

Transcription of the interview with Giuliano Amato (Rome, 15 October 2012)


Caption: Transcription of the interview with Giuliano Amato, President of the Italian Council from 1992 to 1993 and 2000 to 2001 and Interior Minister from 2006 to 2008, carried out by the Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE) on 15 October 2012 in Rome. The interview was conducted by Renaud Dehousse, Professor and holder of the Jean Monnet Chair in European Union Law and Political Science at Sciences Po Paris and Director of the European Studies Centre, and particularly focuses on the following aspects of Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa's life: his role as a great public servant, his work at the Italian Ministry of the Economy and Finance (2006–2008) and the importance he placed on networking.

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I. Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa: a great public servant

[**Renaud Dehousse**] I would like to thank you for agreeing to this interview in which we would like to review the life of Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa and try to situate him in terms of developments in Italy and Europe over the last 30 years or so. I would like to begin by asking you a somewhat personal question. Do you remember when, or in what context, you first met Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa?

[**Giuliano Amato**] It is too long ago for me to be able to remember, and anyhow some of the people with whom I have had close relationships seem to have been part of my life for as long as I can remember, without any specific dates attached. So the dates on which these relationships began have mostly been erased from my memory. What I do remember is that our early encounters were the monthly evening meetings with a group consisting of professors, public officials and big private companies. Everyone took turns to pay for supper on those evenings so that, by the end of the year, we had each settled our account, because there were about 12 of us, who met to discuss the important things that were happening in Italy and elsewhere in the world. We were therefore brought together right from the start by this need to clarify to ourselves and to others issues of general interest. Our meetings were certainly underpinned by this rationale, this feeling of a public mission if you like. I remember that we also met at his house on various occasions. I can still remember his house in a leafy area of Rome and evening meetings on the veranda, which confirms my initial memory that the group sometimes met in the houses of one or other of its members.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] When would this have been, roughly speaking?

[**Giuliano Amato**] This was between the 1970s and 1980s. The meetings went on over a considerable period. Tommaso was not always able to be part of the group because he left Rome in the late 1970s: I think he went to Brussels as a director between 1979 and 1983–84.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] Correct.

[**Giuliano Amato**] So he was established in Brussels.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] In those Italian circles, he was known as a formidable expert on economic and monetary problems. If I remember rightly, he was also known for the emphasis on the state, which underpinned his thinking. He was really someone who...

[**Giuliano Amato**] Yes, exactly. This dual vocation suddenly became abundantly clear to the general public when, years later, he started to write editorials for the *Corriere della Sera*. His public vocation became evident, and one might say that his approach was somewhat Calvinistic in its rigour. His vocation obviously took him beyond economic and monetary issues, to the political and civil conditions in which he sought and found the solutions that the country needed. His vocation was always to find a solution which reflected ethically rigorous and not just technically effective criteria.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] I once heard you allude to the role played by Padoa-Schioppa at a very difficult time for you when you were President of the Council at the time of the 1992 Finance Bill which, if I

remember rightly, was not the easiest one for Italy.

[**Giuliano Amato**] Yes. You know, Italians are great; they managed to adjust themselves to that standard over the following years, as they are continuing to do even now. But the role that he played for me, at the time of that first Padoa-Schioppa government of mine, was the classic role of the technical expert, in inverted commas, whom you trust because he possesses other qualities and also because he is your friend. So it was a very close relationship between us at that time, but on a very informal basis. Tommaso had previously had some official post at the Italian Finance Ministry which, given his skills, was entirely natural. With respect to me, as President of the Council, he did not have any position other than that of answering the telephone whenever I tried to get hold of him and coming to find me immediately afterwards because I clearly needed to see him in person. I did have great need of him in terms of finding solutions which worked and which were also socially fair. I was particularly aware of this problem at a time when it was necessary to reduce expenditure and increase taxation, and Tommaso shared with me the search for this difficult path. I also remember several evenings at my house when we discussed together far into the night the proposals which had been put to me by representatives of the various ministries in order to crystallise, between us, what my assessment, and hence my decision, was to be. Thus he became part of my work, but not just as another adviser; rather he helped me to crystallise my thought, to sharpen my focus and my subsequent decisions.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] All of which goes well beyond the traditional role of true servant of the state. That shows a commitment that is truly...

[**Giuliano Amato**] It shows commitment, he... There were situations where he completely immersed himself in the task to be undertaken. And he applied himself to it without worrying what recognition would be given to his role. In those situations, he played the greatest possible role because his mind was part of mine in actual fact. But that was what interested him, being able to help most effectively and in line with his own tenets, to find a solution. This, among other things, left a profound impression on our relations because later, when our lives followed different paths and I left the government, I left Parliament and was asked to chair the anti-trust authority, and I did it willingly, and it was one of the experiences from which I learned the most, and I still look back on it with pleasure. A few years later, Tommaso left the Bank of Italy, he was really pushed into leaving, to be quite truthful, and he became Chairman of Consob. Then one of the first things he did was to come and find me. This time, it was to find out from me how to embark on this new career path which was different from, but to some extent similar to, my anti-trust experience; and so he sought me out for a swift induction into the role of being chairman of an independent authority.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] You mentioned his departure from the Bank of Italy. There was a time when many people thought that he was a natural candidate for the post of governor. But that did not happen.

[**Giuliano Amato**] That had happened first, and it was the fact that someone else became governor. That person did not like him, and that was what led him to leave. I would like to stress this: Tommaso left the Bank of Italy, not in a fit of Dantesque rage because he had been passed over in favour of another for the post of governor. Absolutely not. He left because the other person who had become governor did not have a cooperative attitude towards him, quite the reverse. He actually encouraged him to leave the bank. Tommaso was my candidate for the governorship when I was still President of the Council of that government, of that collaborative effort with him to which I referred earlier. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, the then governor, had reached the age of 70 and felt that the rule in the Bank of Italy statute whereby a governor is governor for life was against the principles in which he believed. Ciampi maintained that 'when I reach 70, I should really step down'. But he said this to me right in the middle of the financial crisis, which was when he became 70, so he could not have said it at any other time, and I said to him, this is a subject which I would rather not face right now. However, I began to tackle the issue shortly afterwards with Ciampi, thinking that he would probably decide to leave. We both concurred that Tommaso was one of a highly qualified group of candidates — the Bank of Italy has always been a rich pool of Italian senior civil servant talent — but in that pool,

Tommaso was really the best. We talked in general terms mostly, but noted the difficulties that would arise because, at the time, Tommaso was third in the Bank of Italy hierarchy. There was a director general who was second in line after the governor, and that was Lamberto Dini. There was Fazio who came after Dini and then there was Tommaso, also in terms of seniority. The fact is that I was not able to take these initial assessments any further because my government resigned and a Ciampi government took its place, Ciampi having had to leave his post at the Bank of Italy and tackle himself the issue of his replacement at the bank. Ciampi remained faithful to the scenario that we had envisaged together, but he came up against the expected difficulties. Lamberto Dini did not resign when he realised that he was not the one chosen to ascend to the next rung on the ladder, and this made creating the precedent of choosing someone who was two rungs below the remaining director general particularly problematic. Notwithstanding this, the choice fell on Fazio who was on the intermediate rung. Tommaso, Tommaso is no longer with us, so I can say it now. In the spirit of friendship which bound us and which bound him to Ciampi, he said to me more than once: ‘You and Carlo Azeglio, with your idea of making me governor, you’ve ruined my life. Because I never did become governor and, for a variety of reasons, the relations between the person who did become governor and me ended up taking me away to do things which I was perhaps not destined to do.’ This is part of the institutional and human history of Tommaso and his relationship with me.

[**Renaud Dehousse**] Yes, but despite this he found many things to do subsequently, including some highly prestigious jobs, so it is not that you ended his career in public administration, either at national or international level.

II. Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa and his work at the Italian Ministry of the Economy and Finance

[**Renaud Dehousse**] I would like to talk to you about another period that occurred about 15 years later, about Tommaso’s entry into the Prodi government and the time when he was appointed by Prodi to the Finance Ministry. It is important to stress that, for him, this was a completely new activity in that it was a hugely political appointment, certainly, but he had never really drunk from the chalice of politics as others had, and, for him, it was a source of concern.

[**Giuliano Amato**] Nor did he think that he would ever do so. I think this is the first time that I have mentioned it to you, but in the autumn of 2005, I can’t remember exactly when, I would need to check my diary, we met in Boston, where our paths crossed by chance. We met one afternoon, I can’t remember if I was doing something at the MIT or at Harvard, in Cambridge, and he said to me: ‘Why don’t we have breakfast together tomorrow morning?’ ‘Why not?’ I replied. We sat down, and he spent the whole of that breakfast haranguing me to return to the Finance Ministry with Prodi, assuming that Prodi managed to form a government after the elections, stating that he himself did not intend to enter government, that this was not his role, which was at odds with the party nature of politics. He had his own ideas, he was very close to us, he was a good friend of Prodi, a really good friend as well as being my friend, and this could not mask the fact that there was a framework of Centre Left ideas, and yet he said ‘this is not my sort of job; in fact, I have always played other roles and I want to continue to do so’. Other activities were not ruled out. A few months later, I found that he had become Finance Minister, Minister for the Economy it was then called, in the Prodi government. I haven’t yet asked Prodi how he managed to convince him. It would be worth asking him. They had a very strong bond. It was Europe that consolidated it, their combined European experiences. The fact is that he became a kind of alter ego for Prodi, as President of the Council of Ministers, because the main task of a large proportion of that government was to set to rights the system of accounting which had proved to be in a fairly worrying state at the end of the previous legislature. Therefore, Tommaso was the one entrusted with this task, and he worked very closely with the President of the Council and did it without consulting anyone. I can really understand how, with him, the mission came first and foremost. I would even say that I sometimes found his attitude

genuinely abstract and difficult to accept, because I would go to see him or he would come and seek me out, we were two old friends who were used to working together. But he was convinced that I, who was Minister of the Interior in that government, should do things that were not all very clear-cut in my view, because, to give just one example, if I may, the Ministry of the Economy's Public Spending Committee, whose conclusions he endorsed, made it known that I should have reorganised the Italian prefectures into districts, each with 500000 inhabitants, and not one more. I felt that this was a typical economists' extravagance. I cannot deny that I was less than happy about sorting it out because, depending on how the territory of 500000 inhabitants was made up, the scenarios could be completely different. Frankly, I was lazy about some of these reforms that they had proposed, and one fine day Tommaso said to me: 'Look here, there are things that you haven't done because you've yielded to the internal lobbies opposing the reforms, as so many people do.' Of course, I was not happy about the fact that he was telling me this, but I realised that he was doing so because, well, he was Tommaso who, having chosen a path, could follow it only in a straight line, without any diversions to right or left, without any rethinks.

[Renaud Dehousse] That rigorous attitude of his came in for some heavy criticism during his time at the Ministry of the Economy, because he adopted very firm public stances precisely on that public spending issue. How do you see that time and his way of dealing with that... political neophyte that he was?

[Giuliano Amato] Well. No, well. He was a one-off. In my view, he reacted like that because his internal ethics dictated it, but there was also an educational purpose which he found useful to pursue. This much is evident from reading his editorials in the *Corriere della Sera*. He was convinced that Italy is a country which can follow you on the path to financial rectitude but which needs educating about how to tread that path with conviction. To tell you the truth, I was convinced that this was the right attitude when I was Finance Minister for the first time as a young man between 1987 and 1989. When I was Minister, I used to write columns, I can't remember whether it was for *L'Espresso* or *Panorama*, the two big weekly Italian public opinion publications, and every week there I was, the Finance Minister, explaining to Italians how to behave in a balanced public spending situation. Clearly, Tommaso also shared that vision. Granted, he would do so in ways that, for a politician, were sometimes over the top, to say the least. I remember too one day at Villa Madama, which is the venue usually used for foreign policy meetings by Presidents of the Council, but where other public meetings are also held, we had convened a meeting with the chairmen of the regional assemblies in order to explain to them the public spending situation that they would be facing. Trying to reach an agreement with them, I remember that I finished my speech to the chairmen before his speech and said to them: 'Well, we want weddings to be splendid occasions, we realise that it is not possible to economise by serving dried figs at weddings, but here we have the Finance Minister who will certainly have a fat juicy fig for you; not many, but one at least,' I said hopefully. Tommaso took the floor, gave one of those enigmatic smiles of his where you don't know whether he is teasing you or what, and said: 'In my view, you can have fantastic weddings with dried figs.' He left me there, and in some ways it was an echo of what I had said myself. That was how he was, for better, for worse.

III. Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa: a networker

[Renaud Dehousse] The last issue that I want to touch on is one to which you have already alluded in your comments, that of Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa as a networking man, because we have talked at length about his career as a high-ranking civil servant in Italy, but he did just as much, of course, in Europe, and there again I would say that he operated in the same way, weaving his web, creating contacts at European and even international level, which is really a very particular way of working but

one which came perfectly naturally to him, I think.

[**Giuliano Amato**] It was natural for him. He was a multi-faceted individual, you might say. Because he was an academic. You only have to read his books to find traces in them not just of papers written for practical purposes but also analyses and reflections involving personal commitment, and reading matter to which he devoted himself as both a specialist and a generalist, an attribute which you do not easily find, even in academic circles. He had a great capacity for binding himself to others and for creating links with others himself in order to develop and resolve whatever matter was close to his heart. For this reason, you find him in periods when he had no official post with Delors in *Notre Europe* talking about the possible future of the European Union, or you find him chairing international financial bodies in order to work out the payments systems to be adopted or the relationships between the various currencies of the international monetary system. Let us not forget that, for years, I can't remember how long the mandate is, seven or eight years, he was a board member of the European Central Bank, in the very early years of the European Central Bank, a founding member therefore. That too was a forum where Tommaso spread his network. He was certainly a historic figure, a man who radiated personality like a beacon, whether at the Bank of Italy, as a Minister, as a Commission official in Brussels, alongside Delors in the Delors Commission which laid the foundation for the euro, in the Central Bank, in other bodies... When Tommaso left us, it was as though the world, the Europe we knew and Italy had lost one of its cornerstones, because he was one of the few Italians, and I would emphasise this, one of the few Italians who were capable, interested and highly productive within a system which was not closed, but open. The people whom Tommaso knew were on average much, much more high-powered than a normal Italian would get to know in a lifetime, even by pursuing one of his professions. There were, in fact, huge numbers of people who had reason to remember him and regret his passing. In this sense, he is truly a figure to remember.