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# **“Agente Betulla”: a case of secret agreement between a journalist and the Italian secret services**

(Matteo Gerli)

## **1. Introduction**

According to a very formal interpretation of their role, government intelligence agencies are responsible for the protection of their country’s interests, contributing, along with other security bodies, to the defence and neutralization of both internal and external security challenges (Giannuli, 2012). Essentially, their “crucial” functions consist, on the one hand, of collecting facts and data (for example, through actions of shadowing and spying) and, on the other hand, of producing and disseminating information likely to foster specific interests, which may also involve (when it is considered appropriate to the aim) the manipulation of reality such that the “relevant actors” (politicians, members of cabinet, decision makers, and criminal organizations as well as ordinary citizens) do what “they are supposed to do”.

Two important questions arise at this stage: who is defining which interests are worthy of protection? And to what extent would the manipulation of reality be considered reasonable in enhancing national security? Clearly, in the current society, security agencies represent an essential component in the protection of citizens and the preservation of democracy (particularly against the risk of terrorist attacks). But, likewise, if they do not use their substantial power properly (namely, if their members are not loyal to the state to which they belong), they may turn their role into an instrument of prevarication, able to influence the politics of a country as much as they wish.

Referring to the recent history of Italy, the development of the national security agency<sup>49</sup> was marked by several cases of misuse (or abuse) of power, which, all together, have contributed to casting a shadow over its effective functioning (also explaining the many reforms enacted to

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<sup>49</sup> The Italian intelligence (or security) agency has taken various appellations throughout its history. For this reason, in this brief introduction we preferred to use a “generic” name for it. Afterwards, during the investigation of our case, we will refer specifically to the SISMI (Military Intelligence and Security Service), which was the equivalent of the SISDE (Intelligence and Democratic Security Service) on the military side at that time. Basically, the first one was in charge of foreign affairs, while the second one was responsible for domestic affairs. In 2007, they were replaced by the AISE (External Intelligence and Security Agency) and the AISI (Internal Information and Security Agency), respectively.

increase its effectiveness and bring it more fully under civilian control, the last of which was in 2007). As a matter of fact, any dramatic event that occurred in the second half of the 20th Century—from the “Piazza Fontana bombing” (1969) to the “Ustica plane crash” (1980), to Prime Minister Aldo Moro’s kidnapping (1978), just to mention some of the most relevant ones—are suspicious and thought possibly have some machination of the national security agency behind them<sup>50</sup>.

In confirming this negative trend made of deliberate omissions, failures, secret agreements, we should not forget that, during the same period, many of the Army’s senior leaders were involved in attempts (luckily failed) of conspiracy against the State, the last of which was the so called “loggia massonica P2”, a subversive organization disbanded by the Italian Parliament in 1982.

Journalism, especially investigative journalism, may constitute a real “antidote” against the possibility of the criminal degeneration of a state apparatus (in this specific case, the degeneration of an intelligence agency). “Good journalism” can (and must) help bring to light the real facts in the interest of readers, public opinion and, thus, the regular functioning of the political system. Conversely, real “informational sabotage” can occur when state apparatuses are out of control and journalists pursue the same objective, that is to say, when a professional journalist puts his/her reputation and reliability (and those of the newspaper for which he/she works) to the service of a falsified communication whose sole aim is to poison public information. This is what we discuss in detail in the next few pages through an analysis of a recent case of “secret agreement” between the journalistic sector and the SISMI (the Italian Military Intelligence and Security Service).

## **2. Who is the “agente Betulla”?**

Before addressing the substance of the events mentioned above, we should say a few words about the figure who, more than anyone else, can be considered our “main character”: the journalist Renato Farina (also known as “Betulla”). Indeed, through the analysis of his “cursus honorum”, we believe it may be possible to better assess the specific conditions that allowed what, in the eyes of several observers (mainly, but not exclusively, journalists), seemed to be secretive “recruitment” by the SISMI (see footnote n. 1). To make this assessment, we take advantage of a book that Farina himself published in 2008 with the declared purpose of telling his own version of the events.

To begin, he is considered a well-known journalist, if not to the general public, at least in some important circles (mostly linked to the Catholic right wing of the Italian political system). He is a person, in other words, who has the right acquaintances and friends (which he does not hide) from

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<sup>50</sup> For more details, see De Lutiis (2010).

whom he is able to draw upon the necessary resources to pursue his specific aims, which are not always strictly related to what is commonly associated with the profession of journalism.

His career begins soon after his university studies in philosophy, first with the weekly *Solidarietà* and then with the weekly *Il Sabato* from 1978 to its closure in 1993. Both papers had a declared Catholic leaning. He then became deputy editor for Vittorio Feltri at *il Giornale*, a centre-right newspaper owned by Berlusconi's family, and, for a short period, worked at *il Resto del Carlino*. From 2000 to 2006, the year he was suspended from the Italian Register of Journalists (before being expelled in 2007) because of his ties with the SISMI, he also held the same position of deputy director at *Liberò*, another centre-right newspaper that Farina himself contributed to establishing with Feltri. On television, he was the writer and the host of *L'InFarinata*, a current affairs programme that aired in 2006 on *Rai Sat Extra* through the *Sky satellite platform*, and an advisor for *L'Infedele*, a similar TV programme broadcast on the private television station *LA7* in the same period. Finally, he was elected to the Italian Parliament in 2008 in the ranks of the "Popolo della Libertà", the centre-right party headed by the media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. Referring to this, he declared that he owes everything to Berlusconi and Feltri, "who, after my expulsion from the Italian Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of Journalists), glimpsed this opportunity as a way to rehabilitate my professional honour in front of the journalists' eyes" (Farina, 2008, p. 8).

In his "memoirs", he expressly claimed to prefer a type of journalism that is not simply satisfied with writing opinions and reporting facts but aspires to intervene, if necessary, directly in political dynamics, even if it goes against professional ethics (pp. 37-40). This seems very much like an attempt to bring a guise of morality back to his "extra-journalistic" activities (in his story, there are many references to his "spiritual fathers", such as Karol Wojtyła, Giovanni Testori, and Luigi Giussani). Nevertheless, Farina, according to what he himself reports in the book, actualized this personal disposition on many occasions, thus expanding (or simply consolidating) his network of interpersonal relationships.

In the 80s, he was in Africa. First he travelled to Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast to describe the activities carried out by some Catholic NGOs, then to Ethiopia and Eritrea to cover the conflict between the two countries, and finally to Guinea Bissau following Pope Wojtyła on an apostolic visit. He moved from one position to another thanks to the channels that, from time to time, he accessed through his "friends in the Vatican", the *Caritas* organization and an unexpected Italian entrepreneur with some co-operational sites in the war zones. Regarding those travels, he described, with a hint of megalomania, that upon his return to Italy, he had been so struck by the poverty and adversity of the African people he decided to send a letter to monsignor Gianni Danzi, a personal

friend and secretary of the Pope. After a few days, the Pope himself decided to designate Cardinal Roger Etchegaray as a delegate to those lands.

In the 90s, he went to Serbia and Kosovo to follow the war as a reporter for *il Giornale*. However, his journalistic activities there were systematically intertwined with those of “diplomacy” that Farina claims to have maintained between the warring parties and the Italian Government. His excuse for this involvement remained the same: his desire not to be a mere spectator of facts. This “scheme”, however, was partially new because the objective was different—making a contribution to the end of the conflict—and the network that he needed to activate was also different.

In effect, among the important figures that Farina mentions appearing in his story besides the usual Berlusconi, are the names of Giulio Andreotti, the 41<sup>st</sup> Italian Prime Minister and one of the most important leaders of the Christian Democracy Party; Lamberto Dini, Luigi Manconi, and Riccardo Sessa, at that time, respectively, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the spokesman of Green party and the Italian ambassador to Belgrade; and Ljubira Ristic, at that time the president of the Jul party (the Yugoslav communist party) and political advisor of Slobodan Milošević of Serbia. In particular, from the latter, Farina claimed to have obtained two important “confidences” that he would promptly communicate to the proper authorities: the first one referred to the real risk of a terrorist attack in Europe by the Serbian fighters and the second one to the payment of some bribes in favour of some Italian politicians in the “Telecom Serbia affaire”.

Scrolling down these pages, it seems that journalism was a marginal activity for Farina. The conditions for his appointment by the Italian intelligence agency, however, materialized only in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, following the attack on the Twin Towers (2001) when, at the behest of the then Senator and 8<sup>th</sup> President of the Italian Republic Francesco Cossiga, he published an article under the false name of Franco Mauri with which he supported the appointment of army generals Niccolò Pollari and Mario Mori as director of the SISMI and director of the SISDE, respectively. He describes the success of this initiative:

*Cossiga phoned me at dawn on Sunday. He was just leafing through the pages of Libero newspaper: “Triumph. Everyone is wondering who Franco Mauri is. Ministers and army generals are going crazy. Listen to me. Make an appointment with Minister Antonio Martino on behalf of Franco Mauri. Please meet him in person and don’t talk on the phone”. I asked Feltri if he would authorize me. He didn’t care about these things and he told me: “Meet him. We cannot lose Cossiga; you enjoy these situations, and one day, you will write a book about them”. Cossiga informed me that Pollari would phone me to have a cup of coffee with him before I met Martino (pp. 98-99).*

Farina claims to have met Pollari before (and after) his appointment to the upper levels of the SISMI—“he wanted me to be totally aware of the cause that I was going to support, that is, himself”

(p. 99)—and to have spent with him for hours and hours in complete intimacy, telling him his memories of the Serbian war. It was in this precise circumstance that the preconditions for a strong violation of the autonomy of journalism materialized<sup>51</sup>. As a matter of fact, the following story was developed from their frequent meetings, collaborations “in fighting against Islamic terrorism” and reciprocal benefits, not necessarily of economic, with the “journalist” Farina using *Libero* as a channel through which he spread the information he obtained from the SISMI—“in that period I often went to Rome. I wrote well-informed articles. Pollari devoted substantial time to me” (p. 134)—and the head of SISMI employed Farina as a sort of “undercover agent”. This is not the appropriate place to recall in detail all the cases mentioned in the book. However, just for the sake of thoroughness, we consider it is useful to emphasize that Farina himself was said to have been a key partner of the Italian intelligence agency in the liberation of Italian hostages, mostly by ensuring continuous contact with Imad El Atrache—formally the news editor at *Al Jazeera* but also a man with many relevant connections in the Arab world—and receiving in return some “attentions” that generally are not granted to ordinary civilians.

### 3. The case

News of the “Betulla case” officially broke in 2006 in the course of an inquiry by the Milan Prosecutor’s Office into the disappearance of Imam Abu Omar. In short, Hassan Mustafa Osama Nasr, better known as Abu Omar, was an Egyptian citizen who lived in Italy at that time as a political refugee. He was kidnapped on 17 February 2003 by agents of the CIA with the cooperation of the SISMI—technically, these operations were termed *extraordinary rendition*—while he was going to the mosque, transferred first to the NATO military base in Aviano, then with an air carrier, to Ramstein in Germany and finally to Cairo in Egypt, where he was tortured and arrested on suspicion (no formal charges) of complicity with international Islamic terrorism<sup>52</sup>. The investigation began the day after the kidnapping when Nabila Ghali, Omar’s wife, reported his disappearance to the Italian authorities. In early July 2006, deputy prosecutors Armando Spataro and Enrico Pomarici demanded the indictments of approximately 35 people (mostly CIA and SISMI officials). Among them, Farina and his collaborator, Claudio Antonelli, were accused of abetting by having organized

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<sup>51</sup> Here it must be emphasized that a journalist is free to communicate with a member of an intelligence agency to collect information for his professional activities. Nevertheless, according to the Italian judicial system (see l. 801 of 24 October 1977), the intelligence agencies cannot have journalists on their own staff and, conversely, a journalist cannot practise his profession for an intelligence agency. Additionally, the Single Text of Journalists’ Duties (28 January 1993), which incorporates all the previous deontological charters, explicitly states that: “Journalists must refuse payments, reimbursements of expenses, donations, free holidays, gifts, facilities or stipends from private or public bodies that may affect their work and their autonomy or harm their credibility and professional dignity. Journalists do not take on assignments and responsibilities in conflict with the autonomous exercise of their profession [...]”.

<sup>52</sup> *il Post*, 20 September 2012. Available on: <http://www.ilpost.it/2012/09/20/la-storia-del-rapimento-di-abu-omar/>.

a fake journalistic interview with the goal of both collecting information on the progress of the investigation and tampering with the evidence. In particular, Farina wanted to make a fool of Spataro and Pomarici, but unfortunately for him, they had already wiretapped him while he was planning this “operation” with Pio Pompa, a high official of the SISMI who worked under the supervision of Pollari (Farina would be wiretapped again right after the fake interview while he was reporting all the information gathered to Pompa).

At first, it was the Abu Omar case, even before Farina’s, that “magnetized” the mass media’s attention, in part because it was the first time an operation from this CIA programme of secret transfers was at the core of a legal trial. Within a few days, however, Farina and Antonelli (to a lesser degree) become the objects of considerable interest from the majority of national newspapers. As a matter of fact, the more days passed, the more the publication of excerpts of the judicial process (largely transcripts of wiretappings) revealed clear elements of the pernicious relationship between the SISMI and the two journalists. To begin with, on 6 July 2006, *il Corriere della Sera* published a detailed article that described the existence of an “occult centre” pertaining to the SISMI and located in the neighbourhood of the police headquarters in Rome<sup>53</sup>. It was here that Pompa was responsible for a massive secret archive with thousands of files to be used against magistrates, journalists, politicians and businessmen deemed as “enemies”.

According to this article, Farina and Antonelli were the only journalists under indictment, but many other journalists seemed to have been “approached” by the SISMI’s agents to publish fake news. In particular, the wiretappings would prove that Farina had been employed under the false name of “Betulla” as a confidential informer for military intelligence and that he acted in concert with Pio Pompa when he went to the Milan Prosecutor’s office to “peek at” the ongoing inquiry.

On 7 July 2006, *il Corriere della Sera* published another article dealing with the disclosures addressing the two journalists of *Liberio* in more detail, revealing the names of the first confirmed victims of the heterogeneous activities that the investigators classified as “misinformation”, “tampering with evidence”, “abusive surveillance” and “collecting of private information”<sup>54</sup>. Among the victims, Romano Prodi, at that time the President of the European Commission, and Stefano Dambrosio, the judge in charge of the investigation of the Omar case since 2004, are the two more prominent ones. In particular, to the detriment of Romano Prodi, Farina and Antonelli “wrapped” an article that had been suggested by the intelligence agency through which they

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<sup>53</sup> *il Corriere della Sera*, 6 July 2006. Available on: [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Cronache/2006/07\\_Luglio/06/dossier.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/07_Luglio/06/dossier.shtml).

<sup>54</sup> *il Corriere della Sera*, 7 July 2006. Available on: [http://www.corriere.it/Primo\\_Piano/Cronache/2006/07\\_Luglio/07/sismi.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Cronache/2006/07_Luglio/07/sismi.shtml).

explicitly indicated Prodi as the main politician responsible for the CIA operation<sup>55</sup>. Against Stefano Dambroso, they tried to support the idea that he was directly responsible for the organization of the kidnapping by both suggesting that their closer colleagues publish articles to corroborate that idea and providing false information (during the previously mentioned false interview) to the magistrates. This was a manipulation of reality with a double purpose: to clear the then-Prime Minister Berlusconi of any charges and to ensure the transfer of the inquiry from the Milan Prosecutor's Office to a "less relevant" one (any assessment on Dambroso would have obliged Spataro and Pomarici to give the inquiry to another office, probably that of Brescia).

To complicate Farina's position, according to what we read in *la Repubblica* on same day, there were also two receipts signed at the bottom by "Betulla"<sup>56</sup>. The amounts paid are not very large (2.500 and 5.000 euros), but according to the investigators, this would have proved the existence of a "structural" relationship between Farina and the SISMI.

On 8 July 2006, *Liberò* published a letter from Farina addressed to the editor Vittorio Feltri and to readers to explain and, mostly, to justify the facts that emerged from the inquiry<sup>57</sup>. Here, with a "friendly" style of language, Farina admitted "to have given a hand" to Italian Military Intelligence, transmitting and receiving some information as well as making all his network of contacts available. But, he specified that everything was always conducted following his principles and to preserve Italy and the Western world from terrorist attacks.

On the same wavelength, *Il Giornale* published an article entitled *Farina: "I soldi? Rimborsi per la lotta al terrorismo"* (lit. *Farina: "Money? Only reimbursements to fight against terrorism"*) in which, when commenting on the above-mentioned letter, the newspaper tried to explain how the money received by the journalist should be considered reimbursement for travel expenditures and not a reward for supposed spying activities<sup>58</sup>. Farina, therefore, claimed his role in the fight against terrorism, and he felt proud of his behaviour, even though he was aware of the possible legal consequences.

In the light of this, on 10 July 2006, the Lombardy Council of the Italian Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of Journalists) approved the opening of a disciplinary procedure against Farina and Antonelli: the first was charged of the manipulation and misuse of the journalistic profession, having put his job to the service of purposes other than the duties of independence and autonomy, loyalty and good faith, and thus violating the respect of the readers; the second was asked to explain why he did not

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<sup>55</sup> The article in question was published on *Liberò* on 9 June 2006. Available on: [http://d40105.e53.eundici.it/modello\\_artdos.php?id\\_artic=525&recordinizio=15](http://d40105.e53.eundici.it/modello_artdos.php?id_artic=525&recordinizio=15).

<sup>56</sup> *la Repubblica*, 7 July 2006. Available on: <http://www.repubblica.it/2006/07/sezioni/cronaca/arrestato-mancini/fabbrica-sismi/fabbrica-sismi.html>.

<sup>57</sup> *Liberò*, 8 July 2006.

<sup>58</sup> *Il Giornale*, 8 July 2006.



inform the senior management of *Libero* (in particular, the editor Vittorio Feltri and the managing director, Alessandro Sallusti) about the unusual activities carried out by and with his “supervisor”. About three months later, on 29 September 2006, Farina was suspended from his role for 12 months, whereas Antonelli was completely acquitted of all charges<sup>59</sup>.

Meanwhile, the legal case against them was proceeding such that on 16 February 2007, Farina decided to plead guilty to abetting, negotiating a penalty of 6 months in prison, which was later commuted to a pecuniary penalty of 6.800 euros. No penalty was imposed on Antonelli. A few months later, on 29 March 2007, Farina was expelled from the Italian Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of Journalists), following a request by the deputy General Prosecutor of the Italian Republic, Maria Antonietta Pezza, who declared that: “Farina’s behaviour remains incompatible with the ethical norms of the journalistic profession and has resulted in a serious disgrace to the entire group. And not only in connection with the Abu Omar case and the relations with Pio Pompa”<sup>60</sup>.

What happened in the following years was something paradoxical on which we consider it necessary to reflect before jumping to conclusions. First, at the end of 2009, 23 American citizens (mostly CIA agents) and 2 members of Italian Military Intelligence (the well-known Pio Pompa and Luciano Seno, an official with a marginal role in the Abu Omar case) were convicted of kidnapping. The names of Niccolò Pollari and Marco Mancini of the SISMI and that of Jeffrey Castelli, the then chief of the CIA office in Rome, were not among them because their actions were declared covered as state secrets for Pollari and Mancini and protected the diplomatic immunity for Castelli (such a “guarantee” did not apply to Robert Seldon Lady, the then chief of the same office in Milan, who was convicted along with his American colleagues). Then, on February 2013, all of these people were convicted for the same crime by the Milan Court of Appeal, which decided to reject any type of legal protection<sup>61</sup>. Finally, on February 2014, the Corte di Cassazione (the highest Italian Court of Judgement), recognizing a previous verdict of the Constitutional Court on the inability to take legal action against people covered by the state secret protection, acquitted all members of the SISMI involved in the case except Luciano Seno, who was sentenced to prison for two years and

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<sup>59</sup> For more details, see: [www.odg.mi.it/sites/default/files/farina-antonelli-delibera-28set06\\_1.rtf](http://www.odg.mi.it/sites/default/files/farina-antonelli-delibera-28set06_1.rtf).

<sup>60</sup> See: <http://www.odg.mi.it/node/30181>.

<sup>61</sup> *il Fatto Quotidiano*, 1 February 2013 and 12 February 2013. Available on: <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/02/01/abu-omar-in-appello-condannato-a-7-anni-ex-capo-cia-in-italia-jeff-castelli/486646/>.  
<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2013/02/12/abu-omar-condannati-ex-vertici-sismi-10-anni-per-pollari-9-per-mancini/496479/>.

eight months<sup>62</sup>. None of the convicted US officials were extradited to Italy, and some of them have even been forgiven by the President of the Italian Republic<sup>63</sup>.

As for Renato Farina, he has continued to work for *Libero* and *Il Giornale* newspapers as a columnist, although he was expelled from the journalists' guild. For this reason, on March 2010, the Lombardy Council of the Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of Journalists) approved a suspension of two months against editor Vittorio Feltri for having made use of Farina's work and thus violating professional decorum and dignity<sup>64</sup>. However, on 27 May 2011, the Corte di Cassazione annulled the disciplinary measure against Farina because he had unsubscribed from the journalists' register in 2007, before the Italian Guild declared his expulsion<sup>65</sup>. Following this decision (mainly based on a legal technicality), the Lombardy Council of the Guild was forced first to dismiss the disciplinary action against Feltri (on 5 July 2012), who had meanwhile impugned the previous measure, and then to readmit Farina into the register of journalists on 3 September 2014<sup>66</sup>.

This decision triggered the protests by many journalists<sup>67</sup>. Carlo Bonini, a reporter for *la Repubblica*, resigned from the National Council of the Italian Ordine dei Giornalisti (Guild of Journalists) with the following words:

*The memory of this country is short. Fleeting, I would say. That of its journalists, mostly iridescent, variable to the conveniences. And then, for the benefit of the forgetful, I will report literally what this National Council declared on 29 March 2007, the day when Renato Farina was expelled by the Order with 68 votes in favour, 5 abstentions, 2 against and 4 blank cards. The Appeal Board wrote: "Farina's behaviour is incompatible with all the ethical norms of the journalistic profession and has resulted in a serious disgrace to the entire group. And not only in connection with the Abu Omar case and his relations with Pio Pompa. It is Farina who, in his defence, revealed and claimed a role in negotiations with Milošević, a role that official members of the government deny he ever had. It is Farina who referred to his relationship with a secret US Service (a parallel to the CIA under the orders of Condoleezza Rice). It is Farina who claimed to the magistrates that he received approximately 30 thousand euros from the Italian intelligence agency".*

*Seven years were enough for this Guild to turn night into day. The shame and stigma is in forgiveness and resurrection. [...] Renato Farina, "alias Betulla", had among his espionage "targets" even journalistic work that the undersigned and Giuseppe D'Avanzo, who cannot talk any longer because a heart attack took him too soon on the morning on 30 July 2011, were*

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<sup>62</sup> *Il Giornale*, 25 February 2014. Available on: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/e-stato-eroe-lotta-alle-br-oggi-lunico-condannato-caso-abu-996152.html>.

<sup>63</sup> See: [http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/Seldon-Lady-e-Madero-ecco-chi-sono-gli-uomini-CIA-graziati-da-Mattarella-033a56e9-cf8e-4aaf-98c4-8fd56a02ccb1.html?refresh\\_ce](http://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/articoli/Seldon-Lady-e-Madero-ecco-chi-sono-gli-uomini-CIA-graziati-da-Mattarella-033a56e9-cf8e-4aaf-98c4-8fd56a02ccb1.html?refresh_ce).

<sup>64</sup> See: <http://www.odg.mi.it/procedimenti-disciplinari/vittorio-feltri-professionista-sospensione-di-2-mesi-violazione-artt-2-e-4>.

<sup>65</sup> *Il Giornale*, 1 July, 2011. Available on: <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/adesso-cassazione-d-ragione-farina-errato-radiarlo.html>.

<sup>66</sup> *L'Huffington Post*, 3 September 2014. Available on: [http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/09/03/farina-ordine-giornalisti\\_n\\_5757896.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/09/03/farina-ordine-giornalisti_n_5757896.html).

<sup>67</sup> *la Repubblica*, 10 October 2014. Available on: [http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/10/09/news/bonini\\_farina\\_ordine\\_dei\\_giornalisti-97689638/?ref=search](http://www.repubblica.it/politica/2014/10/09/news/bonini_farina_ordine_dei_giornalisti-97689638/?ref=search).

*carrying out for “Repubblica”. [...] Well, the rehabilitation of Betulla into the Order insults not only the memory of Giuseppe D’Avanzo but also what he gave to journalism. And the silence is a connivance. I am saying to those who, in this Council, with yet another cynical change of opinion, were seeking refuge in the comforting thought that my resignation is only for “personal matters”<sup>68</sup>.*

To complete this “typically Italian” spy story, on 22 June 2015, during the *Tgcom24* Television programme, Niccolò Pollari laconically declared that Betulla is not Renato Farina<sup>69</sup>. As in a game of mirrors, the truth seems to be constantly tripping over into lies and vice versa.

#### **4. Conclusions**

What emerges from our analysis of the “Betulla case” is that intelligence agencies may take a potentially subversive stance serving hidden powers rather than the interests that are expressed by the executives of those same agencies. This phenomenon, as we mentioned in the introduction, is not at all unusual in the recent history of the Italian Republic, even though the use of the state secret protection has often prevented the unveiling of the truth.

In our specific case, Italian Military Intelligence (the SISMI) was successful in penetrating the news system thanks to the availability of a well-known journalist who acted for several years as an “undercover agent”, collecting information, spying on people’s movements (work), trying to tamper with judicial evidence and publishing news articles against every principle of journalistic ethics. This was a very dangerous activity that, in spite of Farina’s “good intentions”, could have resulted in serious threats to the democratic life of the country if the magistrates had not discovered what was happening behind the scenes.

All of this is even more astonishing if one considers that at that time, Renato Farina wasn’t a young journalist (professionally speaking), willing to do anything he was asked for quick career advancement, but a deputy editor of a national newspaper that had deep bonds with the right-centre circle. As a matter of fact, it is really thanks to his “complicity” in the political environment that Farina first became “Betulla” and later, after he pleaded guilty, gained strong political protection through his designation as a member of the Chamber of Deputies.

With regard to the different roles that a journalist can play in a case of corruption, Farina’s is surely a case of an “actively corrupt” journalist. Indeed, despite the fact that the judiciary convicted him of abetting (in legal terms, a crime other than corruption), in practice, he betrayed the bond of

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<sup>68</sup> See: <http://www.lapresse.it/scheda-editoria-la-lettera-di-dimissioni-di-bonini-allodg.html>.

<sup>69</sup> *il Fatto Quotidiano*, 23 Jun 2015. Available on: <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/06/23/renato-farina-non-e-betulla-aiuto-ci-cade-un-mito/1806444/>.

confidence with his readers (and those of the newspaper he worked for) through an illicit agreement with (and to the advantage of) a third party (the SISMI).

It remains to be understood, however, how and why the Italian community of journalists was not able to prevent such behaviours and, even when the entire story was made public, continued to tolerate the presence of Farina in the journalistic profession (the reference here is primarily addressed to those figures who tried to “safeguard” his professional reputation, allowing him to exercise his job despite his already clear ties with the SISMI). The answers, of course, may be various, but it is quite clear that the absence of a common set of professional standards and values (apart from personal political leaning) played a very considerable role in this.

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The fundamental purpose of ANTICORRP is to investigate and explain the factors that promote or hinder the development of effective anti-corruption policies and impartial government institutions. A central issue is how policy responses can be tailored to deal effectively with various forms of corruption. Through this approach ANTICORRP seeks to advance the knowledge on how corruption can be curbed in Europe and elsewhere. Special emphasis is laid on the agency of different state and non-state actors to contribute to building good governance.

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