italians. Gabaglio participated with the unitary support of the Italian affiliated unions.

On that occasion, at the urging of Foccillo for UIL, Lettieri for CGIL and Gabaglio for CISL, the Italian confederations worked intensively to develop unitary positions and to reach agreements with the other national confederations, as well as to establish the equal commitment and responsibility of the national affiliated confederations and the European sectoral federations. In December 1990, they also organised a session of the Executive Board in Rome, working in complete harmony with German, Austrian and Spanish colleagues. CGIL, CISL and UIL created a deep understanding at that time, which was the result of the good personal relations between the leaders of their international offices and of the clear balance established between the confederations. The documents were discussed beforehand and each recognised the right of the others to speak on behalf of all three unions. The goal of giving European-level unionism a more participatory and negotiation-oriented character, going beyond the political perspective declared as its scope in the Social Charter, appeared to be aim of the Italian trade unions in the late 1990s.

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68. For CGIL, led from March 1986 to November 1988 by Antonio Pizzinato, the question of its international role remained open.
70. Foccillo headed the International Department between 1989 and 1992 and expanded it by adding many components, divided according to sector; in this period, in particular, Cinzia Del Rio was involved in the UIL European relations activities. Interview with Antonio Foccillo, 10 December 2012.
71. Marini had taken over from Carniti in July 1985 as General Secretary of the CISL and inheriting his offices at the ETUC.
72. See the ETUC meetings of 14–15 December 1989, ASN CISL, CES, A118/9, and the documents in IISH, ETUC, 704, and IISH, ETUC, 1034.
73. See the ETUC meetings in Rome, 13–14 December 1990, in ASN CISL, CES, A119/10-11.
74. See Polis internazionale, a UIL magazine, November 1990.
Moreover, the work to establish a European confederation with its own duties and tasks was fuelled by the progress made by the Political Steering Group for Social Dialogue promoted by Delors to complement and support the two working groups on social dialogue, created after the Single European Act. In September 1990, CEEP and ETUC signed an agreement on occupational training. As a result, in January 1991 joint opinions were drafted about new technologies, work organisation and the adaptability and flexibility of the labour market. A virtuous circle had been triggered, involving both innovation in Community institutions and the campaign for a more powerful ETUC, whose final report was examined between February and April 1991. When the reforms then made by the ETUC – with the inclusion of European Industry committees – did not meet the expectations of some unions, the winds of change began to blow on the leadership of European trade unionism, with Masucci resigning in February 1991. The DGB supported the Italian candidate Gabaglio for General Secretary of the ETUC, while the British preference was for Johan Van Rens (Dølvik 1999: 131–140). The vote of the Executive Committee was in favour of Gabaglio (with 27 votes in favour, nine against and three abstentions) and took place just before the ETUC congress in Luxembourg (13–17 May 1991), which elected him General Secretary. The election of Gabaglio seemed to be a form of reward for CISL’s pro-Europe orientation (it had just elected Sergio D’Antoni as its leader). It also constituted the culmination of the entire Italian union movement that continued to act in unison in the European context and was well aware of its representative capacity in terms of numbers and potential for a positive contribution. Of course, the history of CISL and its members had been a driving force of Italian trade unionism in European scenarios since the 1950s and this seemed to give it an authority that Gabaglio soon found himself exerting during subsequent events.

A relaunch of the principle of ‘participation’, which was a relevant element in shaping the ETUC, was supported by a sort of a genuine Italian network, close to CISL, for the development of social Europe, particularly active at various levels between 1989 and 1992 (Dølvik 1999: 113). Gabaglio was well aware of this particular historical moment and in March 1992 he went to represent the ETUC at the ICFTU Congress in Caracas. He emphasised the unique character of the European Community, which allowed for the construction of a European social union alongside an economic and monetary union. Meanwhile, CISL (who brought Enzo Friso to head the global trade union) and UIL became supporters of CGIL’s request to enter into free trade unionism after the fall of the communist regimes in eastern Europe, a process that had begun ten years earlier (ICFTU 1992, 404 and 496).

The Intergovernmental Conference for the reform of the Treaty of the European Community had just begun and Delors wanted to know to what extent the social partners would have worked to promote the relevant debate. The culture of CISL surely helped to motivate the ad hoc group of leaders of European organisations that had been created, thanks also to their ability to penetrate into other Italians circles whose mediation and dialogue represented an important contribution. These included not only the action of Cassina and Cal in the Italian trade unions, but also the crucial determination of Gabaglio in the ETUC, of Pininfarina among entrepreneurs and of Savoini for the Commission (with the support of Vincenzo Saba for the Giulio Pastore Foundation) (Savoini 2000: 70–71). An agreement

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75. See ASN CISL, CES, A92/8 and A120/1-6.
76. Interview with Luigi Cal, 16 November 2012.
was signed on 31 October 1991 between ETUC, CEEP and UNICE, which was hailed at the ETUC Executive Committee of 5–6 December 1990 as ‘a success for the ETUC with regard to future social relations at the European level’. The title of the document prepared by Jean Lapeyre at that time indicates the value given to the result obtained by the ad hoc group for social dialogue of the ETUC: ‘An agreement that paves the way for European collective bargaining’. A series of meetings began immediately to assess the consequences and find the means to finalise the agreement, the text of which had to be fully included in the Treaty. With the Social Protocol of the Maastricht Treaty – which caused the British government to opt out – the European social actors were given a new role at the Community level, which according to special procedures foreshadowed a kind of equality between legislation and the agreements between the social partners in some fields.

After the signing of the Treaty in 1992, the debate on European collective bargaining had become more intense within the ETUC: CISL and UIL pushed for realistically taking a step forward, but did not underestimate the difficulties. It was now clear that giving a greater role to the European trade union movement involved a transfer of sovereignty to the European level. At the Luxembourg European Conference on Collective Bargaining promoted by the ETUC to formulate a strategy on the subject (1–2 June 1992), even Walter Cerfeda of CGIL stated that a ‘stronger commitment to coordination of national bargaining should be aimed for’. Alfredo Belli for UIL stressed ‘the need for respecting national diversity and following a bottom-up approach’. Tiziano Treu, invited as an expert to express CISL’s perspective, proposed an approach based on ‘learning by doing’, without waiting for a ‘perfect legal framework’. This approach was in harmony with what Deputy Secretary Lapeyre had recalled: according to the ETUC, the agreements of 31 October expressed ‘a wish to be recognised as a European actor’ (Dølvik 1997: 244–257).

As is well known, the ambitious report was criticised by the Nordic trade unions. The decision was postponed to the Executive Committee meeting in London (2–3 December 1992) and, in the meantime, a written comment was requested of the various national unions. The weight of CGIL, CISL and UIL was important because they were among those ‘which had been keen promoters of the 31 October agreement and of European negotiations’ and because ‘the Italian ETUC affiliates in the early 1990s represented around one fifth of the ETUC membership’ (Dølvik 1997: 263 and 293). They approved the report of the Luxembourg conference, but their assessment of the final compromise reached by the Executive Committee on 4–5 March 1993 was not identical. CGIL considered it a good result on the whole, one in which a cultural problem emerged related to political-institutional dynamics, according to Lettieri. For Cassina it was a ‘low compromise’ that conceded a great deal to the objections of the TUC, the DGB and Nordic affiliates (Dølvik 1997: 293–295). CGIL’s inclination to aim for European social legislation through political institutional relationships, perhaps, began to tip the balance common to the Italian trade unions at that time in favour of an approach based on negotiation and social dialogue. At the same time, a number of political and organisational factors gave rise to certain difficulties between the three Italian trade unions. CGIL proposed, in any case, to assume the burden of managing an ‘Italian’ European office, without, however, finding any support from the other confederations. However, in assessing the new phase facing the European social actors after Maastricht,

77. See the ETUC meetings of Amsterdam, 5–6 December 1991, ASN CISL, CES, A120/11-12.
78. The documents of ETUC Executive Committee, Brussels 8–9 October 1992 in ASN CISL, CES, A121/10.
CISL and UIL did not intend to relinquish their support of initiatives at the European level, though they seemed to run aground in complex mediations between the unions involved in the Italian debate.

5. **ETUC as a social actor in the process of globalisation and Italian trade unions in multilevel governance**

After the Maastricht Social Protocol, a new phase in the history of the ETUC seemed to have begun. In summer 1992 the social dialogue committee was formed. In September 1994 Directive 94/45/EC was approved to establish European Works Councils. Then in December 1995 the Agreement on parental leave was adopted, followed between 1997 and 1999 by agreements on part-time and fixed-term work. Following the Essen Summit, a new phase of social dialogue began with the recognition of areas of Community competence and responsibility in the field of employment. Moreover, with the 8th Congress in Brussels (8–12 May 1995), the Executive Committee of the ETUC could ‘vote by qualified majority on the results of the negotiations, thereby recognising the prevalence of the general interest of the European trade union movement over that of individual member trade unions’ (Ciampani and Gabaglio 2010: 144). As late as autumn 1994 CGIL, CISL and UIL seemed to be moving forward together, even planning an innovative European campaign to promote trade unionism throughout the world. At the ICFTU Congress (Brussels, 25–29 June 1996) Gabaglio proposed, on behalf of the ETUC, to move forward along the path of negotiations and collective bargaining in order to become global actors (ICFTU 1996: 87).

In Italy, ‘the demands of the ETUC’ – specifically, social dialogue and greater recognition of rights – were followed with interest. The Italian trade unionists gave their support to the Europeanisation of the trade union movement. In 1995, together with UNCE and CEEP, the ETUC tried to make Florence the European Centre for Industrial Relations, with the participation of Miniutti, but did not manage to achieve its definitive activation. However, the distinctions between the positions adopted by CGIL, CISL and UIL at the national level – especially in the union led by Cofferati, which was looking for a post-communist identity – were a direct result of the paths opened up by the ETUC, which ensured further articulation of internal dialogue. For CGIL, renegotiating the characteristics of Europe defined in Maastricht meant renegotiating the ‘model of European economic and political union’ through the exercise of a ‘contractual and political role’ (CGIL 1996: 84–87, 100–101). This approach was somewhat at variance with the positions expressed by CISL, at its thirteenth confederal congress held in May 1997. CISL reiterated the need for a union able to face the new process of ‘internationalisation of the economy’, rooting the choice of establishing a united Europe in a context of social cohesion. To meet the challenge of globalisation after ‘the end of the bipolar division of the world’, CISL again asked the ETUC to become ‘a partner both in collective bargaining and in concertation’ in Europe.79 It showed the relationship of interdependence between the national, European and international levels, which CISL had always identified as the basis of its European activities. For CGIL, the European legal and institutional structure could support workers’ rights intended as an alternative to the global market.

While the ETUC focused on becoming a valid dialogue partner with member state governments (through the summits in Luxembourg 1997, Cardiff 1998 and Cologne 1999), it also had to cope with the increasingly evident multiplication of levels of intervention, related to increasing globalisation. Each postponement of the settlement of these issues began to affect both the national perceptions of the national confederations and the strategies they outlined. There was also the question – completely unsettled at the end of the 1990s – of the level of effective implementation and impact of any action the ETUC could bring to bear on the national union level. Of course, it could no longer be limited to experiences such as the Euro-demonstration of trade unions in Brussels to support workers at the Renault plant in Vilvoorde. The ETUC Executive Committee of 12 June 1998 discussed the 1997–1998 report on European social dialogue at the sectoral and intersectorial level. Thus, ‘at the end of the 1990s, the construction of a Social Europe, which was the guiding thread of the ETUC and the unifying goal of its demands, met with further difficulties’ (Ciampani and Gabaglio 2010: 138–39).

In this context, CGIL, CISL and UIL decided to meet in January 1999 to discuss their contribution to the upcoming ETUC congress. The initiative seemed to be a kind of ‘negotiation’ between the Italian trade unions, as part of ‘the information and consultation process of all structures, both horizontal ones (a meeting with the various substructures had already taken place) and vertical’. The document reveals the greater need for the involvement of trade unions, and the discussion did not refer merely to heads of secretariats and confederations’ international offices. At the same time, it reveals the difficulty of reaching a consensus on the ‘analysis of the two resolutions that will be presented to the Congress’, on the modification of the Constitution of the ETUC and on the ‘participation plan of CGIL, CISL, UIL’ in the congress debate. Moreover, the 9th ETUC Congress, held in Helsinki (29 June–2 July 1999), prompted a kind of internal political repositioning of the national unions within it. At the same time, new scenarios faced the ETUC in view of the advent of the single currency in financial markets (the circulation of the euro as a currency rather than just a unit of account began in 2001). The issue of so-called ‘macroeconomic dialogue’ was also considered part of the ‘concertation procedures’. On the eve of the Congress, the Italian trade unions proposed amendments to the constitution to complete the reforms initiated in 1991 with a view to enabling the ETUC to exercise greater ‘union leadership’ and equipping it with more ‘standing committees’, like those for the IRTCs and coordination of contractual policies, countering the tendency to define which European industrial relations system to implement. The 1999 ETUC Congress decided to create a special collective bargaining coordination committee ‘with the purpose of defining shared “guidelines” capable of focusing the demands in each country in order to give them greater cohesion and consistency’ (Ciampiani and Gabaglio 2010: 144).

On the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the ETUC sought to gather information about national labour market contexts in order to bring its tasks to completion (Treu 1998), and managed to acknowledge the emergence of a process of Europeanisation in trade union action, as was also the case for the Italian unions (Regini and Regalia 2000). It was possible, too, to address the problem of wages and policies and link them to the action of

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81. See the document CGIL, CISL, UIL Dipartimenti internazionali, Proposte di modifica dello statuto e del funzionamento della CES, March 1999.
affiliated unions (Pochet 2002). However, when it was time to consider the prospects for involving national trade unionism in the process that had been launched at the European level by the agreements of 1991, the debate under way in Italy again highlighted how the horizon of European trade unionism was still restricted to the need for coordinating collective bargaining (Hoffmann and Mermet 2001). For the Italian unions, the high point of European impetus seemed to end with the discussion of the Lisbon strategy, adopted by the European Council of March 2000.82

In the face of strong economic growth between 1997 and 2000 – Italy was growing at 2.6 or 2.7 per cent per year – the ETUC should have negotiated national action plans and intervened about the resources necessary for development, which required a different perspective on the multiple levels of Europeanisation. In Italy, for example, ‘a third phase of development and consolidation of the IRTUCs [could be observed], which ran from 1991 until the early years of the millennium’ (Gilardoni 2009: 92). Moreover, in the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century, CISL’s International Department promoted a new approach to European dynamics and suggested that European issues be considered an internal dimension of the process of analysis and decision-making within the various sectors and areas of union intervention.

For its part, the ETUC acknowledged the standstill of European institutional action. ‘Since the end of the 1990s, the Commission has limited its intervention to the publication of “communications” on social policy and to the promotion of “consultations” that do not have operational consequences’ (Ciampani and Gabaglio 2010: 138–143). Only a few years later the Commission created a Fund for adjustments to globalisation, which was mainly symbolic. After 11 September 2001, dynamics of globalisation were imposed that did not seem manageable through social summits. Nor was ETUC participation as an observer in the work of the European Convention of 2002 sufficient, although Gabaglio managed to bring about the creation of an ad hoc working group on social Europe. With the Tenth Statutory Congress in Prague (26–29 May 2003) the ETUC reached the ‘end of a cycle’, and not only because of the new ETUC, as John Monks from Great Britain took over from Gabaglio (the ETUC secretariat welcomed within its ranks a member of CGIL, Cerfeda, who was unilaterally designated). The dynamics of globalisation now required a repositioning strategy on the part of the ETUC as a European social actor at the centre of a strategy of multilevel governance, as the political limits of having allowed social dialogue to crystallise in institutions and regulatory procedures began to be felt.

These needs and limits emerged in the reaction of European trade unionism at the beginning of 2004 and caused Commissioner Bolkestein’s proposal for a directive to be blocked (Ciampani and Gabaglio 2010: 140–141). The Italian participation in the mobilisation of the ETUC against the Bolkestein Directive was prompt and articulated. CGIL, CISL and UIL moved together at the regional level and requested the ‘withdrawal of the Directive’. On the eve of the European demonstration of 19 March 2005, this sparked a political mobilisation ‘through the relationship with associations and civil society, with information campaigns and mobilisation’ that went well beyond the action of union representation. In this context, however, the European trade union movement could not prevent the Bolkestein Directive from being ‘taken as a negative symbol by all anti-Europeans: “That’s what Europe is, it’s Bolkestein.”’ The ETUC found itself in trouble: ‘I remember the demonstrations we

82. Interview with Giacomina Cassina, 16 November 2012.
held against Bolkestein in Luxembourg, then in Strasbourg; all were full of anti-globalisation protesters. There were slogans that were completely unacceptable."83 Although CISL agreed with the ETUC’s political pressure on the European Parliament, when it made plans to meet again in Strasbourg on 14 February 2006 it focused attention on the need to prevent the directive from interfering ‘with labour law, with collective bargaining and industrial relations in the member states’84.

In fact, the focus on the evolution of collective bargaining rendered Italian trade unions more sensitive to the risk of the ETUC becoming entangled in the web of European institutional procedures, thereby closing itself off in a position of mere political reaction to the neoliberal and conservative wave. In March 2007 CGIL’s European Secretariat organised a study day in Bologna which sought to develop its traditional approach: ‘The current situation and prospects of collective bargaining in European countries and in Europe.’ In the end, CGIL drew closer to CISL and UIL in supporting collective bargaining as necessary for relaunching trade unionism as a whole. This led to the negative response to the European opinion polls on the subject of a minimum wage:

CGIL, CISL, UIL believe that setting a minimum wage – especially if it is established by legislation – is not the appropriate response to protect the most vulnerable workers. […] Moreover, the establishment of a minimum wage would weaken collective bargaining and the role of the confederal trade unions, de-legitimising its authority on wage-related issues.85

Italian trade unions, therefore, considered the Seville Congress, 21–24 May 2007, as a ‘congress of transition’, in which the need to reconcile ‘the different union cultures’ involved in the process of European enlargement was apparent: ‘the mediation between different countries brings you to lower your goals’, admitted Cerfeda. ‘And the social culture’, added the CISL General Secretary Raffaele Bonanni significantly, ‘ends up being watered down’. It was thus up to Cerfeda (confirmed as secretary of the ETUC) to reiterate in the face of the risks of social dumping in Europe the common adage that had characterised the Italian union movement over time: ‘greater union and collective bargaining coordination at a European level’ was necessary to ‘negotiate matters such as transnational mobility and lifelong learning’. The union led by Guglielmo Epifani found in the bitter words of Rinaldini the toughest criticism of the ETUC’s ability to impact national unions: ‘When a company closes down in one country, everyone is ready to send out sympathetic press releases, but then the unions of other countries heave a sigh of relief. […] Either the forms of coordination evolve or they will be reduced to a mere exchange of information.’86 On these issues, the three Italian trade unions – divided on different aspects of national trade union policy – now agreed. At the end of the Congress, the path towards ‘a greater unionisation of the ETUC’ emerged, ‘to break out of a conception of the European trade union as a subsidiary function of Community legislative initiatives’.87

83. Idem.
84. See News of CISL Lombardia, 19 January 2006.
86. See CGIL, Segretariato Europa informa, 1 June 2007.
87. CGIL report on Seville ETUC congress, 30 May 2007.
The Italian trade unions saw a confirmation of these prospects in the events of the *Viking* and *Laval* cases (Giubboni 2006; Dorssemont 2009). The response of the trade unions to European judicial rulings in labour and union matters could not simply be confined to debates or to calling for its own model of social relations. It was necessary for CGIL, CISL and UIL to seek greater correspondence between the preparation of new tools and strategic policy decisions in Europe. Consider for example the ETUC’s promotion of the Social Development Agency (directed by the Italian Claudio Stanzani), which was given the task of monitoring the establishment of EWCs and, more generally, the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* in the field of workers’ rights to information and consultation in undertakings.

When the European Parliament, in 2008, proposed the revision of Directive 94/45 on European Work Councils, in March the Executive Committee of the ETUC seemed to desire the revision of the Directive ‘in the context of a negotiation between the social partners for a strengthening of social dialogue’. After the difficulties posed by Business Europe, however, in May the ETUC explained to the European Commission the reasons that led it to ‘decline’ its invitation and, instead, to request a proposal for a Directive. CGIL, CISL and UIL supported the European trade union’s pressure aimed at orienting the Commission and the Parliament. In the letter sent by the secretary-generals of the Italian confederations – Epifani, Bonanni, and Angeletti – to European Commissioner Vladimir Spidla on 23 May 2008 it was again affirmed ‘an effective revival of European social dialogue’. The Italian unions also perceived a temptation within the ETUC to ‘abandon social dialogue’ as the best way to promote the interests of workers and to conduct relations with the European institutions (Cilento 2009: 41).

The recognition of the open society that seemed to characterise the ‘globalised’ world seemed, in Italy, to encourage the European trade union movement to rethink its role and its objectives, in light of the impact that the European dimension came to represent in the economic and social activities of national social actors in a bi-directional perspective. ‘It could make clear the confederal dimension necessary to multiply the strength of the trade union federations, and could encourage a “multilevel” social dialogue capable even of outlining major framework agreements in the context of the transnational mobility of enterprises’. National confederations indeed do not always produce calls for innovation, but sometimes create serious obstacles to cohesive and coherent action. After the 22 January 2009 agreement signed by CISL and UIL on the reform of collective bargaining, CGIL, which had not fallen in line in order to justify its isolated mobilisation against the agreement, put pressure on the ETUC despite the continued mediation of unitary documents and the good relations between the international representatives of the three organisations. CGIL defined the agreement of the other Italian social forces ‘insufficiently innovative and not very European’, although the confederal secretariat of the ETUC itself had declared those agreements ‘consistent with all the different resolutions approved on this topic by the ETUC executive committee’, hoping that the Italian trade unions would find ‘a unitary approach as quickly as possible’ to combat the crisis and support the initiatives launched by the union at the European level.

91. Letter from Monks and Cerfeda to Italian leaders Bonanni (CISL) and Angeletti (UIL), 13 March 2009.
If there was an objective difficulty at the European level in monitoring the effects of the European initiative on trade union action in companies and in the territories of the various European countries, the question still did not appear to be a priority for the protagonists of social action nationwide. The Report on Industrial Relations in Italy and Europe 2008–2009, prepared by CESOS on behalf of the Italian CNEL, did not emphasise the impact of the ETUC’s work in the Italian context, despite the awareness of the participants in the study group of the important processes of Europeanisation under way in the national labour market.

On the eve of the Athens Congress, 16–19 May 2011, anyway, the Italian trade unions – each with different confederation histories and different local cultures and industrial sectors – supported a more realistic European approach in order to draw up the agenda of European trade unionism to develop international social relations. As can be seen in the recent work of the EESC (in which the presidency of Mario Sepi, 2008–2010, exercised an active role), the trends and the effects of ‘globalisation’ confirm ‘the great validity and effectiveness of the principles which inspired the history and identity of the European Union’ (Iuliano 2010: 141). Italian trade unions called for European trade unionism to be a leading actor in the European labour market, while remaining aware of the presence of different sensitivities among those who favoured a strengthening of the ETUC as a real union and others more inclined to support its coordinating role. Moreover, it is widely acknowledged in the Italian confederations that ‘if we need more Europe on the political and institutional level, also the ETUC must become a more credible and demanding interlocutor, with a reinforced role and specific mandates’ (CISL 2013: 17).

Finally, in the history of Italian trade unionism it is possible to trace a predominant attention to ensuring that the process of political and institutional decision-making at European level involves actors whose actions foster economic growth and represent the workers of Europe. Today, this focus has an impact on the need – which seems to be clearly felt within the ETUC as it enters its fourth decade – to identify and address the dynamics of interdependence between the different levels of socio-economic governance in order to achieve the successful participation of different actors. In this context, the issue now concerns the relationship between the rise of the trade union movement as a social actor in Europe and the awareness of the trade unions that a ‘pro-European choice’ is not made on a level different from that of confederal trade unionism and collective bargaining.

**Bibliographical references**


