

Report from Rome by Liliana Celani

Andreotti's bid draws opposition

Craxi ruled out his foreign minister's succeeding him as premier, and many in Andreotti's own party are not charmed.

The East seduces me, it has also a kind of gentle civilization" whispers Giulio Andreotti *Il Giornale*. Andreotti was foreign minister in the Craxi government which fell on March 4, and who aspires to be prime minister as a result of the government crisis—the first Italy has had in 42 months. Andreotti has been in Italian politics for more than 40 years, and his methods are even older, harkening back to the style of the Roman Empire.

This time, his wry jokes in the Italian press are not sufficient to cancel the impression that Andreotti's bid for power in Italy is being opposed. The shrewd foreign minister had been preparing this government crisis for months: He even made a deal with Premier Bettino Craxi, on their way back from a diplomatic visit to Spain, demanding to become premier without any parliamentary debate, according to an unwritten contract called in Italy *la staffetta* (literally, "the relay race") which would have given the Christian Democrats the premiership again after 42 months of a Socialist at the helm. When Craxi announced on national TV that "there is no such thing as *la staffetta*," Andreotti decided to provoke a regular government crisis.

Andreotti has been playing the Soviet and Communist card so heavily that even some of his colleagues in the Christian Democracy (CD) started wondering whether he would be the best man for the job. He flew first to Sofia, Bulgaria, to whitewash the Bulgarians from any charges about their role in the attempt against the Pope's

life in May 1981, even as new evidence was being presented in the Italian press on the "Bulgarian track" in drug and weapons smuggling. He even made a parallel between himself and Bulgarian dictator Todor Zhivkov, who is almost 80, saying "this means that, being less than 70, I can govern at least 10 years." It was certainly not his best joke, since, as the Italian daily *Il Tempo* commented, "fortunately it is not only up to the Bulgarians to decide who will be the next premier in Italy."

Back from Bulgaria, Andreotti flew to Moscow, where he met party boss Gorbachov a few days before his "peace offer," and signed a contract to set up a World Laboratory in the U.S.S.R. in which Western and Eastern scientists are supposed to cooperate to prevent war. As soon as Andreotti got back to Rome, Craxi resigned, officially opening the crisis with a televised speech in which he said that the "political atmosphere had become too poisoned" to keep together the five parties forming his government coalition, mainly the Socialists and Christian Democrats who have been quarreling over the premiership for months.

By way of "vendetta," Craxi vetoed Andreotti's candidacy for premier. He said, "The CD demands to lead the new government. So the new premier should be the highest political representation, either the general secretary or the chairman of the party." That means not Andreotti, but either Ciriaco De Mita or Arnaldo Forlani. The latter is vice premier in Craxi's

government and a Craxi ally.

Andreotti's threat to use the vote of the large Communist Party to obtain the majority for his candidacy if the Socialists keep vetoing it, only weakened his position inside his own party, since not everybody in the CD is as "seduced" by Communists and East bloc leaders as the foreign minister.

While Italian President Francesco Cossiga, is having the usual consultations with all parties to see whether early elections in June can be still avoided, what can already be said is that in this government crisis no party has addressed any of the crucial issues facing Italy right now: the deepening economic crisis, the rapid spread of AIDS, and the revival of Soviet-backed terrorism inside the country. Not even the visit of Brazilian Finance Minister Dilson Funaro—who was in Rome during the governmental consultations and met Treasury Minister Giovanni Gorla—attracted the attention of the five parties squabbling over the premiership. Funaro was asking Italy for support in the fight against International Monetary Fund conditionalities, which are hitting Italy as much as they hit South America.

The only new factor in the political vacuum is not a party, but a movement called "Patriots for Italy," which made its first public appearance on Feb. 24 and again on March 4, when a "call to Italian Patriots" was published in two dailies, *Il Giornale d'Italia* and the economic daily *Italia Oggi*, addressing the urgency of a solution to the AIDS problem and the Soviet threat to Italy, and demanding a stronger Italian role in SDI.

Among the signers of the call were Fiorella Operto, president of the Schiller Institute in Italy, and Gen. Duilio Fanali, former Defense Chief of the General Staff, the highest military rank in Italy.