

FROM RUSSIA TO THE USSR: THE ITALY-SOVIET RELATIONS DURING THE YEARS OF THE COMMUNIST UPRISING AND THE MARCH ON ROME

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ABSTRACT

The First World War brought with it enormous ideological, political and social problems. In Russia, as in Italy, the repercussions of the war were soon felt and the two countries, which were struggling with monarchical regimes embodying different principles and ideological stances, saw the birth of oppositional movements within them. In Russia, these movements came into power thanks to a Bolshevik coup, while in Italy Mussolini founded the “Beams of Combat,” a real militia ready to ride the popular discontent on the “mutilated victory,” that is to say, dissatisfaction with the territories promised by the Treaty of London and not granted to Italy at the end of the war. The relations between the two countries were interrupted for several years and were resumed only when they both realized that the economic advantages that could result from resuming the relations would be far more beneficial than continuing the ideological confrontation. However, mutual distrust never stopped and rendered the bilateral relations increasingly tenuous until they were definitely severed in the early years of the Second World War.

Key words: diplomacy, Italy, Russia, Soviet Union, Lenin, Mussolini, revolution, fascism, communism

It is quite certain that Italy has historically had few direct interests in common or in contrast with Russia. The latter has never gravitated along the Italian borders, as happened with the central European countries, nor along Italy’s colonial frontiers, as for example England.

The few times Italian military units fought on Russian soil, with the Grand Army, in Crimea, with the Entente or with the Germans, our public opinion confronted this event as something uncalled for or unbelievable. The economic relations with Italy were also poor and, in addition, Italians and Russians even lacked an essential union based on having enemies in common, like the one the north Americans often had with

the Russians, with whom they shared animosity towards the British nautical hegemony and, later, towards German and Japanese demands. According to some historians, this distance and the difficulty, as mentioned previously, to find valid sources, was responsible of the indifference with which, up to a few years ago, Italians looked upon Russia as different, disturbing and Asiatic. One of the first translations available in Italy on the Slav people was given by Alexander Bruckner, in regards to German universal history, who defined the Russian society as brutal, full of tyranny and foolish anarchy.¹ Due to geographical/cultural distances, Russia played a strong role in the myths, fears and hopes of the Italian people. It is not by chance that the only Italian entity that had tangible interests to be protected within the Russian, then Soviet, Empire was the Holy See as it needed to protect the vulnerable Catholic minorities.² In the Italian political culture, the church and diplomacy dodged the collective suggestion of Russophobe and Russophile myths. Since the history of Italian-Russian relations lacks treaties and negotiations, it is subject to being accepted in its most general character. Historians researching the relations between the two countries must bring up the histories of conflicts, contacts, interactions; starting with the cultural, ethnic, religious, political and spiritual frontiers which are ideal starting grounds.

In a beautiful historic-literary work appeared in Italy in 2007, the writer Vjačeslav Kolomiez, analyzing the complex events which took place in Russia and Italy at the end of World War I, said that the two countries were involved “dramatically and with high costs for the respective national authorities in the creation of new orders, unknown and unpublished, prejudicially opponents, in their form and content, both to absolutism and to constitutionalism of the traditional monarchies, both to liberalism of modern liberal democracies.” Kolomiez had taken on the theories expressed a few years earlier by Zinaida Jachimovič, renowned historian of Italian-Russian relations, in his book *1914–1918, at the origins of totalitarianism and “mass democracy.”* This book, which was part of a wider study on the first war World, represents an acute reading of post-war phenomena in the two countries.³

The march on Rome in 1922 inaugurated the Fascist period and carried through the political project of Benito Mussolini in his rise to power. In the same period, the

¹ A. Bruckner, *I Popoli Slavi, in Storia Universale: lo Sviluppo dell'Umanità sotto l'Aspetto Politico, Sociale ed Intellettuale* (by J. Von. Pflugk-Hunting), Milano 1934, p. 123.

² During the first partition of Poland, Empress Catherine II constituted in Mogilev the first Roman Catholic diocese on Russian territory; under its jurisdiction were Moscow and Petrograd. In her initiative Catherine did not even worry to ask the consent of Rome; to choose a Bishop they turned to the Catholic Bishop of Vilnius, always by imperial decision the cathedral of Mogilev was transformed in 1782 into archdiocese. In this way the Catholic Church as institution, rose in the Russian Empire with already very peculiar traits compared to the rest of the universal church. From that moment on relations between the Vatican and Imperial Court will be marked by conflicts and tensions due to the imperial will to determine, in an absolutely independent manner, the Catholic Church's life on her territory. See J. Aleksej, P. Grigorij, *Cattolici in Russia e Ucraina*, Roma 1992; I. Osipova, *Se il Mondo vi Odis*, Martiri per la Federazione Sovietica, La Casa di Matriona, Roma 1997.

³ The extensive historical analysis of the Italian-Russian-Soviet relations, largely the result of archival research and the impressive Russian literature on the subject is present in the volume of V. Kolomiez, *Il Bel Paese visto da lontano. Immagini politiche dell'Italia in Russia da fine Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, Manduria–Bari–Rome 2007, p. 89 and ss.

civil war came to an end in the Soviet Union where Lenin's red army had wiped out the last defenses of resistance by the White army in Crimea ushering in the long period of Soviet communism.

Italy had lived this painful page of Russian history through the military missions of generals like Achille Bassignano in southern Russia, Edoardo Fassini Camossi in Siberia and Augusto Sifola to Arkangel'sk⁴. A mission led by General Romei Longhena in Poland in 1920 had also dealt with the Russian-Polish relations while the Italian public opinion was proving very attentive to the independence of Ukrainian political issues, although the diplomatic milieus did not show an equal interest. Indeed, the diplomatic correspondence of the period indicated a substantial Italian interest not to change the regional balance in favour of Ukraine by subtracting territories to Hungary and Romania, which were considered the "natural barriers of Europe."⁵ The phase of the Russian-Polish war, who had held the European chancelleries in suspense, "produced significant consequences on the Italian international position."⁶ This can be because the Russian-German rapprochement in anti-Polish direction would have allowed the Italian Communists to have a closer ally in the case of revolution. Indeed, both Lenin and the European communist feared that the Italian Communists were not ready to climb into power because France and Britain were intent on stifling any subversive act in Italy as well as in any other western European context. The strong socialist component in parliament also prevented Italy to send military equipment to Poland, even after the purchase contracts that the Polish Government claimed rightly until the last day had been concluded. Meanwhile, in Italy metal workers, backed by the Soviet Union, went on strike, paralyzing the country to the point that the government had to publicly reinstate relations with the USSR by sending Giovanni Amadori in Moscow as head of a trade delegation in May 1922 and by receiving in Italy the Russian Vorovskij. Amadori was convinced that the Soviet regime would collapse soon, and he was not the only one to think so: "In 1922 the Soviet Russia gave an impression accentuated of the collapse [...] Bolshevism resisted due to its Slavobyzantine duplicity: the Soviet leaders would eastern player mentality, pointing everything and wants to continue even when he lost everything."⁷ Amadori criticized the Soviet army as unable to stand up to the young but well-organized Polish Army. From Italy instead Vorovskij reported alarming news about the Fascist government activity that had dissolved with armed force socialist municipalities, destroyed socialist and workers' associations, beat up and often killed top socialist and communist representatives.⁸ From Italy, the representatives of the Soviet Bolshevism, sent bitter reflections on the real face of fascism. German Sandomirskij himself, a member of the Soviet delegation at the Genoa Conference in 1922, when reflecting on the ac-

⁴ On this subject see the book of F. Randazzo, *Alle origini dello Stato sovietico. Missioni militari e Corpi di spedizione italiani in Russia (1917-1921)*, Roma 2008.

⁵ G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca. La diplomazia italiana in Russia 1861/1941*, Roma 1996, p. 265.

⁶ Ivi, p. 279.

⁷ Ivi, pp. 288-289.

⁸ V. Kolomiež, *Il Bel Paese visto da lontano...*, p. 92.

tion of the fascist squads, as a far-right reaction, uses a strong historical analogy that evoked the image of the black centuries in Russia, a movement that was an “emanation of the conservative political culture and thus strongly opposed to any revolutionary trial.”⁹ An image which Lenin himself used in those years as he wanted to remove the socialist origin of the Italian leader to avoid easy political combinations. After the war and the long Russian civil war the first diplomatic contacts between the two countries turned out particularly intense with Turati, Treves, Labriola, Ferri, and Ciccotti through whom the hope of a socialist involvement in future Italian political physiognomy was kept alive. However, with the rise of fascism, “which banned or sent into exile the most representative members,”¹⁰ diplomatic contacts became increasingly less frequent, until they turned into open antagonism, only mitigated by international events and Mussolini’s political opportunism.

Surely the history of the Italian Communist Party, which was founded around this time, is full of historical-political relevance and the subject of various interpretations. Which moments and historical events can be identified as the most significant ones of the relations between the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Soviet Union? The PCI was created in Livorno, in January 1921, after the Left Wing of the Italian Socialist Party split from the main body of the party, whose main political leaders were Amadeo Bordiga and Umberto Terracini.¹¹ Antonio Gramsci was an intellectual and a political figure of great relevance in the Turin group, and at the time he was absorbed by the magazine “Ordine Nuovo.” He did not have a primary role in the creation of the party, though he did shortly after. The same will happen to Palmiro Togliatti: he, too, was part of the Turin Communist group, established immediately after the war whose main experience was in factory councils. The Soviet Union was very influential in the development of the PCI, because of the Bolshevik success in conducting the October Revolution and in ascending to power in 1917. The groups and militants that joined the Party did not just “mimic” a foreign experience. The “abstentionist” faction was the basis of the Communist Party when a conflict took place within the leftwing of the Socialist Party. In the latter two tendencies were present, each already provided with its own cultural and political profile, partially independent from the Bolshevik Party’s profile. On one side there was the “Ordine Nuovo” group, on the other there was a group, initially more significant, formed around the magazine “Soviet,” created in Naples and animated by Amedeo Bordiga, who became to all effects the first leader of the Communist Party following the Livorno split. Lenin’s way of thinking, which had guided the Bolsheviks to seize the power and was at the basis of their political strategy in a more complete way, in the case of Italian communists, was not accepted in a superficial way but was inserted within a political-ideological foundation already provided with a certain depth. Although the Socialist Party declared itself proponent of the Soviet theory and loyal sustainer of the revolutionary prospect indicated by the *Terza Internazionale* (Third International), to which

⁹ Ivi, pp. 96–97.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 103.

¹¹ Cf. A. De Clementi, *Amedeo Bordiga*, Torino 1971.

it adhered to, it remained reticent in accepting entirely the organizational and political propositions that were solicited by Moscow. In particular, Serrati and his maximalists did not accept the pressing invitation to expel Turati's moderate reformist component. According to the most widespread historiography the PCI, born in 1921, was not a docile agent of the Soviet will or of the Communist International. The Communist International, born in 1919, was formed on the conviction that there could be a phase of revolutionary expansion in Europe, which would have gone well beyond Czarist Russia and it would have involved other countries such as Germany and Italy. For this reason, in a first phase, there was persistence in directing newly formed Communist Parties to take on a more radical form, freeing themselves of uncertain members. Between 1923 and 1925 the policy of the Communist Party came into conflict with the Soviet leadership. Initially the whole managerial group joined Bordiga, including Gramsci and Togliatti. The only exception came from a small Right Wing fringe, led by Bombacci, who would later become a fascist, Grazia Dei and Angelo Tasca.¹² Tasca came from the *Ordine Nuovo* experience. The new group of leaders critically reexamined Bordiga's policy, which was considered increasingly unproductive and incapable of entrenching the Party amongst the masses. The Italian political situation was dominated by the fascist expansion, Mussolini's rise to power after the march on Rome and by a growing repression towards the communists and all democratic forces. In general the strength of fascism and its capability to become a regime were underestimated. This was mainly due to the crisis that followed Matteotti's which was the only moment of real difficulty during the fascist take of power. For Bordiga there were not relevant differences between fascism and democracy for it was a simple matter of different forms of exploitation and capitalistic domination. The change of political tendency within the PCI found great opposition initially, especially amongst the intermediate functionaries. As a matter of fact, during the conference of Como Bordiga's followers were still in the majority, even though the International's intervention made it so that the control of the party remained with the new leadership. The Convention of Lione in 1925 allowed the consolidation of the Bordiga majority who, during the Comintern debate, brought to attention a real problem, that is, the risk that the communist movement operating in the more advanced capitalistic countries could be negatively conditioned by the Russian revolutionary and Party models. Less convincing were the critiques directed to the political strategy, proposed and sometimes imposed by the International, which tried to send out the Communist Parties from the sectarian minority. Bordiga remained in the PCI, until he was expelled in 1930, even though he will gradually leave politics. Only at the end of World War II will he return with a small militant group obsessed more by the search for doctrinal purity than by the capacity to really intervene in political and social conflicts. According to Bordiga the Party had to safeguard Marxism from any form of ideological degeneration while awaiting the working class, under the inevitable push of the capitalistic crisis, to rediscover communism. During the second half of the

¹² Cf. A. Tasca, *I Consigli di Fabbrica e la Rivoluzione Mondiale. Relazione letta all'Assemblea della Sezione Socialista Torinese la Sera del 13 Aprile 1920*, Torino 1921.

twenties, the evolvement of the Soviet Union's internal situation, through the process in which Stalin imposed his power, produced moments of crisis within the Communist Party but remained mainly confined to the managing group. A first "case" was determined by the letter Gramsci wrote on behalf of the PCI to the Soviet leadership in 1926.¹³ It was the moment of confrontation between Stalin and Bukharin on one side and the so called "Nuova Opposizione Unificata" (New Unified Opposition) of Trotsky and Zinoviev on the other. Two were the main causes of the clash: the economic policy and the management of the Party. In regards to the economy, Stalin sustained the economic safeguard of the farmer class, also of the middle class, as a foundation to produce a primitive accumulation which would have brought a gradual industrialization of the country. Instead, Trotsky and Zinoviev requested an acceleration of industrialization even if this meant displeasing the farmer class. The opposition also criticized the increased bureaucratization and the reduced democratic scope within the Party. The PCI and Gramsci himself joined Stalin and Bukharin's majority, mainly on the economic choices, but were worried about the rupture that was setting in on the Bolshevik executives, which under Lenin's leadership directed the revolution. Gramsci invited both majority and opposition to not pursue the dispute to an extreme point. Another turning point in Russia's path towards "Stalinization" is obtained at the end of the twenties, when the alliance with Bukharin is severed. Togliatti seemed more favorable to Bukharin's political layout. Even amongst the PCI front, Togliatti's administration went through a difficult period. This because the administrative part of the group pushed international changes in order to obtain an immediate implementation to the communist policy by the deployment of Italian clandestine militants. This policy was not successful and the militants sent from Italy were arrested by the fascist police, ending up in jail or banished.¹⁴ Furthermore, the extremist analysis which prevails in the Comintern generated the conviction that the

¹³ Gramsci's ideas rarely corresponded with the Stalinist and reformist propaganda. First of all Gramsci did not waste his life in the struggle for the bourgeois democracy. He never theorized an Italian Republic based on the collaboration amongst classes to obtain a capital advantage. He was instead one of the first Italian Communists to understand the social nature and role of the Russians that emerged during the revolutions. He understood that they were bodies of proletarian power and could have developed also in Italy. Gramsci favored the transposition of the Soviet experience in Italy since the conditions were extremely favorable during the *Biennio Rosso* (red biennium). This is how the Factory Councils of Turin came to be, true fighting instruments during the hottest moment of class conflicts. Gramsci stimulated them by dedicating pages and pages of *L'Ordine Nuovo* to them.

¹⁴ On his return from Vienna, Gramsci finds the Party devastated by the repression: 1923 was the year of the communist hunt by which the government and monarchy tried to avoid the fusion of the PCd'I with the PSI. Thousands of militants and communist executives at all levels were arrested, their funds confiscated and the printing presses are destroyed; Turin alone counted 23 executions in the middle of its streets within a few weeks. The structure of the Left Wing parties had experienced a strong blow; On the other hand, the Communists had complied only formally with decisions of the IC Congress, but continued to refuse to carry out a united front against Fascism. While still in Vienna, Gramsci had refused to sign a document proposed by Bordiga and the majority of the Party's management. Togliatti, also, opposed the IC lines head on. Gramsci, who returned ill, tried to create a group within the Party to contrast the sectarian lines. He managed only partially and with Togliatti founded *L'Unità*, in the beginning of 1924, created by the fusion with the PSI and would remain the official newspaper for the PCI until 1991.

fall of Fascism, which was thought imminent, would lead immediately to a socialist type of revolution. The PCI's setup, in line with the "social fascism" theory supported by the Comintern which equates social democracy to Fascism, leads the political Party to isolation. In regard to Italy, considering its critical condition of illegality, this policy would not produce such disasters as it did in other places, such as Germany. In the historical and political discussion that followed there were those who argued that from a bad political setting the PCI derived something good, favoring its establishment in Italy. Different and rich of interesting interpretable ideas, for a study purpose, is the perception Italian diplomats have of the reality that surrounded them during those years. In addition, the knowledge they have of Russia as well as the image of it which they convey to their superiors end up weighing on the story of Italy's relations with that nation.' Precisely from the reports and diplomatic writings we can draw ideas about the relations between Italy and Russia during the period under examination. Let's take a small step back.

After the promulgation of the October Manifesto, in which the Tsar Nicholas II, on the advice of his prime minister Sergei Witte, had conceded the election of a popular representation, the Duma, the government tried unsuccessfully to contain the revolutionary vocation of their representatives, who were coming mainly from emerging social classes and lacked political skills. All this led to the dissolution of the first two popular assemblies and the necessary modification of the electoral law, proposed by Prime Minister Petr Stolypin, the author of an agrarian reform which aimed to create a class of peasant owners who supported the monarchy. The third Duma inaugurated the period which has been called parliamentary autocracy,¹⁵ which upset the Italian ambassador in St. Petersburg, Giulio Melegari. He, a few years earlier, had valued with interest the appointment to Prime Minister of Stolypin, whom he considered up to the task of leading the tsarist empire towards a better stage because of his reforming work. The use of repressive methods and the recourse to special laws to approve restrictive and unpopular electoral laws, had reduced the initial enthusiasm of Melegari.¹⁶ In September 1911, soon after the assassination of the Russian minister took place in Kiev, he was forced, to draw an inadequate balance of the tsarist policy of the first decade of the twentieth century.

¹⁵ In 1906, in a Russia besieged by serious economic problems and by deep and unacceptable social imbalances, Pëtr Arkadevič Stolypin was nominated president of the Council by Czar Nicola II. The statesman immediately launched a serious and brave reform program, especially in the agricultural field, attempting in this way to implant a decisive switch in Russian politics. The objective was to elevate the economic prosperity of the country, stabilizing social justice and loosen the revolutionary pressure. The subversive forces, as a matter of fact, would not have found fertile grounds for their actions and maybe many horrors and tragedies could have been avoided not only in Russia but in the whole world. Unfortunately, that great reforming endeavor, very audacious for the time and for its context, was abruptly interrupted by an assassin's hand, armed by the international and masonic finance centers. In this way began the political, economic and military collapse which brought on the communist dictatorship. Cf. F. Randazzo, *Dio salvi lo zar, Petr Arkad'evic Stolypin. Un riformatore nella Russia zarista*, Loffredo 2012.

¹⁶ On this question see the volume by F. Randazzo, *L'altra diplomazia. L'Italia, la Russia e le relazioni eurasiatiche nell'epoca della Belle Epoque*, Tricase Libellula 2014.

In 1907 the Council president Stolypin dissolved the second Duma, modified the electoral law and endorsed an agricultural reform which aimed at forming a class of owner-farmers.

In the following years, the attention of the Italian ambassador Andrea Carlotti di Riparbella, after his arrival in Russia, was drawn to foreign policy and not to the domestic one.¹⁷ His interest was focused on the expansionist goals of the Russian establishment but the situation suddenly reversed and in August 1915 domestic policies became, again the center of interest for the Italian ambassador.

In the years that he remained in the Russian capital Andrea Carlotti interacted a lot with the Foreign Minister Sazonov who hoped to attract Italy, initially neutral in the first world war, in the sphere of the Triple Entente. The Italian diplomat organized the idea of “counterpart” Balkan without, however, as noted by Paleologue, having a special mandate to negotiate for the Italian government. This brought discredit to its global diplomatic activity.

Carlotti di Riparbella, in his reflections, had excluded the onset of a revolution during the war, using the 1905 riots as an interpretive guideline. According to Carlotti di Riparbella, differently from the 1905, the 1915 movement was connoted by a political rather than a social character.¹⁸

The political struggle in Russia was analyzed by Carlotti under an essentially bellicist key in which the social question determined strikes of an economic character. For this purpose our ambassador had requested from Consul Adelchi Gazzarelli a specific study on the war industry committees, which had sprung up in Moscow through the initiative of great entrepreneurs. Through the analysis it emerged that the Moscovit society was more reactive compared to the Petersburg society, which was more static and bureaucratic. His conclusions hypothesized an arms production that would, within two years, supply the army.¹⁹ What was happening in Russia was also an object of interest for the Italian military mission. Meanwhile, in 1916, a mixed parliamentary mission of the Duma and the Empire’s Council came to visit Italy, where it stayed from June 1st to the 8th. Ambassador Carlotti di Riparbella entrusted the delegation to the Ministry ensuring that they be welcomed in the best way possible. In Rome, the Russian Parliament members were treated as future exponents of the, so hoped for, ruling government.²⁰ Therefore, the progressive group’s politics found full approval by the Italian politicians. On his return to Russia, Pavel Miljukov²¹ reported to the military commission of the Duma his awareness regarding the assignment of

¹⁷ Regarding the diplomatic activities of Carlotti di Riparbella see G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca...*, pp. 117–125.

¹⁸ MAE, s. APOG (1915–18), Russia, b. 170, T. Gab. 500 ris., Petrograd, 1 November 1915. On this question see also G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca...*

¹⁹ MAE, s. APOG (1915–18), Russia, b. 170, rap. Ris.mo, conf. Rec., Mosca, 11 September 1915, p. 9.

²⁰ For details regarding the Russian delegation in visit to Italy see documentation in ACS, Pres, Cons, Min., G. M., s. 19.3.11

²¹ Future Foreign Minister of the temporary government.

the entire Dalmatia area to Italy, for geographical-strategic reasons. Singarev²² told about his meeting with the major representatives of the *Credito Italiano*, whose director guaranteed him a loan for 100 million. It was with this spirit that in October 1916 an Italian commercial mission was organized and would find itself in Russia during the 1917 revolution. The Italian industrialists moved ahead of time to conquer a privileged economic position, held by Germany before the war. The Italian industrial class, furthermore, worked with the government's patronage. The Foreign Minister had assigned Marquis Pietro Tomasi della Torretta as consultant for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, to whom the mission presidency was entrusted. Meanwhile, Ambassador Carlotti continued to not take in consideration an imminent revolution. Not convinced by this analysis Sidney Sonnino sent Prince Scipione Borghese to Russia, appointed officially to the propaganda mission.²³ Circumstances had it that between January and February 1917 three delegations left Italy: An economical-commercial one, a political-military one and a propaganda-investigative one by Scipione Borghese. None of the above foresaw what soon would have happened, especially, the end of the Romanov.²⁴ In his travelogue *Quei giorni del Febbraio 1917 in Russia*, Zaccaria Aberti, vice-president of the economic-commercial commission, does not let anything different show through regarding the interpretations of our ambassador in Moscow.²⁵ Furthermore, Minister Scialoja declared, after his return to Rome, that everything was going well. On March 14, 1917, the day in which "Tribuna" published the interview, the revolution had been inflaming Petrograd for the past six days and the revolutionary movement had reached Moscow and other cities. According to Carlotti Russia was trying to get rid of an incompetent monarch, by liberal interpretations. As a matter of fact, based on the Ambassador's telegrams, the revolution seemed the work of the Duma and the Liberal Parties. In fact, the exact opposite was happening! The revolution was caused by anonymous urban crowds, proletarian and non-proletarian, which had been joined by the army, plus the leaders of the Duma and zemstva who adhered a bit at a time.²⁶ Contrasts regarding the evaluations of the Russian reality started to emerge. The council started having serious doubts on the ambassador's work and that of the various delegations that left Rome. Carlotti left Petrograd at the end of October, after sending his last telegraph. The new Consul in Moscow, Cesare Majoni learned of the news of the ambassador's departure, on 24 November and it did not surprise him. The last time he saw Carlotti in Petrograd,

²² Future Agriculture Minister of the temporary government.

²³ MAE, Cabinet archive, cas. 70, fasc. 1270, Roma 15 February 1917. It's the letter in which Sonnino communicates to the Embassies the official character of Prince Scipione Borghese's mission.

²⁴ Cf. G. Petracchi, *Diplomazia di Guerra e Rivoluzione. Italia e Russia dall'Ottobre 1916 al Maggio 1917*, Bologna 1974.

²⁵ Z. Oberti, *Quei giorni del Febbraio 1917 in Russia*, a cura di G. Petracchi, "Nuova Antologia," n. 2122 (aprile-giugno 1987), pp. 115–158.

²⁶ Zemstvo, a form of local government introduced by Czar Alessandro II in 1864 suggested by Minister Nikolaj Miljutin as administrative and consultation district organ. Elected with suffrage based on census, these assemblies represented the nobles and local bourgeoisie and were substituted by the Soviet after the revolution of October 1917. Cf. T. Emmons, W.S. Vucinich, *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, Cambridge 1982.

he confirmed his faith in the Russia that came out of the February revolution.²⁷ The diplomatic world of that time knew very little about the conspiring and secret police of Russia. The diplomats had no idea who the men were that would shortly be key players in the revolution: their ideology, their inspiring doctrine and the psychology of the Russian masses. Not until 1917 will Lenin enter the Italian diplomatic magnifying glass and our public opinion. The same can be said for the other Bolsheviks and the phenomenon of Bolshevism as being revolutionary. In the world of diplomacy, Lenin and his collaborators were perceived as detached ideologists totally disconnected from the Russian society and seen as lacking any strong ties with the national culture. When the Bolsheviks were not considered as theorists of a world revolution they were simply taken for German agents. The October Revolution, at the time, was therefore underestimated from every point of view, in its causes but even more in its effects. The Italian diplomacy, same as the allied one, considered Lenin's success as temporary. Awaiting the regime to fall in any moment, no diplomat, for a long time, took seriously the Bolsheviks as head of State. According to a great part of the historiography regarding this theme, the underestimation of the Bolshevik leaders, demonstrated in particular by Councilor Giuseppe Catalani who held the Embassy before Torretta (successor of Carlotti), was responsible in equal measures as much to the ignorance of the doctrine and the Bolshevik psychology as to the *forma menis* of the usual diplomacy. Carlotti, Catalani and, during the first phase of his mandate, Torretta took note of the facts without understanding the symbolic sense of the event. Diplomacy in general did not have the moral sense necessary to analyze the new phenomenon, compared to the models of the European revolutions, introduced by Bolshevism during the Russian revolutionary process. Once the "liberal model" of western traditional revolution was broken, what occurred in Russia seemed to the diplomats a manifestation of chaos. Pietro Tomasi della Torretta did not see a national government in the Soviet one, but an ideological State. When, also, Majoni left Moscow in September the Italian diplomacy cut the last bit of contacts with the Soviet Russia. From that moment the new Russian regime remained an object of mystery for the Council. During the summer of 1918, before the end of the world conflict, Italy had already developed, in the country and within the government, the awareness that the war had been a huge revolutionary stage. Too many people had been mobilized, too many areas had been involved and too many interests had been overturned so that the world could be reconstructed according to a preexistent order of rules.²⁸ The implications of this new type of world interdependence made perceivable how suddenly the old international institutions were inadequate.²⁹ That great revolutionary event, which was the war, imposed in first place the transformation of many institutions of the State's administration, in particular its diplomacy. In *Della Diplomazia e le Sue Origini*, an article published in 1918 in the "Nuova Antologia," the ex-ambassador Giulio Melegari started to doubt diplomacy's role. He defined it as incap-

²⁷ G.C. Majoni, *A Mosca, nell'Anno Rosso. Agosto 1917-Settembre 1918*, Milano 1936, pp. 26.

²⁸ Cf. C.B. Falls, *The First World War*, London 1960.

²⁹ Cf. G.J. Meyer, *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War 1914 to 1918*, New York 2006.

ble of changing according to the new international scene's needs.³⁰ Therefore, it was a strong attack to the diplomatic profession. Public opinion and the Italian diplomats handled the *querelle* through the national newspapers. The controversy put in discussion the fundamental role of diplomats and the function itself of a diplomatic career; furthermore, it marked the end of an epoch. The war had destroyed the concept of diplomacy understood as a true technocracy. The world had entered into an epoch of ideologies which the of mass movements had made even more defined and hence almost foreign to a diplomatic body. This epochal crisis hit other countries such as Great Britain and France, which had always been role players on the international stage and flaunted a centuries-old baggage of knowledge and competence, now seemed suddenly inadequate in dealing with the changes determined by the above mentioned events. From this awareness grew the necessity to form a culture that was more focused on problems of an international type. With this intent, for example, was created in London in 1920 the British Institute of International Affairs.³¹ But let us return to the Italian economic mission in Russia. The group of professionals and State officials had returned in 1918. In the course of their stay they were surprised by the onset of the Petrograd Revolution in February. The delegation members lived the end of the regime and the following events from the Italian Embassy, along with the substantial diplomatic staff. Giuseppe Battaglia underlines, in a book published that same year, certain explanatory notes regarding what was happening in Russia between the Italian diplomats:

All'ambasciata tutti parlano, tutti discutono: nessuno sa riaversi dalla sorpresa per la insospettata rivolta militare. Non so qual sia stata a tal proposito la perspicacia del nostro ambasciatore, né mi curo di saperlo. So che il marchese Carlotti è un diplomatico e quindi ha le virtù e i difetti della nostra diplomazia. La quale è vecchia, pedante, piena di acciacchi, e si esaurisce nello sforzo stilistico della selezione e della dosatura dei vocaboli. Inoltre questa vecchia è una sfinge, ha una maschera impenetrabile...e custodisce il proprio vuoto.³²

Someone in the council had surely tried to comprehend in amore specific manner the grand political and social phenomena that shocked the habitual scenario. He did not judge it as a simple event, nor did he ignore it, without historical precedents in Russia and with no interest for the other countries. It matters to us to know, in this study, the opinion regarding the Italian diplomacy and Russia before and after 1917. One of the few people that realized immediately the greatness of the revolution was Giovanni Amadori. He too diplomat by profession was not blinded by easy interpretations, during the October outbursts, nor did he only see the final result of the destruction but tried, with wisdom, to ponder if it were possible to reconstruct a tormented history. The request made to the Ministry to be sent to Russia, in order to analyze the Bolshevik phenomena, when all other Italian and foreign diplomats had left the main Russian cities, offered the following historiography a clue to evaluate

³⁰ G. Melegari, *Della Diplomazia e dei Suoi Organi*, "Nuova Antologia," VI, vol. 195 (luglio–agosto 1918), p. 8.

³¹ Knownas Chatham House.

³² G. Battaglia, *A Pietrogrado nei Primi Giorni della Rivoluzione. Note di Viaggio*, Varese 1917, pp. 133–134.

the works in a positive manner. The ample report he wrote represented one of the few sources of information available which deeply influenced the formation of the diplomatic personnel's opinion on the Bolshevik phenomena. The ambiguous behavior of the super powers towards the Soviet regime had depended, till now, on the fact that each government appreciated in a very different and vague way the internal conditions in Russia.³³ It resulted that the policy followed by the Entente towards the Soviets was the unhappy result of a compromise between those that thought the regime would fall any day and those that thought the regime would hold and therefore deserved tying relations.³⁴ From almost two years, the Entente's diplomacy had severed all ties with Soviet Russia.³⁵ As mentioned, the Foreign Minister no longer had direct relations with Russia since, during March 1918, Pietro Tomasi della Torretta had left Petrograd for Vologda and at the end of July retired in Archangelsk. In September, after the assassination attempt to Lenin and the arrest of Consul Lockhart, even the Italian Consulate and Italian military mission left Russia³⁶. Bolshevism was therefore taken in consideration only, in those days, for the consequence of its diffusion in Italy and Europe. In June 1919, after the government fall of Orlando-Sonnino, the Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni had taken a marked anti Bolshevik stance. The new Ministerial team led by Nitti and Tittoni noticed right away the necessity to learn the Bolshevik peculiarities. Something had changed. Carlo Sforza, newly nominated undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, tried to create at the Consulta a specialized service to collect information on Russia³⁷. During July 1919 he nominated Cesare Majoni head of Cabinet with the task to follow everything that concerned the Bolshevik regime. Everything had to be analyzed for no original documentation on Soviet Russia existed in the Council. The first reliable study on Bolshevism was presented on March 5, 1919 by Colonel Ettore Trojani, head of European section "R" of the Army's Information Service. This piece of work recreated a static profile of the analyzed phenomena, and an optimistic profile of the effects. Greater newsworthiness had been obtained by news published by the Regia Marina information services, which had their own agents within Bolshevik outpost in western countries. Majori tried obtaining copies of Pravda and Izvestija, part of the Bolshevik Party and Soviet government. Searching for Russian publications resulted in not an easy task. Stockholm however, at least until December 1919, was the most important Bolshevik outpost in the western world. In the Swedish capital, in fact, arrived all the propaganda

³³ Cf. G. Boffa, *Storia dell'Unione Sovietica, Dalla Rivoluzione alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, Milano 1976. About a secret mission to Moscow, Giovanni Amadori Virgili and the concept of "psychic messiah" attributed to socialist ideality, see chapter third of the volume of G. Petracchi, *Da San Pietroburgo a Mosca...*, pp. 245–257.

³⁴ G. Lehner, *Economia, Politica e Società nella Prima Guerra Mondiale*, Messina–Firenze 1973.

³⁵ The Entente countries: France, Great Britain, Belgium, Portugal, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Cina, Montenegro, USA, Brazil, Perù, Bolivia, Panama, Cuba, Guatamala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Haiti, Honduras, Ecuador, Liberia and San Marino.

³⁶ The socialist revolutionary Fanny Kaplan seriously wounded Lenin with two gunshots. This episode, and in contemporary the assassination of Mojsej Urickij, started off an arrest campaign, deportations and murders known as Terrore Rosso (red terror).

³⁷ Cf. *Parlamenti e Governi d'Italia dal 1848 al 1970*, a cura di F. Bartolotta, vol. 2, Roma 1971.

material that from Russia was spread throughout Europe and the Allies, worried about this expansion, they saw themselves forced to exercise pressure on Sweden in order to block any contact with the Soviets. Thus, the government of Stockholm was basically forced to pull out its delegations in Russia but without stopping the Bolshevik propaganda.³⁸ The Swedish capital represented therefore a special observatory to interpret the Bolshevik phenomena. The Naval Ministry had its own naval representative, Captain Manfredi Gravina, which filled out periodical reports on the situation of Soviet Russia and Bolshevism. The sources Gravina drew upon were various and his job as informer continued through 1920, becoming in those years the best informed diplomatic agent, regarding Bolshevism. His main works and notes have been collected in a short volume in 1935. The other western Soviet outpost was Copenhagen. For geographic reasons, for its neutrality during the war and the Socialist Party's position, Denmark benefited of a fair amount of freedom in handling its relations with Soviet Russia.³⁹ The Danish government recognized *de facto* the Soviet one and, between the end of 1918 and beginning 1919, a diplomatic mission along with a Bolshevik propaganda⁴⁰ office worked together in Copenhagen. Many were the Soviet delegates sent to distribute propaganda material in France, Germany and Italy. Diplomatic functionaries of the Entente insisted that the western governments exert on Denmark the same pressure as done to Sweden for the Litvinov issue. But the English government thought the risk of having the Bolshevik presence in Europe could entail benefits for the European *intelligence*. During 1919, year in which the Entente countries had extended the political and economic block around the Bolshevik Russia, the English government asked the Danish one to leave the Danish Ministry in Petrograd with the intention of protecting British persons in Russia. After the departure of the Allied Consulates, the Danish Red Cross was put in charge of defending all strangers in Russia. In March 1919 Doctor Carlo Martini arrived in Moscow to take over the Danish Red Cross management.⁴¹ From that point on the Danish

³⁸ Cf. T. Sillini, *Scritti di Manfredi Gravina*, Roma 1935.

³⁹ Cf. K. Winding, *Storia della Danimarca. Breve profilo*, Roma 1997.

⁴⁰ The term propaganda derives from the Latin idiomatic expression "de propaganda fide" (on the faith to spread) with which the Church appoints the congregation responsible for proselytism and spread of Catholic principles in the world. The contemporary use of "propaganda" is meant as the intentional systematic circulation of information and messages intended to give an image, positive or negative, of certain phenomena, events, situations or people, but also to allow appreciation for a certain commercial product (in this case synonym for advertisement). Used for the first time on a wide scale by the Socialist Parties, political propaganda soon became an essential component of mass society: especially starting from the First World War, when the State authorities seized the methods and techniques of propaganda to make popular the war cause amongst public opinion. The mass development of means of communication (radio, movies and television) gave the propaganda activity a new dimension and a new capability of penetration. The regimes made wide use of these possibilities controlling directly the information channels creating forms of persuasion and of indoctrination more effective and sophisticated of the one used in the past. Even because of these experiences the term "propaganda" ended up assuming a negative connotation, tied to the idea of manipulation or at least of unilateral and distorted information. See V. O'Donnell, G.S. Jowett, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Fourth Edition, Thousand Oaks 2005.

⁴¹ *Ferretti a Sonnino*, N. 43/11, Mosca 24 March 1919, in MAE, *Ambasciata Mosca*, Consolato Province del Nord, Arcangelo, b. 38, fasc. I, Giuseppe Ferretti was in charge of Italian affairs at the Danish Red Cross in Moscow.

capital became the crossroad for international correspondence from and to Russia, under the skillful English leadership. For example, the Italian correspondence had to be delivered to the English legation in Copenhagen which took up the responsibility of sorting operations.⁴² The English influence was such that after months of repeated negotiations the Danish government agreed to host Litvinov in the capital under official cover. The Italian legation was involved in the hard task of supporting, in any way, the Italian emissaries that reached Copenhagen under various titles. To this observation point, used to observe the real Soviet culture, were added Varsavia and Helsingfors.⁴³ Poland and Finland were the first nations created after the end of the Russian Empire that were recognized officially by Italy. Business representative Francesco Tommasini arrived to Varsavia from Stockholm in October, sent by Francesco Saverio Nitti, while a month earlier the Legation Councilor Marchetti Ferrante reached Helsingfors. For a long time Italy was absent in the Baltic States, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The official recognition of the countries happened only in 1920. Poland became instead the main outpost against western Russian expansion, while the Baltic States built a flipped northern iron curtain, at the time it went from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea, the “cordon sanitaire” much wanted by the allied *leaders*,⁴⁴ so defined in 1919 and later democratically renamed *Barrier des Nations*. Its acknowledgement *de facto* excluded that the Italian government could send representatives to those governments with a title of minister or charge d'affaires. The only solution possible was to use commissioner or political agent. To recap: Stockholm, Varsavia and Helsingfors were the first windows to open on the Soviet scene. From the start the two missions reflected a skeptic vision of the Soviet reality. The Bolshevik scope was interpreted as a state that was at the service of an ideology which, however, differentiated itself from all other known examples. Marchesi Ferrante, to better fulfill his duty, studied the Russian language. During the Spring of

⁴² R. Pirone, *Ricordi di Russia, 1902–1920*, Milano 1996, p. 273.

⁴³ Helsinki.

⁴⁴ In 1919 the Allies established a common policy of isolation of Soviet Russia, defined later with the expression “Cordon Sanitaire.” August 8, 1919, the inter-allied Supreme Council discussed the possibility of carrying out an embargo towards Russia, measure already used towards the Government of the Council of Hungary led by Bela Kun. The American representative, Polk, had however pointed out the fact that no declaration of war had been made to Russia. Furthermore, since supplies to Russia could be made from Germany, with which the Allied Powers already signed the Peace Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, the Supreme Council arranged, in the reunion of August 19, to send a notice to the German government and to the neutral States in behalf of the main Allied Powers and associates; asking them: to refuse departure documentation to all ships directed towards the Bolshevik Russian ports; that such embargo be posted on all goods destined to be sent by ground to Russia; to refuse all passports of persons headed for or coming from Russia; prohibit the banks from doing business with Bolshevik Russia; to refuse to admit, in telegraph offices or wireless telegraph stations, messages destined or originated from Bolshevik Russia and sending mail to or from Russia and to inform that: The Allied and associated powers had intention to put in act, in their countries, similar measures to those asked to perform by the neutral countries; the Allied Naval ships, guarding the execution of the embargo project on the Russian Bolshevik ports, would act in name of the Allied and associated governments. On September 29, 1919, the Supreme Council decided to send to the neutral states the notice regarding the measures against Soviet Russia, submitted by the Block Commission.

1920 the most advanced observation point for Italy in Russia moved to Reval, known today as Tallin. Estonia, in fact, was the first country to sign in Dorpat on 2 February the Peace Treaty with Russia; from its frontier the first Italian's would later enter the Soviet country in March 1920. Agostino Depretis took on the management of the political agency in Reval, hosting the first eye witnesses of that society which was being created. The Estonian city remained a privileged observation point until May 28, 1922, date in which Cavalier Amadori arrived in Moscow and opened the economic agency. Meanwhile, in September 1921 the Legation's person in charge changed to Paolo Brenna, watchful diplomat that served as second to Tommasini in Varsavia. Anyhow, the Bolshevik experiment was given as finished, both in the diplomatic areas and consequently within the offices of the Foreign Ministry. It was not so.

After January 16, 1920, the Supreme Council declared the end of the Russian embargo; Nitti was in a hurry to make contact with the Russian government to organize his recognition. The council president was worried that Italy would be preceded by other governments on their way to Moscow; to which he had contributed decisively to its opening. Amadori was sent in reconnaissance. While awaiting his Russian visa, the delegate made his way into Ukraine up to Kamenec-Podol'skij. In drawing up his report on the Ukrainian situation Amadori described the various grain burial systems, thought up by the farmers in order to save their harvest from being searched by the Bolsheviks and the Whites. However, crossing the Polish frontier would have been complicated therefor he moved into Estonia which, as mentioned earlier, had become an open window from Russia onto Europe after the Dorpat peace. In Reval operated the Soviet mission guided by Gukovskij. The trip from Reval to Moscow lasted three days. A complex report was written by Amadori on his return to Rome regarding the mission; a conceptual elaboration of politics, Bolshevik ideology, the organization of the State according to Soviet laws and domestic and foreign policies.⁴⁵ The Italian delegate noted much destruction amongst the cities he visited and he came into contact with the survivors of the Italian colonies. The Russia he observed was still in full blown war communism. The Bolsheviks, after having defeated the White Army, had practically won the civil war. General Vrangel still remained to agitate the counter-revolutionary Crimean flag. Behind the Russian-Polish frontline they organized their armies waiting for the decisive conflict, on which the Bolsheviks entrusted their last hopes of bringing the revolution to Europe. The nationalization of the city's populations was complete, while relations with farmers were dictated by the requisitions. What shocked Amadori was the impression of an accelerated destruction of things; the eighteenth century city wanted by Pietro. After all, the memories of travellers from those days of revolution are associated to destruction.⁴⁶ According to Amadori the regime felt the dead weight of its construction and

⁴⁵ G. Amadori Virgili, *La Situazione Russa e i Suoi Probabili Sviluppi. Gli Obbiettivi Italiani in Rapporto ad una Eventuale Ripresa di Contatto col Governo dei Sovieti*, Roma 10 Luglio 1920, in MAE, Ufficio Personale, Miscellanea 175.

⁴⁶ Even H.G. Wells describes the disastrous conditions of Petrograd in H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, Doran, New York, 1921; Walter Schubart explains the horror of the destruction as innate within the European as a manifestation of the middle culture, socially established on the middle class and psy-

the need for the revolution in order to save itself. Nothing in Russia seemed essential to him. Even the sociological analysis of the Soviet power seemed inadequate. Amadori understood well that due to social disintegration Russian society regressed to an almost primordial state; this constitutes the peculiarity of the Russian revolution compared to the European ones. The delegate observed the crumbling of Russian administrative units and local soviets disconnected from one another and removed from a true leadership unit of its own. The psychological description made by Amadori of the Bolshevik leaders is very close to certain verdicts by historiography on dissident Russia, which speaks of a police-like *forma mentis* type picked up by the revolutionary Bolshevism. We have seen that a negative function is assigned to Bolshevism. Returning to foreign policies, the Italian official discouraged, at that moment, the Italian government from recognizing the Soviet one, preferring a simple *de facto* recognition with the right, if anything, to create respective offices. Amadori also suggested the Entente countries not to fight Bolshevism, so that its implosion would be generated only by internal causes. In conclusion, his observation appeared punctiliously verified on the sources and on first hand observations, therefore, presenting itself superior to many other accounts written in evidence either in favor or against the Soviet Regime. In February 17, 1921, Russia was still in mourning for Lenin's death while Count Gaetano Manzoni, sent by Benito Mussolini, left Rome for Moscow. The Count was in-charged Minister plenipotentiary, that is, ambassador. The economic agency thus changed its denomination assuming officially that of Italian Embassy.⁴⁷ Subsequently Manzoni searched for an adequate location and found Villa Berg, which allowed even in Moscow, as in Constantinople, the most functional arrangement in order to permanently host all personnel in the embassy along with the chancery services.⁴⁸ This late nineteenth century Russian villa is situated in one of Moscow's most silent and secluded streets, one of the most beautiful neighborhoods of the city, between Ulica Kropotinskaia and Arabat. The first Italians to visit it did not feel in the heart of the Soviet machine.⁴⁹ The personnel was formed by about fifty people who made for a sort of permanent "Italian island" in Moscow. Some of them will remain in Russia until 1941 becoming an institution, leaving in the human memory and in the diplomatic documents indelible traces. The most representative and institutionally relevant figure for the embassy's history, between the two wars, was Guido Relli, ex-subject of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, of Italian nationality. He was the cohesive element between the Italian and Russian culture, thanks to his long stay he contributed in making the not easy Italian diplomacy more effective. Even the Italian press, between the two wars, frequented the embassy in Moscow; Later, even

chologically on a central state of mind, which virtues are self-control, discipline, etc.. The destructive Russian attitude, instead, is the manifestation of the culture of the end, set on the non-equilibrium, on the waste of things and humans; the contrast between secularity and religiousness. W. Schubart, *L'Europa e l'Anima dell'Oriente*, Milano 1947, pp. 99, 116, 257.

⁴⁷ Cf. E. Cerruti, *Visti da Vicino. Memorie di un'Ambasciatrice*, Milano 1951.

⁴⁸ See P. Quaroni, *Ricordi di un Ambasciatore*, Milano 1954.

⁴⁹ *Manzoni a Mussolini*, Tell. N. 39, 48, Rap. N. 493/66, respectively of February 19 and March 1st 1924, MAE, *Archivio del personale*. S. VIII, b. 46, fasc. 124 (Moscow, 1923–1927).

writers and intellectuals in search of a different idea of that country, from the one perceived within their own countries. If anything the dismissal of Cicerin and the beginning of *pjatiletka* signed a rupture in the internal Russian history and even in the relations between the diplomatic body and the Soviet authority. Since September 1929, the Italian diplomacy had completely lost the respect and prestige it benefited of up to the prior year. The newspapers did not neglect to amplify the scandals in which diplomats were the main role players. The custom of informal relations almost completely stopped and became only related to protocol. But then we must say the regime needed new interlocutors, better suited for the country's modernization effort and preferred practical professionals, different from the diplomats, such as economists, engineers and technicians that spoke the language of numbers and elaborated complex statistical charts.⁵⁰ The Italian Embassy itself, even if not involved directly in the scandal campaign, felt the effects of this mutated climate. However, in a short time it managed to find other resources, other channels to win isolation and come into contact with the Russian world. In 1930 hundreds of Italian technicians contributed in creating excellent relations between the two countries. The new quinquennial plans had brought many professionals from Italy to visit Russia; journalists, engineers, economists and men from the financial world all came to study Soviet politics. Even the president of the Italian Commercial Bank (*Banca Commerciale*), Ettore Conti, arrived in Moscow in 1932 and was guest at the embassy. Those were extremely unpredictable times and from a moment to another the residents in Villa Berg could augmentate, as a matter of fact, those Italian politicians, who had enough of the Soviet Union and wanted to repatriate, started to flow into the villa. All in all we can state that the Italian diplomats looked upon the Russian events with their usual way of observing things, through the mental categories of political realism. Basic concepts of social class conflicts, class interests and internationalism are still attributed, even recently, to a greater heuristic and interpretative validity, both in and out of the Soviet country, and are continuously deciphered without complications or doubts. The ambassador's relations during the period in consideration (1917–1933), speak of the personal character of the conflict between executive groups fighting for power, the contrast between cities and rural areas, the interests of great power and the conflict between nations. This capacity to look at the facts and stick with them confers demonstrative strength, even to the infrequent but inevitable generalizations. The study of facts and the choices of being on site to compare the ideological presumptions with evidence, working up the trail of available sources, allow them to evaluate correctly even the ideological phenomena's. Russia of the 20's, not different from that of the nineteenth century, is seen by the Italians with the image of a maternal archetype "great mother," at times perceived in a positive sense others in a negative one. The logic and conceptual categories that Trotsky and Bukharin had in common resulted more comprehensible compared to those used by Stalin. The perception and interpretations were clearly different. Stalin's strength, besides his role in the Party, was searched for mainly in his non-Russian character which the Italian functionaries

⁵⁰ Cf. E. Lo Gatto, *URSS 1931. Vita quotidiana. Piano quinquennale*, Roma 1932.

often found as stereotype in Russian literature. The fact that Stalin was not Russian was detected as a dynamic spirit, stubborn, disagreeable, and indifferent but also as a sign of great extraneousness towards the Russian population. This interpretation was widely used in Italian historiography which summarized Stalinism as an Asian-Marxist combination and as a *forma mentis* created from a mix of revolutionary and police methods. Furthermore, the events those diplomats witnessed were without record in recent history, therefore the sociological models of dictatorship and despotism were completely inadequate in describing the Stalinist phenomena⁵¹. Stalinism was not considered a creative phenomenon, but destructive and necessary for politics, destined to perpetuate a regime that otherwise would not have lasted. Stalinism developed not for knowledge of that model but for a coercive mobilization on the one hand and the collective enthusiasm of the younger generations on the other, which was incited to nurture limitless ambitions. This model was not considered exportable and as a matter of fact did not work elsewhere. Diplomats in Russia at the time were therefore, less able than others to explain why Russian communism had taken that universal meaning of cogency. Italy and Russia had found through national policies and economic benefits a solid base for friendly relations. This is why between Fascism and Bolshevism a *modus vivendi* was created, dangling between advantageous commercial exchanges and diplomatic favors and a faint but controlled ideological debate. The observance of the *modus vivendi* by Fascism had impeded the publication of all anti-Russian literature in Italy by Russian emigrants, at the time very numerous in France. Another series of answers are found in the rooted ambivalent Fascist attitude toward the USSR. It was characterized by an oscillation, which Fascism had never been able to give a plausible recap, between an extremist revolutionary aspiration and the cultural heritage of a traditional and conservative tendency.

Finally, the Italian-Soviet relations were influenced by historical prejudice that underlies the relationship between two hostile worlds, one next to the proletariat, the other to the strong social classes and bourgeois parties that emerge together and almost simultaneously. In Italy, Mussolini had introduced himself as a leader of a movement that had been fighting the communist party presenting the country as a “bastion against the dangers of a Bolshevik revolution”⁵² and for that he found himself against Salvatore Contarini, diplomatic Sicilian that from the encounter of Racconigi until the WWI, worked for international relationship between the two countries. Lenin in the Soviet Union represented, with his political party, a “new era” in which his country should have to fight with all their forces against the “capitalist encirclement.” With the ascent of Hitler and his power politics, were undermined relationships between Stalin and Mussolini, and Italy found himself fighting alongside Germany against the “communist enemy.” But that’s another page of history.

⁵¹ The totalitarian model was unknown during that historical period.

⁵² M. Martelli, *Mussolini e la Russia. Le relazioni italo-sovietiche dal 1922 al 1942*, Milano 2007, p. 3.

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