

The security threats related to Chinese aids to Italy

The arrival in Italy of supplies and medical personnel from China to deal with the coronavirus emergency has sparked a lively as well as unusual debate on the international posture of our country and the security uncertainties connected to Beijing's sudden generosity. An absolutely unusual development for an introverted and deeply provincial public like the Italian one, but which perhaps for this reason fully reflects the seriousness of the situation. After the outbreak of the epidemic in the People's Republic and the silence imposed on its doctors by a regime fiercely determined to safeguard its grip on power and ensuring social stability in the most populous country on the globe, the Dragon is now doing everything to rewrite the history of the pandemic. To this end, every situation of potential advantage must be exploited, as well as capitalizing on internal experience and foreign assistance programs having announced the world that China has now left behind the peak of infections. A move that is perfectly legitimate in itself, but which requires full awareness on those who find themselves dealing with a power animated by such ambitions. Hence the media offensive of the last few weeks that fully affects also our country, thanks to the presence of a national establishment and a business class composed in no small part by enthusiastic supporters of a privileged relationship with China. Not to mention the delayed and often inadequate reaction staged by European institutions and governments in the face of contagion, which undermined Europe's compactness while also providing leeway to foreign "interferences". For Beijing, the assistance offered to Italy – one of the richest,

most symbolic and loved countries in the world – is in fact an unrepeatable opportunity to increase its soft power abroad. Therefore, the rhetoric and emphasis that marked the landings of Chinese aids in Italy are not surprising, beginning with the arrival of the first plane from China that was welcomed at the airport by the Italian Foreign Minister in person with the Beijing Ambassador by his side. Or the images of the Chinese doctors beside the managers of the Spallanzani hospital during press conferences, or those of the inhabitants of Milan's Chinatown who donate masks to the street cleaners – naturally while being filmed by cameras. Chinese activism is all the more evident when it is compared with the media coverage given instead to medical aid landed from the United States, or with the senseless controversy over the face masks regularly purchased by Washington from an Italian company in the Brescia area. The public debate also focuses on the risk that the Chinese government may try to ride the health emergency to gain space in Western economies, before sealing political agreements with the different governments from a position of strength. Hence the call to think carefully about the whole situation addressed to Palazzo Chigi by the members of Copasir, the prominent parliamentary supervisory body on secret services, which is receiving transversal plaudits from pieces of the ruling coalition and opposition parties as well. The fear is that the 'Health' Silk Road proposed by Chinese President Xi to Italian Premier Conte could act as a forerunner to favor a further strengthening of China's technological giants in Italy. With all its associated security uncertainties.