



THE DIPLOMATIC ACTION OF PIETRO QUARONI. THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ITALY AND THE USSR IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1944 AND 1945

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Abstract

The present study approaches the subject of the diplomatic relation between Italy and the Soviet Union during 1944 and 1945 beginning with 27th May 1944 when Pietro Quaroni, a career diplomat, presented the credentials of ambassador.

Keywords: *diplomatic actions; Pietro Quaroni; Italy; Soviet Union; Italian-Soviet relations*

The impact of the USSR foreign policy on Italian-Soviet relations

Relations between Italy and the Soviet Union were interrupted in 1940 with the withdrawal of ambassadors from their countries after Italy left the conflict in September 1943. But from the very first days, they were characterized by the extreme distrust that Stalin felt for the Italian government and its ties with fascist circles not yet completely defeated. So on 27th May 1944 Pietro Quaroni, a long-time diplomat, former ambassador to Afghanistan, reached Moscow with the credentials of ambassador. He knew Russia perfectly, having

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married a Russian woman and having already been sent to Moscow in 1925.

Stalin favoured a very pragmatic and realistic approach to foreign matters, which had a considerable impact on the evolution of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Italy. The Soviet leader had always been strongly interested in undermining, through contrast with the capitalist world, the anti-Soviet bloc of which Hitler's Germany was just the spearhead¹. According to Quaroni, the USSR, while conducting an active foreign policy, remained an isolated nation, as it considered the Allies themselves as potential enemies for the construction of the Soviet system, especially from a long-term perspective. The Russian mistrust of the Italian situation, therefore, seemed to be dictated by a wider Soviet concern at the European level, which had existed long before the conflict, against both Germany and the Anglo-Americans, due to a literally "classist" view of the world which had been severely tested during the Second World War².

The reports of Quaroni of August 1944 speculated that this political idea of the USSR derives from the failure of the Third International, which had brought a series of capitalist states to oppose the Soviet Union in the same period in which Germany was strengthening its attacks against the Soviets at the dawn of the war³.

Since the earliest days of the Bolshevik revolution, in fact, Soviet Russia had gone through years of war in which the population had had to endure all kinds of harassment from neighbouring states, through an undeniable patriotic effort⁴.

This was a situation that had precipitated after the beginning of the Second World War and Operation Barbarossa, but which, however, had been stemmed thanks to the action of

¹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs AI, Bonomi*, R. 60/1, Moscow, August 8, 1944 (received on October 5), 409–14. See also Ulam, A. B., *Storia della politica estera sovietica (1917-1967)* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1970).

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

the Allies and the implementation of an effective Stalinist reconstruction plan. This had helped to strengthen relations, between 1942 and 1943, with both Roosevelt's United States and Churchill's Great Britain, leaving aside possible fears of a capitalist invasion at the expense of the Soviet world⁵. Thus, in 1943 the Soviet people, despite the losses they had experienced in previous years, returned to wage an offensive war against the German Reich, aware of their own strength, of the immense resources of the country and of its prestige, whose influence could be compared only to that of the United States⁶.

In this Soviet plan of development, economic as well as political, it was essential to keep diplomatic relations with the United States intact and profitable. To satisfy the Italian requests, on the contrary, would have complicated the relations with the Allies, an issue which remained at the centre of the attention of the Soviet foreign policy. This way of "reading" the international situation contributed to increase the distrust of the Kremlin towards Italy, which until September 8, 1943 had fought alongside the Germans and now, instead, was already demanding a revision of the principles of the armistice⁷. Along with safeguarding international balances, Stalin's attention, rather than on the Italian affairs, was focused on the emerging Yugoslav and Polish issues. As of August 1944, the Soviet government, as revealed by Vyshinsky to Quaroni, was committed to clarifying, by diplomatic means, the possession of the Polish and Southern-Slavic territories in the face of growing demands for influence by the British⁸. For the USSR, it was

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, R. 121/5, Moscow, September 16, 1944, 488–94.

⁷ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, R. 60/1, Moscow, 8 August 1944 (received on October 5), 409-414. See Pons, S., *La place de l'Italie dans la politique extérieure de l'URSS (1943-1944)* in "Comunisme", n. 49/50, 1997, 91-106.

⁸ IDD, Serie X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister*

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undoubtedly more important to succeed in resolving diplomatically this kind of matters, rather than following up the requests from the Italian politics, regarded as rather confused and unsatisfactory⁹. Other issues must be taken into consideration, in particular those regarding Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland, recently occupied by the Soviet; there, the difficulties do not come from the fact that England has the strength to prevent the USSR from obtaining the solutions it craves, but from the desire of the Soviet Union to maintain, for the post-war period, the collaboration of the three main powers, and therefore from its desire to avoid breaks¹⁰.

Stalin's interests, more closely related to the fate of the Soviet Union, had overshadowed the demands made by Italy. Therefore, the question of the armistice would have remained unsolved for a long time, according to Quaroni, just as the powers of control by the Allied Commission would not have been diminished¹¹. In relations with the Kremlin, the question of the recruitment of Italian prisoners on the Soviet-German front remained unresolved as well; moreover, the diplomatic importance of this particular issue, which had been initially amplified, was now gradually decreasing. In the eyes of the Soviets, the opportunity of an Italian involvement on the Eastern front had a character of negotiation for Rome, rather than being the expression of a genuine national will to fight Nazism. The sending of the Italian troops, in fact, would have given Italy more authority ask for a revision of the conditions of Cassibile¹².

In this context, the Soviets, who for the reasons already examined were no longer willing to negotiate on the issues raised

and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi, T. 2011-2009-2010 / 47-48-50, Moscow, September 2, 1944, 469-70.

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ IDD, Series X, 1943-1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943-December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi, R. 121/5, Moscow, September 16, 1944, 490.*

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 488-94. See also Salvaggio, L., *L'armistizio di Cassibile* (Siracusa: Lombardi, 2016); Castellano, G., *Come firmail'armistizio di Cassibile* (Milano: Mondadori, 1945).

¹² *Ibidem.*

by the Italian government, believed that Italy should have shown on its own that it was not “completely dead”¹³, from both a political and military point of view – this was the only way to give to the Italian question a relevant place in the Soviet political scene. The USSR, moreover, respecting the Stalinist paradigms of foreign policy, would have been interested in the Italian requests only when it received, from the resolution of the latter, a return in terms of diplomatic power towards the other allies. Something similar had already happened with France a few months before: after the liberation of Paris, and despite a serious lack of men and means in a country depleted by four years of occupation, the French had been able to recover and reorganize to take part in the fighting against Germany, thus awakening Stalin’s interest¹⁴.

After all, there was a veiled fear in the Soviet government that the Fascist sentiment of the Italian people was not completely extinct, and that it could take over again, taking advantage of every little international uncertainty that the revision of the armistice could have implied¹⁵.

Quaroni’s opinion was that Stalin had much more serious concerns than, and was little attracted by, the Italian situation; he was waiting to see how the country would react to its new geopolitical role alongside the Allied Powers. For this reason, Italy had to continue to focus on cultivating relations with the Anglo-Americans and strengthening those already on track with Yugoslavia and France; a fact which would have been well liked by the Soviets as well as the Anglo-Americans. This diplomatic strategy outlined what the potential lines of Italian policy in the post-war period could have been, given the imminent capitulation of the Third Reich¹⁶. According to Quaroni, moreover, the Soviet Union would have emerged as the main winner of the war, and it was for this reason that provisions had to be given in order to keep diplomatic relations steady, since the efforts made by the Italian government would undoubtedly pay off in the long term.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 493.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 488–94.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

In principle, Quaroni's suggestion was once again to strengthen Italy's reputation on the international diplomatic stage, before making other requests to the Soviets, so that the country could enjoy greater credibility, and its fate could return to occupy a prominent place in the Allies' concerns¹⁷.

The evolution of diplomatic issues concerning Poland and Yugoslavia

Regarding the Polish and Yugoslavian issues of August 1944, it seemed that they were now resolving precisely along the directives dictated by the Soviets, at the expense of the British¹⁸. The Polish Committee, in fact, had accepted the Soviet proposals regarding the Curzon Line for the eastern borders of Poland, since the Soviet government had agreed to revise the latter in favour of the Polish population. With this agreement, Poland would have entered the Soviet sphere of influence, meaning it would have been all but diplomatically lost for London. In particular, the agreement for Poland foresaw a relocation within its borders of East Prussia, Upper Silesia, and Oder, where German minorities would then be sent back to Germany. Moreover, with a treaty already signed on September 14, 1944 between the Polish Committee and the governments of Ukraine and White Russia, the establishment of the Curzon Line would have also allowed a voluntary exchange of populations with the neighbouring Soviet republics¹⁹. The government that would be born in Poland, following the relocation of the aforementioned territories, would certainly have been made up of members of the National Liberation Committee and, in part, members of the Russian and British governments.

These agreements had been taken only in an unofficial manner, but their development affected Italy because, if they were concluded for the benefit of the Soviets, this would have

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, Telespr. 122/6, Moscow, September 16, 1944 (received on 9 October), 494–8.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

perhaps allocated greater value to the Italian requests. Quaroni, therefore, in those months, constantly reported information to Rome on the Polish situation. The agreement and resolution of the matter, however, were not yet formalized, although the USSR had not shown any apparent disagreement with regard to the relocation to Poland of the lands previously conquered by the Germans²⁰.

The same can be said for the Yugoslav situation, whose government could become another possible intermediary for the Italian diplomacy. Yugoslavia, according to Quaroni's sources²¹, in September 1944 had partly fallen under the rule of Tito, the leader of the Communist Party, supported by the USSR in the fight against the German invaders at the expense of King Peter. With the Balkan states, the Kremlin wanted to undertake political relations of friendship so that regimes capable of endangering the Soviet world were not recreated, just as had happened some years before. The real interest, however, was not in taking economic advantage from the possible support of the Balkan governments, or in conducting any kind of political sovietization in these countries, but in holding the priority and support of the latter in any evolution of international political relations among the Allies. Therefore, the Soviet action resembled, more than anything else, a precise long-term diplomatic strategy and, perhaps, it was exactly there that the interest in the Italian question could be found – Italy, at that time, would not have given Stalin any diplomatic advantage, but any operation aimed at favouring the Italian government would have been for the benefit of the latter alone, and not the USSR. The converging around Stalin of a large political federation of Slavic peoples, on the other hand, would have given the USSR an enormous power on the diplomatic stage, securing its frontiers from a revival of German militarism while, at the same time, conferring to the Kremlin a leading role in post-war Europe²².

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs A.I. Bonomi*, Telespr. 124/6, Moscow, September 16, 1944 (received on October 5), 499–501.

²² *Ibidem*.

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For Yugoslavia, even more than for Poland, and always for the same political purposes, the interest of the Soviet government clashed with that of the United Kingdom in a rather daring struggle for influence – a struggle which was to be consumed solely on the diplomatic stage, with Stalin as the winner. The United Kingdom had made King Peter its main interlocutor in Yugoslav affairs, but the sovereign was no longer well-liked by the population: he was looked as the culprit for the profound economic crisis that had hit the country in 1939, as a result of the government's compliant attitude towards the German advance in Central-Eastern Europe²³.

Such historical evidence is important because any support to the government of Tito by the Italian government, and especially a diplomatic normalization with the Yugoslav Communists, would have contributed in strengthening the Italian position, despite the previous anti-Slav policy carried out by Fascism. To take advantage of the Polish and Yugoslavian issues, it would have been desirable, according to Quaroni, to send officials of any qualification to the respective embassies, and to start international operations that could have had major long-term consequences²⁴.

The Italian ambassador had shown a strong political sensitivity, filling his missives with objective analysis and reliable judgements on the future diplomatic passages for which Italy and the Soviet Union were destined. His long diplomatic activity allowed him to develop a global vision of the international phenomena, and remarkable maturity on the matter – rather rare qualities in the politicians of the time. His diplomatic and political qualities proved to be fundamental in increasing, as far as possible, the international role of post-Fascist Italy, despite all the difficulties encountered. However, his strategic intuitions were rarely granted the unconditional support of the Italian government, which, on the contrary, remained entangled in geopolitical schemes that could not find space in the diplomatic relations with the Allies.

Furthermore, according to Quaroni, Stalin's main interest was to prevail in a short time over Hitler and Nazism which,

²³ *Ibidem.*

²⁴ *Ibidem.*

until a few years before, had celebrated the German attack on the USSR as the final act of supremacy of the Germanic race over the Soviet and Slavic world. The Kremlin, Quaroni reported, wished to take on all the merits of Hitler's defeat, in order to increase both prestige and power over the United States, diplomatically and politically, giving rise to a longer-lived communist supremacy in the post-war period²⁵. This was Stalin's main objective in his foreign policy, and justified the lack of interest shown by the Soviets towards the Italian issues, since the latter no longer played any significant role concerning the Stalinist political goals. On the contrary, accepting changes to the armistice conditions would jeopardize the Soviet reputation at the international level.

These personal ambitions of Stalin, however, could undermine relations between the Russians and the Anglo-Americans. The expansionist aims of the Kremlin, in fact, would certainly not have been appreciated by the Allies, since they would have endangered the precarious international political balance in the most delicate of moments – the last supreme effort to defeat Hitler. The Anglo-Americans, consequently, viewed in the impeding Soviet expansion in the surrounding territories the risk for an authoritarian drift of communism in all Eastern Europe. It is for this reason that in October 1944, through a UK diplomatic operation, the head of the Polish government in exile, Mikołajczyk, agreed with Stalin that, in the case of the formation of an independent pro-Soviet Polish government, the latter had to include a strong British representation within it. Poland would thus be freed by the Red Army, and the National Liberation Committee would have gained full powers in the administration of the country, but with an internal British representation. This agreement undoubtedly succeeded in relaxing, at least for the moment, the relations between the Allies²⁶.

The Italian government always looked carefully at the evolution of the international situation. This is because Italy, as

²⁵ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, Telespr. 122/6, Moscow, 16 September 1944 (received on 5 October), 494-498.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

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was happening with France and Yugoslavia, was looking for every little diplomatic chink to gain relevance in the eyes of the Soviet foreign policy, which assumed an increasingly important weight in the European context. For this reason, Poland would have been another possible intermediary, useful for reviving the fate of Italy in foreign policy: to be exploited optimally, however, contacts with the Polish National Liberation Committee – as stated by Quaroni – should have been initiated without going through British intermediation²⁷.

At any rate, the only significant result that Italy managed to obtain at the time was the repatriation from Greece and Romania of numerous Italian soldiers, prisoners of war of the Germans, freed by the Soviets themselves, through agreement with the Allies²⁸. Many other Italian soldiers, however, interned in both Soviet and German territories, still waited to be freed and repatriated, and their fate seemed relatively unimportant to the USSR beyond the implicit diplomatic aspects. Proof can be found in a telegram from Venosta on November 19, 1944, where the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs complained to the Moscow representative that he had never received any list of Italian prisoners of war from Russia, despite repeated requests, or received any proposal to facilitate the exchange of communications between the internees and their respective families in Italy.

In reality, the specific situation of the Italian prisoners, about which Quaroni no longer referred, had not resurfaced in the diplomatic stage in recent months. Nevertheless, it was the Foreign Secretary General Prunas who returned, more concretely than Venosta, to the subject, notably on December 6, 1944 when, in a telegram, he communicated the liberation by the British and the Americans of Italian prisoners of war,

²⁷ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, Telespr. 122/6, Moscow, September 16, 1944 (received on October 5), secretary, 494–8.

²⁸ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 2332/71, Rome, November 10, 1944, 599–600.

disabled or aged over sixty, who were allowed to return to Italy²⁹. According to the Italian government, therefore, prisoners in Russia had to be considered “equivalent to those in the hands of the Anglo-Americans”, and needed to be treated as such, pointing out that “[this] provision would not fail to provoke favourable repercussions in the sentiment of the Italian people”³⁰. This return would have also been facilitated by the possible transit of them through Romania and Bulgaria, and this would have helped to further strengthen not only the relations between Italy and the USSR, but also with the neighbouring countries.

On December 12, 1944, the third Bonomi government was formed, including Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti and the Christian-Democratic Giulio Rodinò as Vice Presidents of the Council of Ministers, and Alcide De Gasperi as Minister for Foreign Affairs. At the time of the inauguration of the new government, Italy was still divided into two sections: on one side the centre-north, occupied by the Germans but virtually under the jurisdiction of the Italian Social Republic, a Fascist puppet state headed by Mussolini, on the other side, the “Kingdom of the South” under Vittorio Emanuele III, controlled by the Anglo-Americans.

The newly-assembled Bonomi government inherited the problems of the previous months, primarily concerning the expulsion of the Germans and the attempt to rebuild the democratic roots of the country. In the face of these situations, it was first necessary to stabilize diplomatic relations with the Allies in order to enhance Italy’s international legal personality, depleted by the war events, in view of the future peace treaty.

The issue of the prisoners of war

One of the diplomatic roads that had been opened after September 8, 1943 was the Soviet one that, at the end of 1944, seemed to have stopped at the unresolved question of the

²⁹IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, Prunas, to the Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. for Messenger 2728/78, Rome, December 6, 1944, 631.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

prisoners of war. The Kremlin had never given a clear answer to Italy's continuing requests for information about the soldiers still detained in Soviet territory³¹. As reported by Quaroni, the reasons for this behaviour, according to the Soviets, stemmed from Italy's failure to comply with international conventions which provided for the delivery of the lists of prisoners only "as a matter of reciprocity"³². In other words, for the USSR, Italy had not sent the list of Soviet detainees in the years before the armistice, so it was not right to request it in turn. Despite the diplomatic work carried out by Quaroni, the Soviet authorities were therefore reluctant and intransigent to the Italian authorities, which led the ambassador to turn to other sources, mainly Romanian and Bulgarian, to obtain more information on the prisoners. From the talks with the representatives of Sofia and Bucharest in Moscow, it was possible to acknowledge a certain willingness on the part of the USSR to release, in the future, only those soldiers who had demonstrated effective collaboration in dealing with the Nazi-Fascists, while pro-German collaborationists would remain prisoners of war as "reparation." As for the prisoners on Polish and Yugoslavian territory, on the other hand, Italy should have addressed

³¹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 23/27 R., Rome, August 22, 1944, 449; IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, Vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 2472/73 R., Rome, November 19, 1944, 611–12. See also Giusti, M. T., *I prigionieri italiani in Russia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2014); Gherardini, G., *Moriregiorno per giorno: gli italiani nei campi di prigionia dell'URSS* (Milano: U. Mursia & C., 1966).

³² On the subject see the studies of Aga Rossi Elena. The historian also wrote *Una nazione allos bando. L'Armistizio italiano del settembre 1943 e le sue conseguenze* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006); Aga Rossi E.-Zaslavsky, V., *Togliatti e Stalin: il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997) IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, T. 171/79, Moscow, December 17, 1944, 6–7.

directly to the competent local governments, as it was a matter that did not belong to the Kremlin³³.

In truth, the irreverent and obstinate attitude of the Soviet Union towards Italy came from the perplexities that the Soviets themselves had developed regarding the conduct of the Italian soldiers sent to the Balkans³⁴. Although they were in large numbers, the Italian troops had been defeated, routed or captured by the Germans, increasing the doubts about the effective will of the Italians to fight Nazism³⁵. These doubts, added to those relating to the continuous requests for revision of the armistice conditions, had increased Stalin's perception of the unreliability of the Italian army, thus justifying the refusal to send the lists of prisoners, using the lack of the "reciprocity" requirement as an excuse³⁶.

As also pointed out by De Gasperi³⁷, and subsequently Quaroni³⁸ himself, the stunted situation of the prisoners was due to an imperfect coordination of the exchange of communications between Italian and Soviet authorities, caused by the contemporary Soviet advance and German withdrawal. The updates from the war, in fact, absorbed the attention of both

³³ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, T. 179/81, Moscow, December 20, 1944, 8–9.

³⁴ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, T. 2023/10, Moscow, June 30, 1944, 345; IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (9 September 1943 – 11 December 1944), *The President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs AI, Bonomi, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 22 / 14, Rome, July 22, 1944, 370–1.

³⁵ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador to Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, 1944, *op. cit.*, 9.

³⁶ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador to Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, 1944, *op. cit.*, 7.

³⁷ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Minister for Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi, to the Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 209/8, Rome, January 16, 1945, 46–7.

³⁸ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, T. 667/20, Moscow, January 30, 1945, 60–1.

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the Russians and the Anglo-Americans, because their main objective was still to annihilate Germany. In a warlike context of such nature, demands about the prisoners of war, used at the beginning by Italy only to try to improve diplomatic contacts with the Russian counterpart, were therefore destined to be set aside, at least until Nazism had been definitively defeated. De Gasperi, in telegram no. 209/8 of January 16, 1945³⁹, realizing this situation, invited the ambassador to Moscow to desist on the subject of the detainees, and recommended addressing the Soviets with considerable “tact and ductility”⁴⁰. Moreover, the armistice conditions still did not allow political attitudes contrasting with those of the Allies, nor taking pretentious positions. In pursuing this political strategy, they risked creating precedents, and therefore Soviet repercussions, at the time of the ratification of the peace treaty⁴¹.

In addition to the question of prisoners of war, the Bonomi government was also concerned about the economic and financial situation of the country. Realizing that it was necessary to report to the Allies about the conditions in which Italy was due to the armistice, it was the President of the Council himself who updated Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt through an official communication⁴². This declaration expressed the desire “in the interest of the common cause” to “replace the authoritarian solutions and the protection and control formulas envisaged by the armistice, [with] new solutions of trusted and dignified association with the Allied Powers”⁴³. The aim was to make up for the urgent needs of the population in matters of food and transport which, after fifteen months of oppressive armistice restrictions, were now on the verge of collapse. The

³⁹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Minister for Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi, to the Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni, op. cit.*, 1944, 46–7.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The President of the Council, Bonomi, to the President of the United States of America, Roosevelt, to the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Churchill, and to the President of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, Stalin*, February 6, 1945, 66–7.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

sustenance of the people, moreover, was also hampered by the obstructive diplomatic action led by the Nazi-Fascist regime in Northern Italy, which had not yet been occupied by the Allies. These conditions, in turn, prevented achieving the goal of building a united Italy, in full respect of the democratic principles of the United Nations⁴⁴.

The Crimean and San Francisco conferences

At the beginning of February 1945 a conference was held in Yalta in Crimea, at the presence of the leaders of the three main Allied powers. The purpose of this summit was to resolve some issues related to the continuation of the war, in particular regarding the formation of the new Polish government, the structuring of the United Nations, and the future distribution of the reconquered German territories. The conference led to distension between Stalin and Churchill, whose relations had stiffened as a result of the Polish and Yugoslav issues, in which Britain and the USSR had repeatedly found themselves in disagreement over the formation of new governments. Specifically, during the conference, the Soviet state promised to renounce dealing with Poland and Yugoslavia by following the Anglo-American demands that were pressing on the establishment of independent governments that, at a later date, should have led to democratic elections. In the Balkan states, Finland, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, recently freed from the German dominion, Allied commissions would have been installed to guarantee a democratic reconstruction. About the continuation of the conflict, it was decided that the USSR would have entered the war against Japan within three months after the German capitulation, and that the latter, after the conclusion of the war, would have been disarmed and demilitarized by the Allies themselves, along the lines of four separated occupation zones.

The project was to divide the German territory into several administrative parts – each power would thus administer and demilitarize a certain part of it. Although Italy was not among the main arguments discussed in Yalta, according to Quaroni,

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

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two results were achieved by the Italian government⁴⁵. On the one hand, Russia, aside from the disagreements with the British for the control of the Balkans and Poland, could now be more interested in Italian requests, especially regarding the return of the war detainees and the definitive re-conquest of northern Italy. On the other hand, given the numerous differences between the Anglo-American and Soviet viewpoints on the political vision of the future of Europe, Italy could play an essential role in balancing the disagreements that would arise between the United States and Russia during the post-war period (regarding, for example, the resolution of issues concerning Italian borders, colonial domains, war reparations, armistice management, and the war with Japan).

Despite the minimum influence Italy possessed in international matters, the diplomatic documents of this period show a more mature resumption of government relations with the other Allied states. Thanks to the work of Carandini (the representative in London) and Tarchiani (the ambassador in Washington) and the reopening of relations with the French government of De Gaulle, Italy was trying to reacquire the international legal personality that twenty years of Fascism had taken away. In this sense, especially promising seemed the improvement of relations with the American president Roosevelt, as reported in a secret report by Tarchiani of March 22, 1945⁴⁶. Roosevelt, specifically, had repeatedly asked the Allies – without success – to involve Italy in not only the Crimean Conference but also the upcoming San Francisco Conference, which would soon be held on the future of the United Nations. The Soviets, however, had opposed the Italian presence, because they wanted to limit the inclusion of other nations for reasons of prestige and supremacy. The Soviet Union was afraid of seeing the dismantling of the rational, influential, and

⁴⁵ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador to Moscow, Quaroni to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, T. 1144/42, Moscow, February 16, 1945, 76–7.

⁴⁶ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Ambassador to Washington, Tarchiani, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi*, R. Secret 395/88, Washington, March 22, 1945, 133, 136, 138.

ideological power that the last events of the war had allowed it to obtain, and that would allow it to acquire better post-war economic conditions. In fact, Italy was considered by the USSR as an area of Anglo-American influence, and accepting its interference in international affairs would have meant increasing the diplomatic supremacy of the Americans, at their own expense⁴⁷. The non-participation in the San Francisco Conference played against the international prestige that Italy was struggling to regain, and could have cost them more advantageous conditions in the future treatment of peace. To safeguard the Italian position, Tarchiani wasted no time in advancing, once again, the Italian reasons in the revision of Cassibile to Roosevelt and to Halifax (head of the British Foreign Office).

According to the representative in Washington, Italy, thanks to its central position in the Mediterranean and “in contact with Central and Balkan Europe, can always cause disturbance and imbalance, if maintained in conditions of discontent, of degradation and of disorder”⁴⁸. For this reason, a juridical and practical revision of the current armistice conditions would have played not only in favour of the democratic reconstruction of the country, but also of the improvement of relations between the Allies themselves. This is because:

The Allies have certainly done a lot for Italy, even in the field of material aid, but have not been able to derive any psychological advantage from their good intentions and works. They have weakened rather than strengthened the possibilities of a democratic structure, albeit modernized and quick, in our country. So there are great chances that they will lose in Italy every fruit of the war that they have won here... The way in which the problem of Trieste and the exaggerated Yugoslav claims will be dealt with will nevertheless have decisive importance on the developments of the internal and international factors of the Italian situation⁴⁹.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 136–7.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 158–15.

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Tarchiani's diplomatic conduct, complementary to Quaroni's, proved to be effective, because it placed the Italian question on the Anglo-American side and, in some cases, clearly against the Soviet. Since Stalin all wished but to clash diplomatically with the United States, US support for the Italian authorities would certainly have influenced the Kremlin's decisions, particularly regarding the definition of the Yugoslav borders and the revision of the armistice. In this regard, as De Gasperi affirmed, receiving support from the other Allies on the purposes of pacification with Yugoslavia (with which the question of Trieste remained pending) could mean intensifying not only the concreteness of Italian requests compared to the Soviet ideas, but also giving them more solidity from a diplomatic point of view⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. II (December 12, 1944–December 9, 1945), *The Minister for Foreign Affairs, De Gasperi, to the Ambassador in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 1834/113, Rome, April 12, 1945, 160–1.