

Italian-Soviet Relations from 1943-1946

Italian-Soviet Relations from 1943-1946:

From Moscow to Rome

By

Francesco Randazzo

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Italian-Soviet Relations from 1943-1946: From Moscow to Rome

By Francesco Randazzo

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2019 by Francesco Randazzo

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4301-3

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4301-0

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One.....	7
From September 8 to the resumption of Italian-Soviet diplomatic relations	
The resumption of diplomatic relations between Italy and the USSR	
The economic situation and the reputation of Italy in the Soviet Union	
The impact of the USSR foreign policy on Italian-Soviet relations	
The evolution of diplomatic issues concerning Poland and Yugoslavia	
The issue of the prisoners of war	
The Crimean and San Francisco Conferences	
Franco-Soviet relations and the policy of the spheres of influence	
Chapter Two	41
The collapse of Nazi-fascism and its international consequences	
The question of Trieste and the borders	
The declaration of war on Japan	
The new British government and the Potsdam Conference	
The London Conference and Italian waiting policy	
The development of relations between Yugoslavia and Italy	
The request to revise the armistice	
Soviet reparations requests	
Chapter Three	75
The Moscow Conference (December 16–26, 1945)	
The political attitude of Italy	
The role of the press and public opinion	
International tension on the eve of the Paris Conferences	
Italian memoranda before the peace conference	
Proposals to modify the armistice	
The beginning of the preparatory conferences for peace	
The proclamation of the Italian Republic	
The internationalization of Trieste and other peace agreements	

Epilogue.....	107
Bibliography	109
Index of Names.....	115

INTRODUCTION

On the eve of the Second World War, Italian foreign policy suffered a severe setback with the signing of the Ribentropp-Molotov pact, on the basis of which Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union decided *motu proprio* to identify the Polish territory as a battlefield for a now inevitable bilateral offensive.¹ Italian diplomacy, however, was already working on a project on its own, in order to "create a large independent Ukraine as a buffer state between Mongol-Soviet barbarism and Western civilization."² In the context of a new geopolitical scenario, composed of a Europe divided by ideological barriers and nationalistic impulses that were everywhere triumphant, Italy seemed destined to play that role already interpreted on the eve of the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919. That is, finding itself to be the reference point for those Ukrainian, Georgian, and Armenian committees established in the East, and therefore to act "in support of the oppressed nationalities of Eastern Europe."³ On December 28, 1939, Ciano recalled the Italian ambassador in Moscow, Augusto Rosso, with the directive to leave the capital "without giving any explanation." Stalin did the same by withdrawing his ambassador in Rome. After twenty years of vicissitudes, relations between Italy and the Soviet Union reached their lowest point.⁴ The withdrawal of the respective

¹ "There were clues that suggested the existence of mutual bad faith... The two new allies undoubtedly wanted closer consultations on the military level, but the place of military attaché in Berlin was unfilled until September; evidently, it was difficult to find a Soviet officer who did not speak too much and who gave guarantees to remain absolutely loyal to his government. The German attitude in this circumstance did not demonstrate an excessive trust in Stalin's word of honor." In this way, Adam B. Ulam explains the Russian-German relations regarding the recently-concluded pact. There was no loyal desire for agreement on both sides, but a strong distrust that emerged from the actions put in place by the two powers as early as the day after the agreements were signed. A. B. Ulam, *Storia della politica estera sovietica (1917–1967)* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1970), 397–8.

² G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca. La diplomazia italiana in Russia dal 1861 al 1940* (Roma: Bonacci Editore, 1993), 366. From 1934 to 1939, the cabinet collected many materials on the nationalities and ethnic minorities of the USSR.

³ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁴ O. V. Dubrovina, *USSR in reports of Italian diplomats 1924–1941*, in "Review of International Relations", 48, no. 3 (2016): 75–87.

diplomats opened a gap between the two chancelleries while Stalin, aware of the imminent Nazi aggression, forced London and Paris to engage in a 360-degree anti-German alliance, leaving to the successor of Litvinov, Molotov, the task of warning the two Western governments about the stipulation of bland political agreements. “We are interested not in talking about the pact, but in organizing reciprocal and effective aid in case of aggression. Participating in simple conversations, the purpose of which is unknown, does not fall within the intentions of the Soviet government. For such conversations, the United Kingdom and France can search for more suitable interlocutors than the USSR.”⁵

The Mussolini government had been one of the first to recognize *de jure* the USSR at its birth and had actually been engaged in a “race for Moscow” against the United Kingdom, which also wanted to promptly reopen relations with Soviet Russia. German diplomacy was now encouraging a rapprochement between the two powers, pushing its Italian ally towards Moscow “in order to avoid one of the most glaring anomalies in the foreign policy of the Axis. So, in June 1940, ambassadors Rosso and Gorelkin returned to their respective locations.”⁶ However, Wilhemstrasse intervened in hindering subsequent attempts to bring Rome closer to Moscow until the start of Operation Barbarossa, when Italy followed Germany in the war against Russia.

The issue of the Italian participation in the world war, in fact, had been the outcome of a long back and forth between the two dictators. With the so-called “Cavallero Memorial” of May 1939, Mussolini had revealed to Hitler the organizational difficulties of a war effort alongside its ally which could not have happened, according to the Italian government’s intentions, before 1943.⁷ Only the German success against France gave the Duce the motivation to enter a war that, in the intentions of the Führer, should have been *blitzkrieg* – the “lightning war”.

The parenthesis of the war led the two countries to confront and fight on European battlefields, and for thousands of Italian soldiers to settle along the border traced by Hitler to invade the Soviet Union. Until September 8, 1943, the Italians fought for the ideals of Nazi-Fascism; with the armistice, Italy quit the war alongside the German Reich and switched sides, while the Allied landings in Southern Italy opened a new period of civil war, an indelible wound for the nation. The Soviet Union, an ideological arch-

⁵ G. Boffa, *Storia dell’Unione Sovietica, 1928–1941* (Roma: L’Unità, 1990), 300.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁷ E. Ortona, *Diplomazia di guerra 1937–1943* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993).

enemy for the former fascist leadership, suddenly became an “ally” of Italy in the war against the Hitler’s tyranny. Meanwhile, the Duce, having spent a period of imprisonment first on the island of Ponza, then to La Maddalena and finally to Campo Imperatore, was released on September 12 with Operation Eiche, four days from the signing of the armistice by the new Italian government.⁸ The action was conceived by General Student, one of the most valuable commanders of the German paratrooper corps. Some historians argue that the signing of the “long armistice” in Brindisi “coincided with the emergence of an embryo of international politics”, bringing the hands of history back to when post-unification Italy was looking for international recognition.⁹ Although this interpretation of the Italian post-armistice situation can be partially shared, a great deal of concern remained. For a long time to come, a climate of confusion and uncertainty reigned, due to the different protocols to be adopted in a nation divided between those forces still anchored to the monarchy and a wave of new political and social ideas – emerged, or resurrected, after the fall of the Fascist regime. The armistice, promptly followed by the hasty escape to Brindisi of King Vittorio Emanuele III and of the whole General Secretariat of Foreign Affairs headed by Prunas, had in fact created serious problems in the recognition of the Southern Kingdom by the Allies. The armistice also involved a series of purely interpretative disquisitions on how to decline the expressions “negotiated surrender,” which was added to that of “unconditional surrender,” contributing to create further chaos in the relations between the new Badoglio government and the Allies.¹⁰ Moreover, it was necessary to manage relations with those Italian diplomats linked to the Fascist regime who were still in the offices abroad, because they were the emanation of a government that was no longer legitimate. Last was the problem of reopening a confrontation with the Soviet Union after three years of diplomatic blackout. Feelings of the

⁸ The detention of Mussolini was problematic and involved the continuous displacement of the prisoner to prevent the Nazis from intervening and freeing him. According to historian Renzo De Felice, the prisoner was also subjected to extensive referrals even by the military personnel who had taken him into custody. From La Maddalena he was transferred to Campo Imperatore on the Gran Sasso, where, having learned of the armistice signed by Badoglio, he tried to cut his wrists by declaring that, for Italy, the armistice was a real political suicide that would unleash German anger for the betrayal. See R. De Felice, *Mussolini e il fascismo. La guerra civile 1943–1945*, vol. 8 (Torino: Einaudi, 1997–8), 4–5, 24–25.

⁹ See R. Alonzi, *Stalin e l’Italia (1943–45). Diplomazia, sfere di influenza, comunismi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2013), 44.

¹⁰ Ibid.

public opinion had to be taken into consideration as well: the USSR represented, for many Italians now striving for freedom and democracy, a dictatorial state ruled by a strongly ideological and illiberal system. Prime Minister Badoglio actually remained somewhat on the sidelines of the new negotiations with Moscow, in which Prunas, Raimondo Manzini, and Guido Pazzi instead played a crucial role.¹¹ A few months after the signing of the armistice, in May 1944 the Badoglio government sent Pietro Quaroni to Moscow, first as a representative of the Italian government in the USSR, and then confirmed with ambassadorial credentials on November 22 of the same year. He remained there for barely three years, but they were indeed important years – crucial for the destiny of Europe, grappling with the epilogue of the Second World War of which he left ample testimony in his punctual and rigorous documentation. In his 1946 report on Soviet foreign policy and communism, addressed to the then Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Alcide De Gasperi, his statements go beyond a simple and proper diplomatic account. Regarding Soviet foreign policy, he notes that “the national element and the ideological element undoubtedly existing in Russian politics do not always maintain the same balance”, by virtue of the substantial complexity of the variegated Soviet world. Towards the USSR, Europe showed indeed great curiosity, which was often accompanied by an inevitable “ideological” fear. However, the mistrust was mutual, and Quaroni explains why:

For a Russian, a convinced Marxist and a Marxist of that kind of form that is Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, dialectical analysis is a scientific analysis of facts; consequently, the Russian appreciation of the international political situation, based on this dialectical analysis, is scientific, while it is empirical for non-Marxist politicians; likewise, Russian foreign policy in its broad lines is scientific, while that of others is empirical. Russian appreciation of the international situation is therefore, inevitably, based on dialectical analysis, and it rejects, *a priori*, any other interpretation: this constitutes in itself an ideological element of primary importance.¹²

The Italian ambassador often used the adjective ‘Russian’ instead of ‘Soviet’, according to an old diplomatic tradition, and also because the Second World War was felt by the people to be a “patriotic” effort.¹³ In the act of explaining what communism was in Russia in his day, Quaroni states that it is “ultimately Stalin”. Unlike Lenin, he added, the Georgian

¹¹ E. Serra, *Professione: Ambasciatore d'Italia* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2001).

¹² *Pietro Quaroni*, a cura del Servizio storico e documentazione (Roma: MAE, 1993), 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*

dictator was an orthodox exegete, firm in his convictions and persuaded that errors were always committed by others and never by him:

He is not able to create, or perhaps just adapt, a new theory. Stalin is eminently – and here we see his formal education – an exegete and a strictly orthodox exegete. Lenin who, as a philosopher, was of a completely different scope, the day when, with his war communism, he brought Russia, and the revolution, to the brink of ruin, he said frankly: we were wrong; and he has pulled out of the NEP. Stalin caused catastrophes in the interior of Russia that were slightly less serious: but his “line” being strictly Orthodox, he never admitted to having made a mistake: it was always someone’s fault – the counter-revolutionaries, the Trozkites, the Bukharinists or whoever.¹⁴

In an attempt to foster and sharpen the conflicts within the capitalist world, Soviet diplomacy made the fatal mistake, according to the diplomat, of favouring the rise of Fascism. This is a suggestive thesis that gives rise to further reflections by Quaroni, whose successors in Moscow – Manlio Brosio, Mario Di Stefano, Luca Pietromarchi, Carlo Alberto Straneo, Federico Sensi, and Pietro Vinci – later defended and substantially shared, albeit in the area of a much more critical and suggestive evaluation of the analogies between European authoritarian regimes.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Pietro Quaroni*, a cura del Servizio storico e documentazione, op. cit., 15.

¹⁵ See the studies of M. Conciatori, “1943: la diplomazia italiana dopo l’8 settembre. I diplomatici italiani di fronte alle conseguenze dell’annuncio dell’armistizio”, in *Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali*, VI, no. 2 (1990): 199–234; M. Mazzetti, “L’Italia e gli Alleati dopo l’armistizio”, in *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, a. XV, no. 5 (1969): 135–48; P. Cacace, *Venti anni di politica estera italiana (1943–1963)* (Roma: Bonacci, 1986), 25; G. Mammarella and P. Cacace, *La politica estera dell’Italia. Dallo Stato unitario ai giorni nostri* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010), 132–3; *La seconda guerra mondiale nel carteggio di I. V. Stalin con Churchill, Roosevelt, Attlee, Truman*, 2 vols. (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1957); R. Luraghi, *Sui rapporti diplomatici tra l’Italia e l’Unione Sovietica* in “Il movimento di liberazione in Italia,” July-December 1958, 113–18; Adstans (P. Canali), *Alcide De Gasperi nella politica estera italiana 1944–1953: note e riflessioni* (Milano: Mondadori, 1954); E. Aga Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando. L’Armistizio italiano del settembre 1943 e le sue conseguenze* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006); E. Aga Rossi-V. Zaslavsky, *Togliatti e Stalin: il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997); B. Arcidiacono, “La politique soviétique en Italie (1943–1945)”, in *Relations Internationales*, no. 45 (1986): 35–49; R. Morozzo della Rocca, *La politica estera italiana e l’Unione Sovietica, 1944–1948* (Roma: Universitaria, 1985); AA.VV., *La cobelligeranza italiana nella lotta di liberazione dell’Europa* (Roma: Ministero della Difesa, 1986) (in particular the study by F. D’Amoja, 130–7).

CHAPTER ONE

FROM SEPTEMBER 8 TO THE RESUMPTION OF ITALIAN-SOVIET DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

In the late 1930s, the strong German influence and, above all, the schizophrenic course of Hitler, which prevented Mussolini from figuring out his real intentions in Eastern Europe, created the preconditions for instability that heralded misunderstandings and scepticism between the Soviet Union and Italy¹⁶. With Ambassadors Augusto Rosso and Andrey Vyshinsky having withdrawn from their respective diplomatic offices, a year later Italy found itself fighting on the Eastern Front in support of the German plan to conquer the Soviet capital. The Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia (CSIR) was made up of three infantry divisions (Pasubio, Torino, III Celere), and fought alongside the Wehrmacht on the Southern front. In the late summer of 1942, Hitler's plan to take Moscow was supplanted with the less demanding one of concentrating the efforts towards Leningrad to the North and the Crimea to the South, following Stalingrad and the Caucasus as their vectors. Of the twenty divisions that Mussolini had originally planned to send to Russia in support of CSIR, only two new corps were sent, with General Italo Gariboldi in command. The divisions employed – Pasubio, Torino, Celere (ex CSIR), Sforzesca, Cosseria, Ravenna and Vicenza of the II Army corps; Tridentina, Julia and Cuneense of the Alpine Army corps – formed a total of 122 battalions, plus other autonomous forces, for over 230,000 men. Towards the end of 1942, the first great German defeats took place (at El Alamein and later Stalingrad), marking the end of the so-called “lightning” war” – “the only real war that Nazi-Fascism could have won... With the American intervention in Europe, a union of such forces, resources and productive capacities will be realized, to be able to continue the war for an infinite time; it therefore enters into the conflict of attrition, a clash of war

¹⁶ Toscano, M., *La ripresa delle relazioni diplomatiche fra l'Italia e l'Unione Sovietica nel corso della seconda guerra mondiale* (Padova: CEDAM, 1962); Serra, M.– Manzini, R., *1943-44: rivelazioni sulla ripresa dei rapporti italo-sovietici* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2005).

potentials without limit, before which the capabilities of Germany, Italy and even Japan will finally succumb”.¹⁷

The subsequent defeats in Russia, Africa and Sicily, the sufferings of the population and the unending Allied bombings finally led, as already mentioned, to Mussolini’s defenestration and the signing of the armistice of September 8, 1943.

Operation Achsee was launched by the Germans on the same day the truce was announced, at 16.39 (GMT), and led to a chaotic state determined by the escape of King Vittorio Emanuele III in Apulia and the consequent birth of a parallel Fascist government in Northern Italy. This situation undermined the loyalty declared by the Badoglio government to the Allied forces. “Actually, the Allies and the British in particular were delighted to employ Italians for logistical and territorial control tasks; but they did not intend to bring many Italian units on the line”¹⁸. The British intent was to limit the use of Italian forces to prevent this effort from having political weight at the time of peace negotiations. A now famous “turning point” was also about to take place in Salerno. In fact, the return of Togliatti reversed a situation that saw the social-communists, backed by the Action party, about to clash not only with the Badoglio government, but also with the Allies. This would have led to a split between the left and the moderates in the National Liberation Committee and the fatal marginalization of the left itself. Togliatti, with great unscrupulousness but with no less authority, reversed the situation by advocating the line of “national solidarity”, with the postponement of any other political dilemma until the conclusion of the conflict. In the first post-war period, claims for an effort towards the collectivization of the land had damaged the left. Togliatti completely overturned this approach by immediately launching the program “Land to the peasants.” All this allowed the Communist party to play a focal role in the Resistance – although not as fundamental as was later written. Ultimately, the structure of the Italian state was restored at Salerno, and the lines along which Italian politics

¹⁷ S. Ambrogio, *Lezioni di Storia militare e contemporanea (1789–1991)* (Roma: SME, 1994), 369.

¹⁸ M. Mazzetti, *Salerno 1943*, in R. Dentoni Litta (a cura di), *Schegge di Storia. Salerno e l’operazione Avalanche. Documenti, diari, memorie e reperti*, Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism (Fisciano: Direzione generale degli archivi [SA], 2014), 17.
<http://www.archiviodistatosalerno.beniculturali.it/Risorse/scaricabili/schegge.pdf>.

would be developed in the following years were also established, for better or worse.¹⁹

In May 1944, at the resumption of diplomatic relations between Italy and the USSR, the prime minister and Foreign Minister Badoglio, in order to officially re-establish relations with the Soviet Union, sent greetings to Stalin through the Italian representative in Moscow, Pietro Quaroni. In doing so, Badoglio noted how the First Secretary of the USSR had initiated, in recent years, the rapid development of his country, while at the same time effectively opposing Nazi Germany and Fascism. Leading a country that had to shake off the Fascist label, Badoglio's desire was to find itself on the side of the Soviet Union and its allies in the fight against Nazi-Fascism, in order to rebuild "a democratic, autonomous and sovereign Italy."²⁰

The resumption of diplomatic relations between Italy and the USSR

As Giorgio Petracchi states in *St. Petersburg to Moscow*, a history of the diplomatic relations between Italy and Russia from the birth of unitary Italy until the beginning of the Second World War, "the lines of development of the relations between Fascist Italy and Soviet Russia present a very complex dimension and a contradictory trend to the historical investigation."²¹ An initial attitude of collaboration, deployed by Mussolini to take the greatest economic profit in relation with the Soviet world – virgin land of indefinable commercial value – gradually became mistrust, especially on the part of the Moscow government when the Italian dictator approached General Alexandru Averescu, supporting the annexation of Bessarabia to Romania. The armistice of September 8, 1943 obliged Italy to an unconditional surrender. This event unleashed the anger of the Germans who, with the start of the aforementioned operation Achsee, had advanced from the north to the centre of the peninsula with the intent to conquer all the primary centres of command of the Italian army. Thus, Badoglio, at the end of 1943, found himself forced to leave

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ IDD (Italian Diplomatic Documents), Series X, 1943–1948, Vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Badoglio, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 630/1, Salerno, May 29, 1944, 290.

²¹ G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca. La diplomazia italiana in Russia 1861/1941* (Roma: Bonacci, 1993), 340.

Rome and repair to Brindisi in an attempt to escape Nazi capture. The search for Soviet support, therefore, represented an extreme attempt to succeed in rebalancing a political situation that was critical, caught between the harsh conditions of Cassibile²² on one hand and the German advance on the other. The first official diplomatic exchange between Badoglio and Stalin, represented by Quaroni and Kostylev, took place on May 30, 1944.²³ The Italian ambassador was later received by Molotov (Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Skryabin), the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, on June 5, giving notice to the Italian government by telegram no. 1025/7. Here, Molotov stated: "The future is entirely in the hands of the Italian Government, which must demonstrate its ability to act for the mobilization of the country's living forces against the Germans and their ally Mussolini."²⁴

It follows that the Soviets understood well the delicate political situation in which Italy was involved, and they made use of the will of the Italian government so that all its military, political, and diplomatic efforts could be oriented in favour of the Allied victory. The auspice of the Soviet Union, in other words, was for Italy to start a more active collaboration with the new allies, in order to accelerate the fall of Nazi Germany. Without a clear demonstration of intent, it would have been impossible to obtain Stalin's support for the resolution of both internal and external political issues.²⁵

They did not have to wait long for Badoglio's response. In the words of the Italian government, the conditions of the armistice themselves were the source of the lack of freedom of action for the Italian army. In order for

²² Cassibile is a small town in the south of Syracuse. On September 3, 1943, in the district of Santa Teresa Longarini, three kilometres from the village of Cassibile, an armistice was secretly signed which took its name from the locality, with which the Kingdom of Italy ceased hostilities against the Allies during the Second World War.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ IDD, Serie X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Badoglio*, T. 1025/7, Moscow, June 5, 1944, 296. See Petracchi, G., *L'Urss di fronte alla caduta di Mussolini e all'8 settembre in L'Italia in guerra, il Quarto anno, 1943* (Roma: Ufficio Storico Esercito, 1994); Nesterov, A. G., *La ripresa dei rapporti diplomatici tra l'URSS e l'Italia. Un'indagine sui documenti conservati nell'archivio della politica estera della Federazione Russa* in "Nuova Storia Contemporanea", n. 6/2009: 157-162.

²⁵ Ibid., 296–7.

the Italian commitment to fight against Germany to be effective and more concrete, it would have been necessary to ease the same limitations of war intervention imposed on the country on September 8, 1943.²⁶

This request, however, did not meet the unconditional support of the USSR, despite the declared desire of the Italian government to oppose Nazi-Fascism; this was also demonstrated on June 22, 1944 in Salerno, where a special declaration was issued, peremptorily reiterating absolute opposition to the Fascist ideology. In the same formula, moreover, the full support to the Allies in the fight against Hitler was also reaffirmed, with the Italian government declaring its will to increase military support to the United Nations.²⁷

The political action that could have bolstered the recovering of relations between the Soviet Union and Italy was represented by the hypothesis of employing, on the German-Soviet front, all the Italian prisoners of war who were already on Soviet soil, veterans of the defeat in the Russian campaign initiated by Mussolini.²⁸ Quaroni advocated this approach to the Italian government following a request by Prunas, on June 17, 1944, to receive information on the health conditions of Italian soldiers who had not yet returned from Russia.²⁹ This would also prove Italy's concrete interest in the resolution of the war in favour of the Allies, as explicitly requested to Italy by the Soviet Union in the meeting of June 5 between Molotov and Quaroni.³⁰ The diplomatic and strategic importance of the political action proposed by Quaroni, however, was not immediately realized by the Italian government. At least at first, in fact, neither

²⁶ 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*, urgent telegram 845/13, Salerno, July 4, 1944, 353–4.

²⁷ For further information see Narinskij, M., *Togliatti, Stalin e la svolta di Salerno* in "Studi Storici", a. 1994, n. 3: 657–666; Lepre, A., *La svolta di Salerno* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1966); DD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *Statement by the Italian Government*, Salerno, 22 June 1944, 331–2.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, Prunas, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, Telespr. 5037, Salerno, June 27, 1944, 341.

³⁰ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Badoglio*, T. 1025/7, Moscow, June 5, 1944, 296.

Badoglio nor Prunas provided Quaroni with any response or organizational intent, and the question remained unanswered.³¹

That historical period has been perceived as an impasse in diplomatic relations between Italy and the Soviet Union. On one side was the USSR which, in agreement with the Allies, was obliged to enforce the armistice clauses while being, at the same time, determined to obtain guarantees on a constant commitment against the Germans; on the other hand, however, there was a request from the Italian government to lighten the conditions of the armistice, in order to demonstrate more concretely its determination in countering the Wehrmacht.

However, the Soviet government continued to be sceptical about the issues raised by Italy, especially its intention to continue the war alongside the Allies.³² Specifically: “The Government of the USSR would like to know which and how many military forces the Italian government believes itself able to deploy against Germany, which precise Italian attempts have been hindered or impeded and in what form, and which precise clauses of the armistice should be eliminated for Italy’s greater participation in the war.”³³

Ultimately, the Soviet leadership feared that the Italian government would have taken advantage of the diplomatic relationship with the Kremlin solely in order to eliminate the clauses signed the year before, without having a real interest in the fight against Hitler’s Nazism.³⁴ Therefore, a climate of diffidence floated around in the very first post-armistice reports.

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*, urgent telegram 845/13, Salerno, July 4, 1944, 353–4.

³² 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., Badoglio*, T. 1025/7, Moscow, June 5, 1944, 368–9.

³³ Ibid., 369. See also Petracchi, G., *Le relazioni tra l'Unione Sovietica e il Regno del Sud: una riconsiderazione della politica sovietica in Italia* in “Storia Contemporanea”, n. 6, dicembre 1984: 1171-1204; Arcidiacono, B., *La politique soviétique en Italie (1943-1945)* in “Relations Internationales”, n. 45 (1986): 35-49; De Felice, R., (a cura di), *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati: la politica estera fascista e la seconda guerra mondiale* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1973; Giuliano, M., *La politica Sovietica verso l'Italia e i paesi ex satelliti della Germania* in “La Cultura Sovietica”, a. I, luglio 1945: 11-22.

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., Badoglio*, T. 1025/7, Moscow, June 5, 1944, 369.

The acceptance of Quaroni's proposal to use Italian prisoners of war on the Soviet-German front could have concretely dispelled the doubts that the USSR had about Italy's intentions and, consequently, it would have made less difficult to deal with the points of principle raised by Venosta about the armistice.³⁵

Considering that Badoglio, and later his successor Ivanoe Bonomi, had not yet managed to dispel Stalin's perplexities regarding his war purposes, the Italian government had to accept Quaroni's proposals³⁶ and frame the Italian troops present in Soviet territory with well-distinguished uniforms, with Italian officers in command, and send them to the German front, as requested by the Soviet authorities. In addition to spreading anti-German sentiment in the Balkans, where Italian soldiers were deployed *en masse* since 1940, the action once again confirmed the repudiation of the Nazi-Fascist ideology, demonstrating the willingness to collaborate with the Allies. In order to support this objective, moreover, in August of the same year a fundamental purge of Fascist laws, symbols and personnel was approved by the Italian government, to definitively remove any fear for a resurgence of the regime. Badoglio and Bonomi, in a certain sense, never failed to reiterate to Stalin how the Italian people were on the front line in the liberation from the Nazis, despite the harsh economic conditions of Cassibile to which they had to submit.³⁷

Italy, moreover, was keen to reiterate to the Soviet government the considerable effort put in place up until then, despite the lack of means and weapons. According to the diplomatic documents, this commitment was translated into an immediate declaration of war against Germany after September 8, which had formalized military participation alongside the Allies themselves, as demonstrated by coordinated interventions in Corsica, Sardinia, Albania, and Greece.³⁸ In order to satisfy the subsequent Anglo-American requests, the recruitment of about forty-five thousand

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. 22/14, Rome, July 22, 1944, 370–1.

³⁷ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The President of the Council, Bonomi, to the President of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR*, T. 1/193, Rome, 7 August, 1944, 405–6. See also Bertoldi, S., *Badoglio* (Milano: BUR, 2001).

³⁸ 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*, Telespr. 1/139, Rome, 29 July 1944, 377–80.

men, both soldiers and civilian workers, to be employed on several fronts was imposed.³⁹ According to the Italian government, these war operations had already shown, *ipso facto*, the loyal intentions of Italy: together with the proposal to form military groups with the Russian Italian prisoners, the active “brotherhood of arms” with the Anglo-Americans would have definitively justified the overcoming of the mistrust shown by the Kremlin, giving rise to a more fruitful collaboration between the parties in the achievement of their respective interests.⁴⁰

The economic situation and the reputation of Italy in the Soviet Union

The purpose of the reports by Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Giovanni Visconti Venosta at the end of July 1944, addressed to the Soviet government through Ambassador Quaroni, had been to demonstrate that the Italian commitment put in place since September 1943 had already been conspicuous, despite the armistice situation still weighing heavily on the decision-making capabilities of the Badoglio and Bonomi governments.⁴¹

From a political and economic point of view, the country was undoubtedly in a deplorable state, due to:

Undefined employment costs; the huge and unknown circulating mass emitted by the Anglo-Americans, a high exchange rate pound-dollar-lira impoverishing the already exhausted Italian people, consuming the last resources, preventing any possibility of recovery. The truth is also that Anglo-American controls and interference are encyclopaedic [*sic*], and in any case prevent any serious possibility of administration. All Soviet politics, in the territories that will soon be occupied, is inspired by many other criteria of administrative wisdom and human understanding. Not the least reason for this is the prestige the Soviet government has been able to secure in Europe. It is therefore far from our intentions to speculate on any disagreements between the Allies, but only to get out of the ambiguity – surrender without conditions – armistice – co-belligerence – which still lasts and, above all, participate the most and best we can in the fight against Nazi Germany and the liberation of the national territory.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ 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. 14/18, Rome, July 30, 1944, 380–1.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 381.

By the end of July 1944, the Italian government understood that, without the support of the Soviets, who posed themselves as the ideal diplomatic bridge with the Allies, it could not have been possible to give birth to a new anti-Fascist and democratic Italy. The voluntary spirit that hovered in the country, which Venosta mentions in the telegram of July 22, 1944,⁴³ could not fill by itself the lack of equipment and resources that gripped the Italian army. Like the rest of the country, the army was in rather poor conditions, and could have never been reinforced without the support of the Allies.⁴⁴

To this, we must add the drama experienced by an increasing number of Italian internees, both soldiers and civilian workers, towards which Nazi Germany was operating its own retaliation following the Italian betrayal. More than a million of soldiers were interned, mainly in Poland and Germany. This is what emerged from a communication sent by Bonomi to Quaroni on July 27, 1944, where, in the name of Italian-Soviet friendship, the USSR was requested to provide assistance to the Italian interned population, as Italy could not intervene in any way.⁴⁵ The response of the Soviet government was not long in coming, since on July 30 of the same year, in Lithuania, over four thousand Italian soldiers were released, an event optimistically read by the Italian government as a good omen for the evolution of diplomatic relations.⁴⁶ There were still about seven hundred thousand Italian soldiers detained in Germany, for whom the Germans had not recognized the status of prisoners of war, having refused to serve the Nazi-Fascist regime.⁴⁷ Only an improvement in the fortunes of war and

⁴³ 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. 23/15, Rome, July 22, 1944, 371.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi, to the Representative in Moscow, Quaroni*, T. for courier 8 r., Rome, July 27, 1944, 376–7.

⁴⁶ 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. 15/19 R., Rome, July 30, 1944, 381–2.

⁴⁷ 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. 30/31, Rome, August 31, 1944, 467–8.

diplomacy would have allowed them to be freed by the Allies and return home.⁴⁸

Beyond the economic and war contingencies, Italy, in advancing its requests to the USSR, paid at the international level for its weak credibility, a product of its recent historical past which did not allow the country to substantiate its claims. To remedy this situation, the improvement of the international reputation could be achieved only with the start of new diplomatic relations, involving not only the Soviet Union (which was also less and less interested in Italy), but also the rest of Europe.⁴⁹ According to Quaroni, reopening diplomatic contacts with the USSR and the other Allies would have been an effective political operation for the revision of Cassibile.

On the other hand, it seemed that Russia still did not believe in the Italian goodwill concerning the war against Germany, especially on the fact that the armistice limited the war capabilities of the Italian army. In Stalin's opinion, in fact, the Soviet government had always provided Italy with weapons and the means to operate militarily, in agreement with the Anglo-Americans, but had never received concrete answers in return, increasing the feeling that the main Italian concern was to resolve their internal issues, rather than the war.⁵⁰ In other words, Stalin's main interest no longer seemed to be the Italian politics but, rather, the continuation of the collaborative relationship with the Western Allies, for the purpose of maintaining peace and the common effort against Nazism. It is for this reason that, according to Quaroni, Italy could not continue to "make the Russians the exclusive lawyers of Italy."⁵¹

Starting relations with the Allied countries would have guaranteed, in this state of affairs, a position of greater privilege than the one that the Italian government had had so far. Given the heavy inheritance collected by Italy in the twenty years of Fascism, it was crucial "to persuade the world of the

⁴⁸ Ibid. See Cacace, P., *Venti anni di politica estera italiana (1943- 1963)* (Roma: Bonacci, 1986)

⁴⁹ 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. 19/20, Rome, August 5, 1944, 396.

⁵⁰ 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. 61/2, Moscow, August 8, 1944 (received on October 5), 414–17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 417.

honesty and seriousness of the Italian foreign policy”⁵² and transmit it to the Allies, as well as the USSR, with the ultimate aim of making their own reasons prevail in an effective way. The construction of good relations with the Anglo-Americans, but especially with France and Yugoslavia – looked as “friends” of the USSR⁵³ – would have allowed the Italian government to gain a position of greater credibility within international issues. For this reason, Quaroni emphasized his own interest in this aspect, with the hope that his efforts would be repaid by the favourable repercussions these events would have had on present and future relations with the USSR and, even more, with the entire Allied Control Council.⁵⁴

A foreign policy of such a nature, however, was difficult to implement for a series of reasons that concerned not only the Soviet Union, but also the Western Allies themselves. As can be seen from the diplomatic documents of August 1944, the Anglo-Americans had no interest in contributing to the rearmament of the Italian army in the territories they occupied,⁵⁵ just as it did not interest them to exchange information with the Soviets regarding the Italian situation. This happened despite the intensification of the telegraphic exchanges between Undersecretary Venosta and the representatives of the United States. Even for the Anglo-Americans, acquiescence to Italian demands could have meant calling into question the Fascist defeat and the agreements with the other allies. In short, towards the end of the summer of 1944, two diplomatic windows remained open for Italy. On one hand, the request of training volunteer troops with prisoners of war in Russia for military participation on the German-Soviet front; on the other, the reopening of diplomatic relations with the other allies, notably France and Yugoslavia, to improve its international “reputation” in the eyes of Stalin. Regarding the first request, despite the interest shown by the Soviet government,⁵⁶ nothing had been decided in an official way, as Stalin had not yet taken any actual step towards the

⁵² Ibid., 416.

⁵³ Ibid., 417.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Arcidiacono, B., *La Gran Bretagna e il pericolo comunista in Italia gestazione, nascita e primo sviluppo di una percezione (1943-1944)* in “Storia delle Relazioni Internazionali”, a. I, 1985/1: 29-65. IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta*, T. 60/23, Moscow, August 9, 1944, 464.

⁵⁶ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta*, T. 60/23, Moscow, August 9, 1944, 464.

deployment of the prisoners.⁵⁷ The Soviet government, moreover, had not even provided the lists of prisoners requested by Italy, and this complicated the possible organization of the troops.⁵⁸ Vice versa, as reported by Prunas, the resurgence of diplomatic relations with France and Yugoslavia was already under way; Paris, in particular, was ready to sign an agreement for a new plant convention in Tunis (crucial for the future of the still-numerous Italian community in Tunisia), which could realistically be considered a first step towards a general Italian-French rapprochement.⁵⁹ Quaroni's diplomatic action undoubtedly contributed to the positive evolution of these relationships. From July 1944, he began to talk and exchange information with the French and Yugoslav ambassadors in Moscow, implementing a network of contacts and settling old alliances.

If, from a diplomatic point of view, things seemed to improve compared to a few months before, from an economic and political point of view this was not the case. The oppressive armistice conditions were still intact and, according to what Venosta reported in a telegram to Quaroni on August 28⁶⁰, the dollar-pound-lira exchange continued to weigh heavily on the economic capacity of the Italian people. The Anglo-Americans, in other words, seemed to exploit their privileged position to obtain undue economic benefits from the Italian occupation, and the hope was that the Soviet Union could curb Washington's opportunism. The terms of the armistice also forbade Italy from interfering in international affairs between the Americans and the Soviets, thus preventing the Italian government from knowing in depth the actual relations among the two world powers, the latter being always filtered by "mediators." In this situation, the Italian government under Bonomi did not easily understand how to deal with either the USSR or the other allies. This is what emerges

⁵⁷ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta*, T. 69/28, Moscow, August 17, 1944, 432.

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, Prunas, to the President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs A.I., Bonomi*, Note, Rome, September 1, 1944, 469.

⁶⁰ 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. 28/30 R., Rome, August 28, 1944, 462.

from the telegrams from Venosta to Quaroni⁶¹, which show how the Italian situation was at that moment crucial from a diplomatic, as well as economic and political, point of view.⁶²

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

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 spearhead.⁶³ 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 War.⁶⁴

The reports of Quaroni of August 1944 speculated that this political idea of the USSR derived 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 war.⁶⁵

⁶¹ 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. 29/32 R., Rome, August 30, 1944, 465.

⁶² IDD, Series X, 1943–1948, vol. I (September 9, 1943–December 11, 1944), *The Representative in Moscow, Quaroni, to the Secretary General for Foreign Affairs, Prunas*, T. 62/3, Moscow, August 8, 1944, 418–19.

⁶³ 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).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

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 effort.⁶⁶

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 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 world.⁶⁷ 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 States.⁶⁸

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 armistice.⁶⁹ 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

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ 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

influence by the British.⁷⁰ For the USSR, it was 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 unsatisfactory.⁷¹ Other issues must be taken into consideration, in particular those regarding Romania, Bulgaria, and Finland, recently occupied by the Soviets; 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 breaks.”⁷²

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 of the Allied Commission would not have been diminished.⁷³ 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 Cassibile.⁷⁴

In this context, the Soviets, who for the reasons already examined were no longer willing to negotiate on the issues raised by the Italian government, believed that Italy should have shown on its own that it was not “completely dead,”⁷⁵ from both a political and military point of view – this

⁷⁰ IDD, Serie 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. 2011-2009-2010 / 47-48-50, Moscow, September 2, 1944, 469–70.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² IDD, Serie 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.

⁷³ Ibid., 488–94. See also Salvaggio, L., *L’armistizio di Cassibile* (Siracusa: Lombardi, 2016); Castellano, G., *Come firmai l’armistizio di Cassibile* (Milano: Mondadori, 1945).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 493.

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 interest.⁷⁶

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 implied.⁷⁷

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 Reich.⁷⁸ 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.

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' concerns.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 488–94.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

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 British.⁸⁰ The Polish Committee of National Liberation, 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 relocation within its borders of East Prussia, Upper Silesia, and the 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 (close to the USSR) and the Soviet 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 republics.⁸¹ The government that would be born in Poland, following the incorporation of the aforementioned territories, would certainly have been made up of members of both the National Liberation Committee (the so-called Lublin government) and the Polish government in exile in London, with a shared supervision by British and Soviet authorities.

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 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 Germans.⁸²

The same can be said for the Yugoslav situation, whose government could become another possible intermediary for the Italian diplomacy. Yugoslavia,

⁸⁰ 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.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

according to Quaroni's sources,⁸³ 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 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 Europe.⁸⁴

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 Europe.⁸⁵

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

⁸³ 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.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.