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*Handwritten notes:*  
p. 1 up 3/a. (31)  
Miss Savill - pl. back Mr. Pellow when you see him.  
R.  
2/9.

E A J Fergusson Esq  
Assistant Under-Secretary of State  
FCO

Your reference

Our reference

Date 27 August 1980

*Handwritten in red box:*  
WAT 0142  
27 August 1980  
Residual Dept. ✓

*Handwritten:* My dear Eugen,

## ITALIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

1. We face a perennial problem over reporting on Italian internal politics. They are complicated, continually in crisis over trivial issues, and apparently cyclical: Governments succeed each other rapidly but the same Shakespearian army of Ministers generally re-enters the stage. There is not much market in London for detailed accounts of such doings, however much it matters to HMG what policy the Italian Government of the day may adopt on a particular issue, and it is hard to remember the names. We therefore report relatively little. The Department rarely asks for more, except about the PCI, which distorts the balance of the picture we offer.
2. However, with the State Visit due in October, there may be more people in London over the next few months in need of a child's guide to the Italian political system and we asked Mark Pellow to undertake the work on the basis of four years' experience in Rome. I now enclose a copy of the resulting memorandum for you. It remains basically Mark's draft (he is now on leave) though we have made some adjustments here and there.
3. I fully agree with what the memorandum says. But partly because it deals with each party separately, I do not think it brings out all the particular oddities of the system here. These derive most of all from the nature of the Christian Democrat party. The DC is all-pervasive, more a way of life than a political party as such. Its origins lie in the Popular Party and it retains surely the strength of the Popular Party's position as the only Italian party acceptable to the Vatican. It is also worth remembering that the Popular Party was contaminated by the Church's compromise with Fascism; although the DC is not so tainted, the continuity with its origins means that its democratic principles are predominantly anti-Communist. This history, together with the history of the Italian Resistance Movement during the latter stages of the Second World War, go a long way to explain why the DC's strength is predominantly in

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the backward South, where the party affords not only a political grouping but a universal holding company controlling access (often corruptly) to jobs, power and patronage. In most of the former Papal states and wherever the Resistance was strong, the Communists play the same all-purpose role. This role reinforces the regional and local basis of party power.

4. The DC's appeal to the voters (patronage apart) <sup>a</sup> often appear to be Belloc's principle of keeping a tight hold on nurse. The rest of the parties, including even the Communists, define themselves by contrast more as alternatives to perpetual and undiluted DC control than on their own merits or principled policies. There are exceptions. The Radical Party and the MSI in their differing ways know more or less what they stand for (even if their principles are not always perfectly consistent). Within the left, there is the enduring political preoccupation with party-splitting: the PSI, PCI, PSDI all come from the same root and the PSI always looks liable to divide further. (The memorandum could have said something more about fringe left parties with some 2% of the national vote, for whom the PCI is irredeemably bourgeois and who shade off into doubtfully legal, violent groups.) But in general, the formation of Governments is decided by bargaining within and between the party caucuses rather than directly through the electoral process. The issues even in elections are not those set out in party manifestos but those of personalities and patronage. (The question of PSI/DC relations, for instance, sometimes seems to be confined to that of whether Craxi will become Prime Minister, without any consideration of whether different policies would result.) Changes come about through in-fighting within parties (not unknown elsewhere of course) and reflect the strength of individual leaders' positions. Hence the lack of reference to party programmes in the memorandum. Even the PCI, though they of course have something of a programme and a political justification of it for all purposes, have to respond to a considerable degree to shifts within the DC as these offer more or less chance of Communist influence on Government and within the establishment.

5. Mark Pellew has not, except in dealing with the PCI, made very much of foreign policy issues. This is probably right; despite the special attitudes adopted by some of the minor parties on particular issues (the PSI as the party of the European Community and Mintoff's friends; the Radicals in their relatively successful effort to increase Italian aid to the third world; the Republicans in allegedly influential pro-zionism within the present Government) Italian foreign policy has stayed fairly constant since the 1950's and no possible internal political changes, barring Communists in Government, would end this continuity.



6. This is, of course, an important exception, but, as I say, a great deal has been written about the PCI and I shall not add to it now. I will simply reaffirm my view that the Communists are not going to enter the Italian Government in the foreseeable future. Nor do we intend to weary you with further long accounts of Italian internal politics. But I hope that the memorandum will serve as a point of reference whenever this subject is brought up. We shall also make appropriate use of it in our briefing material for the State Visit.

*Carson,*  
*Alan.*

A C Goodison