**Italy and the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Playing the two-level game**

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*Abstract*

The aim of this article is to assess Italy’s behaviour in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United Nations Human Rights Council, both as a recommending state and as a state under review. The UPR is a peer review mechanism launched in 2008, through which all UN member states can make recommendations to each other regarding human rights practices. Drawing on role theory, liberal and constructivist institutionalism, and the two-level game approach, the analysis reveals that Italian decision-makers played parallel games at the domestic and international tables of the UPR, and managed to adapt country’s human rights foreign policy goals according to the different social contexts where they operated. Indeed, while in the review phase in Geneva, Italy sought legitimacy for both its policies and its status as an international ‘human rights friendly’ actor, at domestic level a policy of inactivity was chosen, in order to minimize the impact of the most costly UPR recommendations, and protect the dynamics of domestic politics. The time-span of the analysis covers the first 19 UPR sessions (2008–14), broadly coinciding with Italy’s first two membership terms at the Human Rights Council.

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