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Think tanks and international affairs during the interwar period: Ispi (Institute for Studies in International Politics) between foreign policy and public opinion (1919-1943).

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Abstract

The object of analysis of this dissertation is the historical analysis of the Institute for Studies in International Politics (Ispi), from its founding in Milan in 1933 until it was compulsory mothballed after September 8th 1943. In confronting Ispi, the attempt is to approach Italy's international involvements during the interwar period from an unusual but meaningful standpoint. As a matter of fact, Ispi turns out to be a challenging as well as controversial subject of study. In fact, even if at first sight the Institute seemed to be nothing more than a propagandistic machine, to gain both domestic and external consensus to the policies of the fascist regime, a thorough analysis of Ispi highlights a more complex story to tell, which is deeply linked with the way in which the international environment was thought and structured in the aftermath of the First World War. The Institute is considered as a meeting point of two separate wider historical phenomena: the interwar European and Transatlantic debate on international relations, animated by a number of national institutions that were born in the 1920s and 1930s, Ispi among them; the intellectual history of Italy in the fascist period, in particular as regards conceptions related to politics, international relations and historiography. In this way, the dissertation tries to handle two different historiographies and methodologies: that of transnational history, necessary to map the debate on International Relations that took place in the interwar period both in its cultural and organizational features, and that of intellectual history. The two layers can't be divided: the international background that "prepared" the birth of Ispi have to be seen together with the peculiar relationship between the Institute and the Fascist foreign policy. In other words, the main purpose of the research is to achieve a meaningful historical account more able to identify transfers and exchanges of ideas, without overlooking the national context: the attempt to define what is Ispi and why it was founded has to be accompanied with an in-depth understanding of the political environment in which it developed its activities. Ispi was founded in 1933 when fascism's international position was reaching its peak: after all the fascist regime appeared to be a system of government able not only to stabilize a complex society after the First World War, but it also managed to shrug off the impact of the financial crisis from 1929 and the increase in unemployment of the early 1930s that market economies across the West experienced. For these reasons, Italy's fascism was perceived as a viable solution and it seemed to promise answers to questions liberal democracies were still facing. Against this backdrop, the Institute was performing a twofold task: while it was supporting a solid and pregnant document-based scientific research on international affairs, it also pursued the precise pedagogical aim of forming a strong national conscience of foreign affairs, in accordance with the fundamental directives of Fascist foreign policy, in short «an Institute which marries science with propaganda». Pierfranco Gaslini, the first director of Ispi, strongly believed that Italy needed a body able to shape a new political culture which was the result of interests and political patterns linked to the liberal period, as well as with new aspirations and watchwords which saw the fascist regime as a reliable answer to satisfy them. The director was able to understand the qualitative changes which characterized the sphere of international relations after the first world war and, to some degree, he recognized the necessity of placing a filter between political decisions and the masses. Against this background, the creation and development of Institutes of International Affairs, nation-based think tanks with the twofold aim of providing national and international elites with qualitative works on international affairs as well as creating an "informed" public opinion, provided Gaslini with the push he needed to found a similar body in Italy. In short, on one hand the consensus created by Ispi in favor of the regime was clear; on the other hand it tried to manage a factual situation in which the realm of foreign policy was linked with a series of aspirations and forces which were more influential than in the past. Indeed, the latter represented a new and lively field of action shared by the various European nations: in this perspective the astonishing growth of the Institute of International Affairs' movement in the 20s and 30s can be seen as an absolute necessity of various national establishments to guide or impose a top-down mechanism with the aim

of controlling the flow of information to the general public, rather than the expression of a new internationalism. The majority of the members of Ispi and its collaborators shared a common political and ideological background with Mussolini's aspirations, and it was equally clear that fascism was conceived as the driving force of Italian foreign policy. Against this background, it is clear, as I showed with the analysis of some articles drawn by the two journals of the Institute, that if on one hand it is plausible to place the start of an Italian tradition of foreign policy studies during the interwar period, on the other hand it is equally clear the intimate connection between the sphere of research and political aims. The fact that Ispi was thought as a centre of research which was dealing with international problems, in general, allowed to mix different perspectives and attitudes. This constitutes a crucial reason in order to understand why very different intellectual personalities and political figures met together in Ispi. Nevertheless, the fact that the Institute aimed at collecting all the most important specialists with an interest in international relations, it didn't mean that Gaslini was able to impose a coherent and logical cultural project to his collaborators. As a matter of fact, there was a continuous compromise between the directives of the "centre" and the effective work of the scholars involved in this activity, as if this preliminary freedom guaranteed by the Institute had as a consequence a dispersion of forces and an inability to constitute a solid amalgam. Eventually, this work reveals how Italian specialists conceived public opinion, which was a new and important weapon to use in the field of international politics against other governments: a top-down construction which had the duty to control in every step the exchange of information and meanings from the realm of political decisions and events to an "informed" public. This doesn't mean that Ispi, and the scholars who were working in it, was a passive instrument with a mere function of control and selection. The Institute, especially with the collaboration of the Roman School directed by Volpe, produced a series of historical works embracing various themes but basically focused on a new reflection of the Italian past functional to the political aspirations of their time. In this perspective, it can be said that there was a connection between this new wave of historical studies and the stimulus derived from the political environment.

Members of Ispi as "cultural mediators" were trying to improve the sector of cultural international relations, supporting a specific idea of Italy which contributed to the formation of those cultural assumptions behind Italian foreign policy during the interwar period. In this perspective, Ispi constitutes an institutional framework from which to investigate some of the most important specialists in international relations and their attempts to develop their works and analysis in constant relationship with the Institute and the political context. Given all this astonishing variety of studies, actors and themes that one can find in the history of Ispi during the 30s and early 40s, I argue that the Institute represents a meaningful vantage point from which to comprehend on one hand the weaknesses, the limits and ingenuity of a particular class of intellectuals and experts in international relations and their degree of support for the foreign policy of the fascist regime; on the other hand the effort to help the Italian nation to overcome structural defects and deficiencies which the Italian state had not been able to remove is undeniable. In accomplishing this "mission", indeed with different accents and motivations, all members of Ispi shared the belief that Italy had to become a great power and, in their Eurocentric view, they considered the world of international relations as a hierarchical environment in which the strongest nations had to come to terms with each other in order to create a harmonic system with different hegemonic spheres of influence.

In this perspective what was the relationship between the effective policies of the fascist regime and the reflections made by the members of Ispi? First of all, it is necessary to identify a fault line that sits above the Italian military action against Ethiopia in 1935-36. The Ethiopian war represented a "before and after" for the activities of the Institute: if before the invasion of the North African state Ispi, as I reported through the examination of the journals «Rassegna di Politica Internazionale» and «Relazioni Internazionali», was trying to act as a real transnational think tank, involving a wide range of different non-state actors, once Italy had its own empire the ever-increasing activities of the Institute suffered a loss of dynamicity and maneuvering space. As a matter of fact, in the first phase of the Institute (1933-1935), Ispi tried to pursue a multidirectional cultural diplomacy,

hosting key personalities from the political and cultural world. It tried to create contacts especially with the British conservative establishment (through the figures of Muriel Currey, Luigi Villari, Charles Petrie) and the Hungarian revisionist front as well as weaving links with analogous foreign institutions. After the Ethiopian war, the activism which characterized Italy in the former period in almost every international fora as well as its willingness to see its “rights” recognized within the international system built in Versailles, gave way to an increasingly imperialistic conception of the international environment, as though the colonial enterprise had rekindled the aspirations and latent desires of the Italian nation. The Ethiopian war had resulted in the political and cultural isolation of Italy, making scorched earth of that prestige internationally reached till then. These factors heavily affected Ispi’s activities and the previous attempts to create transnational diplomatic channels with foreign intellectual and political figures. Consequently, there was a transformation of Ispi which followed the changes of the international situation after the Ethiopian war, from a “transnational think tank” to an institute more concerned with research and divulgation of works related to foreign/international politics, with the desire of developing a political culture on foreign affairs within the national boundaries. On the other hand Gaslini tried to keep alive the Study Office and a peculiar way of doing research which gave priority to a vast use of documents and a taste for inter-disciplinarity.

Ispi was trying to produce an innovative cultural project capable of linking historiography and politics, a study of an “imagined” national past with an in-depth analysis of the international context. The aim was to provide Italy with a more solid political culture in order to help the government both meet the requirements of being a Great Power, and fulfilling what was thought to be an Italian imperial mission. The ambiguous position occupied by Ispi during the fascist regime as well as the contradiction that was revealed at the beginning of this research, which was a claim for the unity of scientific research and propaganda made by Gaslini, can be understood in the relationship that the Milanese Institute established with the liberal Italian past. Ispi didn’t want to make a decisive break with the past, in fact it presented itself as an instrument to achieve that national unity which couldn’t be reached in Italy before the First World War: a sort of sacred mission which could have been reached walking arm in arm with the fascist regime. On the other hand there was a break to the extent that parliamentarism was considered as a bad disease, and a new sense of hierarchy and order emerged which couldn’t be challenged by “individualism” and more in general by all those “vicious” principles which were considered as an attack against the State and the Nation. Against this backdrop Ispi developed a *sui generis* political and historiographical laboratory that saw the collaboration of a large number of scholars, who differed from each other as regards political and cultural interests, but they participated in the initiatives of the Institute specifically because its cultural projects were able to rely upon a broader basis in respect of the most pressing political aims of the fascist regime. This is why, at least until a certain point, the members of Ispi and its collaborators didn’t feel that particular contradiction between a serious and autonomous study of international/foreign politics and a dictatorial environment which, at the beginning, was not so assertive in shaping a coherent and unidirectional foreign policy.

Indeed, its history was heavily affected by the fascist regime, and in a broader perspective it assumed a specific physiognomy as well as a peculiar position at the crossroad of political, cultural and propagandistic national concerns. Nevertheless, these specific features didn’t confine Ispi to an isolated environment with no contacts or exchanges with foreign institutes or personalities. Suffice it is to say that the very idea of founding a series of Institutes of International Affairs capable of studying and disseminating a more scientific knowledge regarding foreign matters was born out of the Peace Conference of Versailles by some Anglo-American representatives; that almost all the members of Ispi went abroad to complete their education; that Ispi was one of the Institutes which participated at the annual International Studies Conference, whose original name was International Conference of *Institutions for Scientific Study of Politics*¹.

¹ Emphasis added.

This is why I think that this research has made it possible both to find new materials in order to better understand the relationship between culture and politics during the fascist regime, and more specifically to investigate what were the themes, aspirations and interests of Ispi's members and the political directives of the dictatorship, as well as to start a reflection about the development of the Institutes of International Affairs. Investigating both how they treated and exploited international information and what kind of relationship they had with their governments allows to better understand the nexus between international politics, foreign policy and public opinion and how it was changing during the interwar period.

Introduction

Pierfranco Gaslini, the first director of Ispi, during the inauguration of the cultural year of the Institute for Studies in International Politics, pointed out the underlying aspiration of the Institute:

an Institute in which scientific information should have been linked with the precise pedagogical aim to form a strong national conscience of international problems, in accordance with the fundamental directives of Fascist foreign policy: in short, *an Institute which marries science with propaganda*².

The Institute for Studies in International Politics (Ispi) is a challenging as well as controversial subject of study. In fact, even if at first sight the Institute seemed to be nothing more than a propagandistic machine, to gain both domestic and external consensus to the policies of the fascist regime, a thorough analysis of Ispi highlights a more complex story to tell, which is deeply linked with the way in which the international environment was thought and created in the aftermath of the First World War. The reassessment of the role played by the Institute, both in the national and international environment, coupled with the attempt to reconceptualise the interwar period with a set of new methodologies provided by a transnational approach.

The history of interwar period has known a renewed interest during the last decades. According to the Benedetto Croce's most celebrated dictum "every true history is contemporary history", connoisseurs since the end of the Cold War started to exhume the period between the two World Wars, convinced that it would have disclosed precious insights in order to better understand the new international situation. Even if there was a "general consensus" among political scientists and historians in acknowledging the re-acquired relevance of the period that goes from the Peace Treaty of Versailles to the outbreak of the Second World War, an even broader disagreement arose when it came to explain what kind of role it played in the historical process. There are more "conservative" approaches who tend to look at the period from 1914 to 1945 as a long civil war, so that they describe the Great War, with its degree of violence and radicalization, as the key factor able to deeply shaped the following period since the "inevitability" of the Second World War. On the other hand, there are new interdisciplinary approaches which are trying to explore the 20s and the 30s mixing traditional ideas with more up to date methodologies derived from other disciplines. Particularly, thanks to a transnational outlook, the traditional categories of diplomatic, institutional and international history has been rethought, opening up fresh paths of historical research³. In this perspective, the re-assessment of neglected actors and instances (such as the activities of the League of Nations and the network it created as well as the emergence of a new internationalism) coupled with the disclosure of new kind of actors, networks and entanglements, highlighting a recent preoccupation of the field with the cultural aspects of international diplomacy⁴.

On the other hand, also the scholarships which directly focused on the nature and history of the fascist regime have experienced a new need to analyze and contextualize this political and cultural movement by employing new questions and methodologies. In particular, the understanding of the fascist regime in Italy as a phenomenon that has to be framed in the light of an international

² *Vita dell'Istituto*, Rassegna di politica internazionale, 1934, p. 613.

³ Schulz-Forberg, Hagen (ed.), *Zero Hours. Conceptual Insecurities and New Beginnings in the Interwar Period*, Europe plurielle/Multiple Europes-Volume 53, 2013.

⁴ As illustrative examples: *Internationalism reconfigured. Transnational ideas and movements between the World Wars*, edited by Daniel Laqua, London 2011; Riemens, Michael, *International academic cooperation on international relations in the interwar period: the International Studies Conference*, «Review of International Studies», Volume 37, Issue 2, Page 911 – 928; Laqua, Daniel, *Transnational intellectual cooperation, the League of Nations, and the problem of order*, «Journal of Global History», Volume 6, Issue 2, Page 223 – 247; Rietzler, Katharina, *Before the Cultural Cold Wars: American philanthropy and cultural diplomacy in the inter-war years*, «Historical Research», Volume 84, Issue 223, Page 148 – 164; Patricia Clavin and Jens-Wilhelm Wessels, 'Transnationalism and the League of Nations: understanding the work of its economic and financial organisation', «Contemporary European History», 14.4 (2005), 465–92.

environment which both affected and was affected by the dictatorship, could help to prevent the artificial isolation of the Italian foreign policy during the interwar period and, as a consequence, to highlight contacts, exchanges, initiatives and meetings that the personalities of the regime established with the “foreigners”. Even in this case, the tendency to look at the fascist regime as something more complicated than a mere reactionary phenomenon imposed by Mussolini with the sole instruments of violence and repression, and the recognition of new actors (which operated in parallel with the duce and his government) who considered the sphere of foreign policy as a concrete strategy of promoting Italy’s interests rather than an instrument of propaganda to gain internal consensus, triggered new perspectives.

All in all, these new historiographical paths suggest a broader tendency to pinpoint a history able to establish a meaningful dialogue between micro and macro, local and global environments through the search for reciprocities, entanglements and networks⁵.

Having said that, I am confident to demonstrate that the peculiar nature of ISPI and its development during the 30s can contribute to add new materials to both, the transnational history of the interwar period (through an examination of the networks and activities created by the Institute) and the multi-layered nature of the fascist foreign policy which was deeply connected with the Italian “nation-formation” as well as with the new perspectives created by the international scenario.

Finally, this work certainly underlines the idea that it is time both to lay to rest the old distinction between diplomatic and international history and to connect the way in which Italian foreign policy was thought and performed to the wider world. By stressing the importance of the Institutes of International Affairs with their effort in institutionalizing a new knowledge in the field of international relations, highlighting the role of Ispi in drawing up answers for a stable world order, as well as examining the role played by some Italian experts in international meetings (such as the International Studies Conferences promoted by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation), allows to «cut into the past at a different angle»⁶, going beyond traditional investigations, and questioning old patterns.

As a consequence, the attempt to reconstruct the history of Ispi is not an end in itself, but has to be seen as a further attempt to shed light on two different topics even if intertwined. Firstly, I want to examine what the origins of think tanks in international politics were and what their role was; secondly, by focusing my attention on the first part of its history (1933-1943), my aim is to say something new about the fascist foreign policy, offering a new standpoint of the hotly debated historiographical question about the continuity/discontinuity of Mussolini’s foreign policy.

The two layers can’t be divided: the think tank’s topic and the international background that “prepared” the birth of Ispi have to be seen together with the problematic relationship between the Institute and the Fascist foreign policy. In other words, the main purpose of the research is to achieve a meaningful historical account more able to identify transfers and exchanges of ideas, without overlooking the national context: the attempt to define what is Ispi and why it was founded has to be accompanied with an in-depth understanding of the political environment in which it developed its activities.

The attempt to understand the development of Ispi from a long-term perspective makes it possible to stress what I suggest to be the underlying continuity of its history, that is to be an original think tank in international politics. Considering Ispi as the first Italian think tank in international politics is not a neutral statement: first of all it goes against what it is called “American exceptionalism” which perceives the origins of such bodies closely related with a particular political as well as institutional environment. As I hope to demonstrate with this research, the proliferation of these think tanks in international politics is a world-wide phenomenon and it can be explained by a variety of factors in which external elements (the growing interdependence of international relations after the First World War) mixed with domestic aspects such as the development of a domestically

⁵ *Zero Hours*, cit., Introduction, p.15-49.

⁶ Geoffrey Barraclough, *An introduction to contemporary history*, Pelican Books 1967.

based intellectual elite. Therefore, even if there are significant differences in the themes and purposes put in place by each Institute of International Affairs, the specific political environment they inhabit, whether autocratic or democratic, is unlikely to prevent these Institutes from emerging. Once established the physiognomy of the movement and its global seize, it still remains to better understand what was an Institute of International Affairs and if it is possible to pinpoint it with a satisfactory definition. In this attempt to search for a theoretical framework of this phenomenon it is useful to take as starting point the book *Think tank traditions. Policy research and the politics of ideas*. Provided the fact that there is not a broader consensus among scholars about what is a think tank, Diane Stone elaborated a definition of think tank as a body capable of connecting the world of power (politics) with the world of ideas (knowledge), whilst playing a role in both policing and mediating their boundaries. Namely, «far from standing between knowledge and power, think tanks are a manifestation of the knowledge/power nexus. In short, knowledge and policy are symbiotic and interdependent»⁷. As a consequence, claiming that think tanks are independent bodies that produce neutral knowledge is naive; on the contrary, as my research assumes, there are no clear cut boundaries between research and ideology, acknowledging the inherently dynamic political nature of research. Seen within this framework, the role played by think tanks becomes more ambiguous: if on one hand think tanks need to have some kind of engagement with government if they are to succeed in influencing policy, on the other hand they make an effort to preserve intellectual autonomy, trying to strike a delicate balance between dependence on governments and total isolation from them. Given that, «the precise nature of think tank independence is to be treated with flexibility»⁸.

Regarding the second topic linked with the history of Ispi, that is the relationship between the Institute and the fascist foreign policy, I argue that in their preoccupation with coherence and continuity historians have ignored many of the key questions in fascist foreign policy, among which the role of various groups in the formation of that policy⁹. Ispi offers an opportunity of approaching an interesting, although still little studied, aspect of Italy's international involvements during the interwar period. More precisely it allows me to dig deeper into the decisive decade of fascist intervention from the early 1930s to the early 1940s, although the process began in the previous period, embedding its roots in the political processes of Liberal Italy¹⁰. Indeed, the fascist regime can't be regarded as a period of rule without much inner differentiation, and a series of various periodizations were offered by a number of historical studies, according to the specific historiographical outlook they were applying. In this perspective, if on one hand my work deals with a consistent period of time, roughly the so called interwar period, on the other hand it focuses on some of those political/cultural figures who were involved in representing Italian interests in international fora since the constitution of the Italian National Committee in 1928 and it follows the changes of Italian action in the international context during the 1930s until the early 1940s through the political, cultural and institutional history of the Institute for Studies in International Politics. From the First World War, Italy emerged as one of the four great powers in spite of the disappointment represented by the myth of the mutilated victory. While Italy was claiming to be a powerful nation with specific interests in the Mediterranean area, the Italian nation agreed to be part of the Versailles system, a position which would last for most of the fascist period. As a matter of fact, until the mid-30s, the revisionist aspirations of the regime were aiming to satisfy domestic rhetoric rather than elements for a real foreign policy strategy. A situation which was driven by the interest of Mussolini's government to immerse Italy into international organizations, not simply to

⁷ Diane Stone (2007) *Recycling bins, garbage cans or think tanks? Three myths regarding policy analysis institutes*, Public Administration, Vol.85, No.2. p.276.

⁸ Diane Stone, *Introduction, police advice and governance*, in Stone, Diane and Denham, Andrew. eds. (2004) *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁹ Stephen Corrado, Azzi (1993). *The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy*, The Historical Journal, Vol. 36, No. 1. pp. 187-203.

¹⁰ See, B.Vigazzi, *L'Italia di fronte alla prima guerra mondiale*, vol.1, *L'Italia neutrale*, (Milan-Naples, 1966), E. Gentile, *The struggle for modernity*, Foreword by S.G. Payne, Westport CT: Praeger, 2003.

be accepted among other countries, but to influence the very nature of international collaboration. Only from the mid-1930s did Mussolini embrace really power politics, willing to conquer by force a *posto al sole* for the Italian nation. Indeed, although the Ethiopian invasion can be seen as a point of no return for the foreign policy strategy of the regime, it is still debatable if the colonial war started by Italy represented the final phase of an evolution that from the liberal patriotism of Risorgimento moved towards radical nationalism; or, on the contrary, the imperial policy of the regime constituted a break with the role played by the Italian nation in the former period. This is a sphere of reflection directly connected with the issue of a broader definition of fascist foreign policy, including the political, cultural and propagandistic aspects of the regime¹¹. The historiography of fascist foreign policy tended to be polarized around some interpretative positions: there were different evaluations about the degree of continuity/discontinuity between the fascist period and the former liberal Italy as well as regarding instruments and cultural references used by the regime.

Undoubtedly, the book of Gaetano Salvemini *Mussolini il diplomatico*, published in 1932 during his political exile in the United States constituted the beginning of a historical research into Italian foreign policy which was born in the fiery atmosphere of that period. The book recalls arguments and writings of Salvemini's former period, linking the text with the Italian economic-juridical school as well as with a broader movement of studies which went hand in hand with the establishment of a series of Faculties of Political Science in Italy. In short, while the book testifies Salvemini's greatness as a historian, who was trying to understand those elements of success which allowed the seizure of power of fascism in Italy and to discover those who supported the dictatorship and promoted the guidelines of its foreign policy, it attempted to offer general analytical categories in order to better understand how the fascist regime gained consensus and general enthusiasm from Italian society¹². In that book the Italian historian showed how to weave documentary sources with the press of the time in order to investigate the relationship between foreign policy events and the great myths of the postwar period. In this way, he was able to offer a methodological platform, fusing social history and the history of mentalities. The result was an evocative image in which the ideological thought shared by fascist and nationalistic leaders was stressed, namely the constant ostentation of their realism which led them to believe they were superior to the situation, to master ideas, peoples, events. According to Salvemini, ideology was the glue that bound the fascist government with a series of demagogic campaigns, a continuous deformation of reality which affected not only the masses but also the élites, leaving no space for reflection and criticism. Namely, Mussolini had a rough and coarse ideology but he was the expression of effective trends present in the Italian society. In this perspective, the duce was very skilled in relying on both the diplomatic class and the masses, depending on the circumstances and needs. This new way of perceiving the relationship between the government's actions and the masses would constitute a peculiar political background in which propaganda was the «inseparable companion¹³» of the foreign policy of the fascist regime. Salvemini fully developed these arguments, considering Mussolini as a master of propaganda who was able to manipulate situations, attitudes, public opinion to his political goals. Thanks to this, he achieved a greater freedom of maneuver in which his abilities as an improviser resulted more important rather than the creation of a set plan from which to develop his own policy. This would be the general approach of Salvemini's historical understanding of Mussolini, which will kick off the endless discussion about whether or not there was a fascist foreign policy program. Nevertheless, those "improvisations" were the

¹¹ See F. Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito. Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero*, Carocci, Roma 2010 and B. Garzarelli, «Parleremo al mondo intero». *La propaganda del fascismo all'estero*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2004.

¹² See B. Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dal 1919 al 1940. Orientamenti di studio e prospettive di ricerca in Opinione publique et politique extérieure en Europe 1915-1940*, Rome: École Française de Rome, 1984, pp.81-136, G. Salvemini, *Preludio alla seconda guerra mondiale*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1967, J. Petersen, *La politica estera del fascismo come problema storiografico* in De Felice R. (ed.), *L'Italia tra tedeschi e alleati. La politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale*, Bologna 1973, pp.11-56.

¹³ Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia*, cit. p.89.

expression of an expansionist policy, intimately aggressive, which was clearly recognizable in the fascist foreign policy initiatives, from the episode of Corfù until the final stage when the regime would give more space to the Nazi revisionism. More precisely the search for an empire, a harsh and systematic repression of minorities along the borders as well as the swing between France Great Britain and Germany might suggest a link between events and longer-term structures providing historical analysis as way to better investigate the Italian society during the fascist regime, its institutions and ideology as well as the role played by propaganda and public opinion. The latter is quite a problematic term to use: as a matter of fact if on one hand fascist foreign policy, through the party, its ideology and propaganda gained a broad “consensus”, on the other hand is it possible to talk about public opinion which is formed by free discussion, criticism and opposition?

No doubt, the issue of consensus for the regime poses a number of difficult questions to answer, and the ever-continuing debate on this subject if on one hand has contributed to better clarify some aspects on the other hand it has had the effect of overloading with different meanings and nuances the key elements at stake. For this reason, it is useful to better define in what sense my work deals with public opinion during the fascist regime and what are the main goals of this investigation. First of all, my project shows how Ispi devoted its efforts to construct a well-informed public opinion, in the sense that both the journals of the Institute, «Rassegna di politica internazionale» and «Relazioni Internazionali», had a section in which the most important documents of international politics were reported. Secondly, it shows how that public opinion was instrumentalized for political aims. The documents as well as the articles that I studied demonstrate how the pedagogical aim to create a national conscience on foreign matters and the propagandistic effort to push the readers to assume a given position were deeply intertwined, feeding each other. In this perspective, whilst books and articles published by the Institute were reflecting a serious investigation, developing the study of international relations in Italy, they were also intimately connected with the political discourse of the fascist regime. This is why I decided to start from my sources in order to better appreciate the way in which these specialists in international relations represented their objects of study, in relation to public opinion, propaganda and scientific research. In the end, Salvemini’s assessment of a fascist foreign policy completely linked with the improvised and incoherent approach of Mussolini was re-thought in favor of a more precise periodization of the internal phases of the regime as well as stressing the progressive development of deeper tendencies in fascist foreign policy¹⁴. Even in this case, there was a clear division between those studies such as the work of Rosaria Quartararo¹⁵ who tended to stress Mussolini’s realism and the Italian “peso determinante” until the outbreak of the war in 1939, and other interpretations such as Knox’s book *Common destiny: Dictatorship, foreign policy, and war in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*¹⁶ in which the ideological affinities between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy fully explained their alliance. According to Knox, Mussolini meant war from the beginning and in 1926-27 his program was «fixed in all essential details¹⁷».

The debate about fascist foreign policy has reached a high degree of analytical interpretation, even if the majority of studies focused on the political-diplomatic aspects, emphasizing the way in which the fascist government, and especially Mussolini, engaged with the international dynamics of the interwar periods. On the other hand the establishment of cultures,

¹⁴ See, E.Di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana (1919-1933)*, CEDAM, Padova 1960; G.Carocci, *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista, 1925-1928*, Laterza, Bari 1969; G.Rumi, *L'imperialismo fascista*, Mursia, Milano 1974. It is important to mention also De Felice’s volumes on Mussolini, in particular *Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso 1929-1936*, Einaudi, Torino 1996 (I ed. 1974) and *Mussolini il duce. Lo stato totalitario, 1936-1940*, Einaudi Torino 1996 (I ed. 1981); R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian dictatorship*, Oxford University Press, New York 1998; E. Di Nolfo, R.H.Rainero, B.Vigazzi (edited by), *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa 1938-40*, Marzorati Milano 1986. E.Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922-1939*, La Nuova Italia, Milano 2000.

¹⁵ R.Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino. La politica estera fascista dal 1930 al 1940*, Bonacci, Roma 1980.

¹⁶ M.G.Knox, *Common destiny: Dictatorship, foreign policy, and war in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.66.

movements and decision-making processes which substantiated a varied fascist initiative for the entire Ventennio were investigated less. From this standpoint, a perspective which is able to mix together the diplomatic, cultural and political level might be useful to dig deeper into the strategies put in place by the regime. Recent historiographical works converged in considering the European dimension and the international character of fascism during the interwar period, with the subsequent invitation to focus on its capacity of providing a model to be imitated by other countries. In doing this, it is necessary to study fascist foreign policy through a closer integration between the history of foreign relations and the ideological/political history of the regime. In dealing with Ispi, I considered the Institute as a meeting point of two separate wider historical phenomena: the interwar European and Transatlantic debate on international relations, animated by a number of national institutions that were born in the 1920s and 1930s, Ispi among them; and the intellectual history of Italy in the fascist period, in particular as regards conceptions related to politics, international relations, and historiography, which was clearly way more nuanced than the ideologically totalitarian character of the regime would suggest. It is clear that the regime tried to reach a new and more influential place in the field of international relations during the interwar period, and that the development of a fascist cultural diplomacy represented a further sphere where to implement the expansionist aspirations of Mussolini's government. Ennio Di Nolfo demonstrated how Mussolini, from the very beginning of his foreign policy, maintained a greater interest in domestic policy, showing a «clear and early awareness of his objectives¹⁸». The elaboration of arguments with the function of strengthening consensus and the development of offensive projections characterized the activities of a broad range of public opinion already in the decade prior to the seizure of power by Mussolini. It is mainly due to the work of Emilio Gentile, a painstaking interpretation on the construction of fascist ideology, which was understood as the original synthesis of the political and cultural instances produced by all those forces which accepted a merger with the Mussolinian project¹⁹. This effort was essential to better decipher all those cultural references which contributed to guide the formation and the concrete practice of the various actors of fascist foreign policy, from members of the government to the diplomatic staff and the large number of publicists, intellectuals and activists²⁰.

In this perspective, the reconstruction of the network produced by Ispi during the 30s and early 40s might add a new piece to better understand those forces which were not part of the official bodies of the regime, nevertheless they played an important role in developing a well-defined political culture in the field of international politics. Moreover, the work stresses the fault line represented by the Ethiopian war, from which the ideological connotations of the Institute would be more pronounced.

In this regard, it is essential to see how Ispi analysed and commented the gradual movement of Italy to Nazi Germany, the Italian conquest of Ethiopia and the subsequent declaration of the Italian Empire, the Spanish Civil War, the Anschluss, the outbreak of the Second World War and last but not least the ways and the motivation with which Italy came into the war alongside Germany on 10 June 1940. Focusing on articles, books, conferences and other initiatives promoted by the Institute is one of the most fruitful way of assessing its role within the political/cultural context of the fascist regime, allowing me to shape a more in-depth understanding of the view formulated by the Study Office of Ispi. Analysing the relationship between Ispi and the fascist regime, we have the opportunity to investigate a thorny issue: what was foreign policy for the fascist government? And above all, was there a clear foreign policy programme put in place by the regime? My research is built upon these questions and the attempt is to appreciate whether or not there was a sort of “freedom” during the fascist dictatorship to theorize on a general political approach in the field of foreign policy. In order to do this we need to historicize fascist foreign

¹⁸ E. Di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana (1919-1933)*, CEDAM, Padova 1960.

¹⁹ See, E. Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista. 1918-1925*, Il Mulino Bologna 2001 (I ed. 1975) and from the same author *Il mito dello stato nuovo. Dal radicalismo nazionale al fascismo*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002 (I ed. 1982).

²⁰ See the work of B. Bracco, *Storici italiani e politica estera. Tra Salvemini e Volpe. 1917-1925*, Angeli, Milano 1998.

policy, underlining what, at first sight, might be seen as a paradox: while fascism, especially during the '30, was imposing a totalitarian regime in the field of domestic policy, the government seemed to have a different approach in the field of foreign policy, in which we can find an unexpected variety of attitudes as well as a surprising degree of freedom, at least until the Ethiopian war. Of course, this statement seems to go against common sense, but if one tried to focus on different conceptions and approaches produced by scholars in international relations during the '30, then he would discover that behind the image of Mussolini as decision maker there was a more complex situation, in which specialists were trying to face the multiple and, to some extent, new challenges coming from the international environment. Given that, it's very difficult to take for granted that there was a clear political programme in fascist foreign policy. In short, the question is the follow: did Ispi reinterpret the line of the fascist foreign policy or it was *per sé* a demonstration of the variety of conceptions and attitudes existing in the field of foreign policy²¹?

Indeed, this question acquires an even more problematic understanding if one is aware of the fact that the Institute was moving in a new territory, in which the sphere of foreign policy was no longer considered as a secretive domain which kept its distance from public opinion. As a matter of fact, in the previous period (roughly liberal Italy) a solid theory was built, which separated in two different fields domestic policy and foreign policy, thinking that it would have been possible to expel every kind of particularism in the latter and that, at crucial points, the different political forces which were fighting against each other at home had been able to channel into a single and indivisible national interest, followed and sustained by a national public opinion.

In the post-war period things seemed to change: public opinion took the stage, pushing traditional politics into the background. On one hand the great myths of Leninism and Wilsonism and on the other hand radical nationalism and the protests of the defeated powers had the result to deepen the divide between different opinions. These changes brought about a different relationship between foreign policy and public opinion: if before the war one could see public opinion in a committed relationship with foreign policy, in the following period the borders between the two forces seemed more nuanced and a new democratic principle was emerging in the relationship between foreign policy and the masses. Nevertheless, a few years after the war what would have remained of this new attitude promoted by the Peace Conference and sustained by the newborn League of Nations? What was the faith of this new diplomacy? Indeed, if one looks at Italy, the seizure of power by Fascism didn't go to that direction, but on the other hand there is no doubt that it was a mass regime which places foreign policies' issues at the center of its political program. That is, foreign policy started to get out of the old thought patterns and new needs involved both political structures and civil societies. In this perspective, was there something in common between the appeals addressed to the public opinion made by democratic states and the ways in which dictatorships were trying to gain a vast consensus? Walter Lipmann when he wrote his *Public Opinion* in 1921 described this force both as essential and tremendous at the same time, destined to change the destiny of human life from one day to another. Certainly, the events which underpinned the interwar period didn't help in finding an appropriate balance between foreign policy and public opinion. Nevertheless, the opportunity to study an Institute like Ispi, which inherited all these controversial issues facing public opinion, foreign policy and international politics, could help in order to follow closely these ever-evolving changes. I think that this method can provide a fruitful and reasonable approach to issues which are really ambiguous and difficult to treat. This ambivalence is simply striking during the interwar period: any reference to foreign policy and public opinion contained hardcore contradictions and, at least at first sight, inextricable paradoxes. Ispi can be taken as an iconic example of this situation: a place in which scientific information should have been linked with the precise pedagogical aim of forming a strong national conscience of international problems, in accordance with the fundamental directives of Fascist foreign policy, in short «an Institute which marries science with propaganda²²». On the other side, stood Western

²¹ Brunello Vigezzi, *Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dall'Unità ai giorni nostri*, Jaca Book, Milano 1991.

²² *Vita dell'Istituto*, *Rassegna di politica internazionale*, 1934, p. 613.

democracies with their acknowledged inability to transform their foreign policy into a real movement of public opinion. The matter is thus significant: what was propaganda, scientific research, open diplomacy and public opinion for the members of Ispi? How can we assess the transformation and the frequent contacts between foreign policy and public opinion and the creation of Institutes which were trying to channel and address this new form of communication? Was it the public forum created by these Institute a further opportunity to democratize foreign policies choices or a maneuver made by demagogues to construct and gain consensus?

Within this effort there is a specific will to integrate more classical account for the two decades between the World Wars, in which national categories often serve as the lens through which we view this period, with a point of view that focus on non-state actors and their connections with both national and international context. Most studies on the interwar period either are dedicated to individual countries or concentrate on the actions of the governments, often losing sight of bodies that maybe were not directly involved in the decision-making process, but nevertheless contributed significantly to characterize a specific environment. To be clear, the present study is built upon the assumption that non-state actors matter in the study of both domestic and international politics, and that taking for granted their existence as irrelevant elements of the historical process doesn't help to grasp a better understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political context. This need has become even more urgent nowadays as new studies have demonstrated the remarkable complexity of the interwar period, in which, alongside with nation-states and their effort to perform a power politics, international organizations, think tanks, private associations steadily growth in number and in the scope²³. As a consequence, a focus on non-state actors and in particular on the roles played by think tanks in international politics provides a fresh perspective on the evolution of international relations and its relationship with foreign policy and public opinion. For instance, the collection of essays contained in the volume edited by Daniel Laqua, *Internationalism reconfigured. Transnational ideas and movements between the World Wars* is an iconic example of what kind of results can be achieved if we take into consideration the transnational network created by actors, who tried to act beyond the nation-state boundaries. Even if the volume has the specific objective to retrace the origins and the development of internationalism during the interwar period, it includes interesting aspects concerning the methodology they used to fulfill this goal. Firstly, they refuse a rise and fall narrative which seems to be too deterministic, «focusing on the seemingly ill-fated hopes vested in the League of Nations, or allude to the inherent limitations of accords such as the Locarno Treaties and the Kellogg-Briand Pact»²⁴. Instead, the volume opts for a slightly different approach: it investigates the efforts of individuals, groups and associations, and their interactions with the new international structures that had been created in the wake of the Great War.

Eventually, these new transnational histories demonstrate that borders are not so easily dissolved, and that nations remain an important concern. Fragmentation and conflict also formed important parts of the story, as the forces of attraction and repulsion often became deeply intertwined. Some transnational encounters tried to exploit or even reinforce national barriers. Piecing together all these elements helps us to better contextualize exchanges, movements and flows during the interwar period, observing how transnationalism is a force that takes life inside nation-states. Therefore, the nation does not stand in opposition to transnationalism as a border-crossing understanding of the latter term implies, but rather is an essential element in shaping the phenomenon. The histories of transnational encounters in the interwar period tell us as much about the national contexts as they do about the world they seek to reshape.

In particular, the research that I am carrying out shows how transnational structures and movements can be used for nationalistic purposes, to advertise and promote a particular vision of international relations and foreign policy. My attempt is to contextualize the history of Ispi into a

²³ Akira Iriye, *Global Community: the role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2002.

²⁴ *Internationalism reconfigured*, Laqua, cit., p.XII

wider appreciation of the international environment, looking at those elements which constituted both a challenge and a stimulus for the creation of the Institute.

The research project is basically divided into three parts. The first part aims at discovering the cultural and political background thanks to which Ispi was founded. In doing this, a first chapter will deal with the origins of the so called "Institutes of International Affairs' Movement", focusing on the features and ideas of the originators of this movement: the British (later Royal) Institute of International Affairs based in London and the Council on Foreign Relations based in New York. These Institutes were born in the aftermath of the First World War and represented an interesting novelty within the international environment. They were founded by specialists who participated in the negotiations of the Peace Treaty of Versailles and their goal was to educate, inform and advise future leaders about the causes and consequences of war. To fulfil this ambitious goal they tried to set up a network of analogous institutions in order to better comprehend the international life and to guarantee a mutual understanding between nations.

In the following years, Institutes imbued with analogous purposes were founded in the Commonwealth, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Norway, Romania, Spain and Sweden²⁵. Why did they proliferated around the world during the 20s and the 30s? And, above all, are there any connections between them? In order to answer to this question it is necessary to introduce another element which played a crucial role in the formation of this movement: the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC)²⁶. One of the main task of the Institute was to promote and sustain a methodical international cooperation in the field of political education. As a consequence, a first International Conference of Institutions for Scientific Study of Politics was called by the IIIC and held at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik (Berlin) in 1928. This was the beginning of a series of International Conferences with the aim to promote a broader discussion on burning political issues such as the role of the state in economic life or collective security. As a result of these conferences, practical international cooperation has been made possible in a number of way: the exchange of professors and of students, facilitation of foreign study, information service and bibliographical work.

To address these new initiatives, a National Committee was formed in Italy with the aim to coordinate all those bodies which were committed with the study of international affairs. At that time in Italy few faculties of political science were developing, especially in Rome, Florence, Padua and Pavia. The latter will play a crucial role in the foundation of Ispi, therefore an entire paragraph will be dedicated on the formation and activities displayed by this faculty and its professors.

The second part of my project begins with the origins of the Institute and follows the development of its nature and characteristics until it was compulsorily mothballed after September 8th 1943. In this phase it took the form of a cultural and research centre *sui generis*, able to draw into its orbit a large number of personalities of high intellectual standing. They included (just to name a few): Luigi Salvatorelli, Filippo Sacchi, Enrico Bonomi, Antonio Basso, Pietro Silva, Giovanni Mira, Ernesto Sestan, Gioacchino Volpe and his School for Modern and Contemporary History (the so called "Roman school" with Federico Chabod, Walter Maturi and Carlo Morandi), and "Benedetto Croce's right-hand man" Adolfo Omodeo. One is naturally led to wonder why they were working for the Institute and what kind of role they were playing within it.

Furthermore, the names that made up the Ispi Study Office included many of the country's most able international affairs specialists: Rodolfo Mosca, Enrico Serra, Cesare Grassetti, Federico Curato, Bruno Pagani, Silvio Pozzani, Mario Toscano, Angelo Tamborra and Francesco Cataluccio. Is it possible to characterise them as representing the first organic nucleus of scholars of international politics in Italy? Attention will focus on the role and significance of the contributions

²⁵ *Institutes of International Affairs*, Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, New York 1953 , p.22-23.

²⁶ The institute was established with the aid of the French government in 1924 and located in Paris. It provided a permanent secretariat for the League of Nations International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation which aimed to promote international cultural/intellectual exchange between scientists, researchers, teachers, artists and other intellectuals.

made by the above-named figures, analysing the many publications produced by the Institute (journals, collections and books designed to cater for specialists and general readers alike) as well as conducting an accurate consultation of their personal archives.

Another aim of this research is to examine the roles and activity of the two main driving forces within Ispi: its director Pierfranco Gaslini, a singular figure as a scholar and cultural organiser, and its president Alberto Pirelli. The former was one of the most energetic personalities of the new generation educated under the Fascist regime, the latter was one of the most important economic-political figures both in the national and in the international arena.

In short, the second part of this research will attempt to answer the following questions: what was Ispi? Why was it founded? How did Ispi interpret and judge the broad lines of the Fascist government's foreign policy? What were the Institute's publishing initiatives and what aims did they have? Can Ispi be considered a major centre of historical and policy research, in terms of modern and contemporary history and the study of international relations? In a general sense, what degree of independence did Ispi have from the dictates of the regime?

The third part aims to analyse the Institute's outlook on international situation, in particular it will be examined how the Austrian issue and the Anschluss were treated by the two journals of Ispi, «Rassegna di politica internazionale» and «Relazioni Internazionali». In this perspective, it will be possible to analyse the collaborations of the Institute and the various standpoints hosted by the journals. Who were the authors who collaborated with the Institute and what were their attitudes towards the most thorny international issues which were happening in those years? How and to what degree did the journals change their views towards Anschluss? Did they align immediately with the regime or were there some discrepancies between authors' writings and the official view imposed by the regime?

The methodology that I intend to use will draw extensively upon primary sources (institutional archives as well as private archives) even if, in order to achieve a more complex account of the history of Ispi, I intend to analyse the many publications produced by the Institute (journals, collections and books designed to cater for specialists and general readers alike) in the context of specific case studies regarding some of the most salient historical events marking the development of international politics.

However the most important source for my research is the Historical Archive of Ispi: access to its historical archive now makes it possible to piece together its history and attempt to understand the development of such think tanks in international politics from a long-term perspective. As a matter of fact, the vast amount of material made available by the Ispi Historical Archive "gives the tangible impression of a task of digging and reflection, almost all of which still remains to be done"²⁷.

This research acquires particular interest in the light of the scarcity of historical study to which ISPI has been subjected. The only two examinations of its work, the essays by Angelo Montenegro and Enrico Decleva²⁸, both mention the same problem. Yet the Institute has a great deal to say. The papers in its Historical Archive reveal the importance of its role in Italian domestic affairs, both under the Fascist regime and later, after the establishment of the Republic. Furthermore, as my project is placed at the crossroads between the history of Italian foreign policy (especially fascist foreign policy), the history of think tanks in international politics and the analysis of the birth of a new elite of specialists in foreign affairs, it is difficult to find some specific reference points. As a matter of fact, though there are a lot of general accounts concerning the foreign policy of the Fascist regime as well as an ample bibliography regarding the function of think

²⁷ Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, *Inventario dell'archivio storico 1934-1970*, edited by Maria M. Benzoni, Anna Ostinelli and Silvia M. Pizzetti, scientific direction Brunello Vigezzi, Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali direzione generale per gli archivi, Rome, 2007, p.XXI

²⁸ Angelo Montenegro, *Politica estera e organizzazione del consenso. Note sull'Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale. 1933-43*, «Studi Storici», anno XIX, 1978, n.4, p.777-817 and Enrico Decleva, *Politica estera, storia, propaganda: l'Ispi di Milano e la Francia (1934- 43)*, «Storia contemporanea», XIII, 1982, n.4-5, pp.697-757.

tanks, it appears to me that my research tackles an important topic which has not been seriously investigated. In particular the lack of specific case studies dedicated to the “Institutes of International Affairs’ movement”²⁹ (especially in the European context) is a real handicap for a better understanding of the historical backdrop which emerged from the First World War. In fact, although it is known that Institutes of International Affairs (IIA) have proliferated around the world since their modest beginnings during the early 20s, «their existence and persistence have, in the main, failed to inspire scholars to study their activities, to assess their influence, and to consider their significance in understanding how power works [...]»³⁰. After this period the next most significant was the late 1920s and 1930s, which saw such developments in the Commonwealth and in Europe, including the Italian Ispi. Inderjeet Parmar rightly acknowledged that the IIAs movement was a world-wide phenomenon: if on one hand the aims and objectives of the IIAs were identical to those of Chatham House (all these institutes claimed to be engaged in the objective, scientific study of foreign affairs), on the other hand they take a variety of forms due to the particular cultural as well as political environment of their respective countries. Focusing on the Anglo-American Institutes, Parmar states that, given the fact that their establishment derived from American foundation sources, the IIAs were part of a global knowledge network promoting liberal internationalism and attitudes sympathetic to the United States. This might be true, but it is only a part of the story, as the establishment of Ispi demonstrates. As an institute founded and developed under the Fascist regime Ispi was originally unconnected (culturally, politically, financially) with the Anglo-American think tanks, aiming at studying and spreading a specific view of international affairs that, needless to say, was strongly critical towards the new international order which emerged from the peace conference of Versailles. So, even if «[...] the archival research still needs to be conducted in order to adequately address the question of IIA policy influence in war, and, indeed, at any, time»³¹, I argue that, against this backdrop, Ispi represents a problematic as well as meaningful case study. So, what was Ispi and, above all, why was it founded?

Indeed, if on one hand the research has resisted the temptation to go for the easy way (that is, to write a parochial micro-history), considering the Institute as a meeting point between the interwar European and Transatlantic debate on international relations and the conceptions related to politics, international relations and historiography produced by a group of scholars and specialists who found in Ispi a place of research and divulgation; on the other hand the dissertation has tried to handle two different historiographies and methodologies: that of transnational history, necessary to map the debate on International Relations during the 20s and 30s both in its cultural and organizational features, and that of intellectual history of Italy in the fascist period. This approach has revealed both its potential as well as its weaknesses. As a consequence, while it has been possible to set a long-term project with a series of, I think, interesting questions capable of both problematizing the object of analysis in an original way and suggesting new paths of research that can hold together different level of analysis, the research has found some difficulties to follow all the suggestions pointed out at the beginning. I am fully aware of the fact that, sometimes, the research sketches out new themes without addressing the issues in more depth. For instance, having stated that it is important to recognize the peculiar international involvement of Ispi in order to better understand Italian foreign policy, considering the Institute as an original think tank in international relations, it would have been interesting to assess how fascism was perceived within the system of International Affairs Institutes and within the League of Nations. The fact is that a transnational approach, with its needs to connect different level of analysis with a historical research based on multi-archival and multi-lingual research, requires a quite long period of reflection in order to operationalize the sources taken into account as well as to develop a critical

²⁹ A definition that I take from Inderjeet Parmar, *Institutes of International Affairs: their roles in foreign policy-making, opinion mobilization and unofficial diplomacy* in Stone, Diane and Denham, Andrew. eds. *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*, Manchester, 2004.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p.19.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p.28.

and self-confident interpretation of the finding. Nevertheless, I argue that, taking account of these limitations, the research has achieved its main purpose: the attempt to define what was Ispi and why what is founded, linking its activities with an in-depth understanding of the national/international political environment in which it developed its activities. The result is a better understanding of both Italy's international involvements as well as a better appreciation of the role played by the Institutes of International Affairs during the interwar period.