

Italy in the European States System of the Pre-March Period: Some Reflections

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During the so-called Pre-March Period from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 to the revolutionary upheaval in 1848, Italy played an important role in the European States System as created at the Congress of Vienna.¹ Standing midway between the Ottoman Empire, entirely left out of this system of the public law of Europe, and Germany, protected by its legal rules as well as the strong bonds of the German Confederation, Italy was a member of the European family but politically disunited, formed by small states without any supranational body that would have offered them protection against external threat. Consequently, the Apennines after 1815 were an easier target for the Great Powers' ambitions than Central Europe, where the German Confederation granted extraordinary security to its members while simultaneously preserving their sovereignty. The result for Italy was that in the decades following the Congress of Vienna it represented a vulnerable

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point in the lower regions of the Continent, in other words of the order established at this congress, by attracting the attention of the self-serving and sometimes even illegal conduct of the European Powers and failing to offer a suitable environment for the better cooperation of its usually minor princes jealous of their own sovereignty, something the German Confederation actually did.

How problematic Italy was for the European States System before 1848 is also evident from the fact – often neglected by historians and political scientists – that the first war between two European countries after the end of the Napoleonic Wars occurred in the Apennines owing to the Sardinian Kingdom's invasion of Austria's Lombardy. In fact, the attention paid to Italian events in surveys of the functioning of this system is surprisingly low. One can mention here the prominent works in the Anglo-Saxon and German speaking milieus: Paul W. Schroeder's *Transformation of European Politics* with little attention paid to Italy and Matthias Schulz's *Normen und Praxis* almost omitting it, for example, completely ignoring the important Anglo-Neapolitan Sulphur Crisis of 1840.² There are naturally a considerable number of studies on particular issues concerning Italy, including some surveys of the relations between specific countries of the peninsula and various European Powers, but they usually lack a more complex – all-European – outlook.³ The result is that an in-depth evaluation of Italy's role in the European States System in 1815–1848 has never been offered.

If one attempts to embark upon this ambitious task and evaluate Italy's importance on the Pre-March diplomatic chessboard, it is necessary to take into consideration several challenges which must first be overcome. Primary among them is not to get mired in the phraseology of the Risorgimento, in other words not to attribute too much value to

² P. W. SCHROEDER, *The Transformation of European Politics 1763–1848*, Oxford 1996; M. SCHULZ, *Normen und Praxis. Das Europäische Konzert der Großmächte als Sicherheitsrat, 1815–1860*, München 2009.

³ See for example G. BERTI, *Russia e stati italiani nel Risorgimento*, Torino 1957; N. ROSSELLI, *Inghilterra e regno di Sardegna dal 1815 al 1847*, Torino 1954; P. SILVA, *La Monarchia di Luglio e l'Italia. Studio di storia diplomatica*, Torino 1917.

Italian nationalism, something of secondary importance for the analysis of Italy's position in the European States System before 1848. It is much more important to remain upon the solid ground of legal norms which form the pillars of every political system and the willingness of the countries to obey to them: the extent of this willingness contributes to the stability or fragility of the system. This means to analyse primarily the competition of the Great Powers in Italy, their relations with Italian princes and, last but not least, the mutual relationships between these princes. Although the question of nationalism and political reform constituted an important factor influencing the decision-making of the Great Powers as well as the individual Italian princes, one cannot overestimate its importance on the predominantly pragmatic and egoistic conduct of the political elites. After all, the Sardinian attack against Austria in 1848, which equalled an offence against the whole states system, resulted rather from dynastic ambitions of the Savoyan dynasty than from Italian-nationalist aspirations.

Another obstacle that is necessary to overcome is the Risorgimento legend or rather legends concerning the conduct of the various players on the chessboard of European-Italian politics, especially the Austrian Empire, which was a popular target of numerous imputations raised by its contemporaries and often blindly adopted by large numbers of nationalist, liberal, left-wing or simply superficial historians. Despite the revisionist and from a scholarly perspective respectable approach of other historians, especially since the mid-20th century, the situation still resembles a minefield where every step can lead to an explosion. It is therefore all the more necessary to base one's research upon a careful study of primary sources of various kinds, with diplomatic correspondence being of course the most important. Even if a considerable number of official letters have been published owing to the editorial activities of Italian historians, a vast archival research must be undertaken at all costs, both in Italian and other European archives.⁴

⁴ From excellent revisionist works see above all D. LAVEN, *Venice and Venetia Under the Habsburgs, 1815–1835*, New York 2002; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich. Vol. 1: Between Conflict and Cooperation 1809–1830*,

Having placed the research of the topic upon a more realist-legal and unprejudiced approach and extensive work with primary sources, one more fact is necessary to keep in mind: Italy constituted a point interconnected with other areas where the Great Powers competed for influence and supremacy, and therefore the area was influenced by events in other parts of Europe or even the world, while simultaneously serving as a source of similar influence on other regions of the Continent. It is thus necessary to gain a considerable understanding of the course of events beyond the Apennines during the period under study to be able to explain Italy's role in the European States System in the wider context of European as well as global politics. What it actually means will be further explained later in this article focusing on the later phase of the Pre-March Period from 1830–1848 since it was not until the July Revolution in France in 1830 that Italy experienced the renewed competition of Austria and France together with Great Britain's increasing interference in Italian affairs as time went by, all of which undermined the credibility of the European Concert in the eyes of Italian ruling elites, which, combined with the distrust of a certain portion of the Italian public, weakened their faith in the stability of the European States System.

The evidence for such a pessimistic claim can be found in three principal periods when Italy played an important role on the international stage: first, in 1830–1832 when Austria served as the region's policeman for crushing several rebellions in the peninsula and France jealously opposed the extension of the former's influence, which finally led to the French occupation of Ancona; second, in 1840 when, in the first half of the year, Europe witnessed the so-called British-Neapolitan Sulphur-War and, in the second half, during the so-called Rhine Crisis, when Italy faced the threat of a general war; third, in 1846–1848 when Italy experienced turbulent events to which the Great Powers were unable to find a response that could protect the order as established in

Washington 1979, and the same: *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich. Vol. 2: Revolution and Reaction, 1830–1848*, Washington 1989.

1815 and finally witnessed not only the outbreak of revolutionary upheaval but also the first open – warlike – breach of the system by the Sardinian aggression against Austria.

The revolution in France in 1830 represented an important turning point not only in French history but also in the position of Italy on the international scene: in the preceding 15 years the traditional competition of the Habsburgs and France had receded into the background owing to the general post-Napoleonic fatigue. Although the cabinet in Paris attentively observed Austria's steps in this part of Europe and diplomatically supported the resistance of some Italian states against Metternich's attempts to increase Austria's influence through the creation of an Italian league or a general police commission in Milan, it did not dare to pursue a more ambitious and hostile policy to undermine Austria's hegemony in the peninsula. When revolutions broke out in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Piedmont in 1820–1821, France allowed Austria to crush them without much opposition. After July 1830, however, this tolerance ended and Paris began to play a more active role.

The reason for this more contrastive policy was the traditional desire of the French political elites regardless of the regimes for France's dominance over the Apennines; consequently, they always considered the Apennines as part of her natural sphere of influence and Austria as her traditional rival. If before 1830 this arrogant attitude of the French was predominantly a matter of private debates, then after the July Revolution it gained an influence on the Parisian cabinet's decision-making. The internal weakness of King Louis Philippe's regime in the months following the revolution made his policy more vulnerable to attacks from domestic opposition. A considerable number of voices called for a more active foreign policy compatible with French "glory" and "dignity", even for one supporting the liberal changes in other parts of Europe with force. France's attitude was symbolised by the policy of non-intervention, a principle promoted by her government on the turn of August 1830 for preventing other Great Powers from

intervening in neighbouring Belgium where a revolution broke out at that time.⁵

For some French diplomats the policy of non-intervention was a genuine means for aiding the success of revolutionaries in Europe since this principle was to prevent any counter-revolutionary intervention of the three conservative Powers – Austria, Prussia, and Russia – against revolutionary regimes. However, without much exaggeration, for all French citizens interested in these political issues, including those politically more restrained and with little inclination to spread revolution beyond France's frontier, this principle was a suitable means for destroying Austria's political supremacy and increasing France's own control over Italy. This principle, unilaterally proclaimed by France and never accepted by the three conservative Powers, served as an instrument for interfering in the internal affairs of Italian countries: France tried to dictate which ones could request external military assistance and which ones could not. This ploy was incompatible with the existing public law since each independent country could ask another one for diplomatic or military assistance and the latter was entitled to offer or decline it; but regarding France's military strength and revolutionary potential – the ability to gain the support of revolutionaries beyond her frontiers through revolutionary propaganda, the Italian rulers had to take her dictatorial attitude into account and expect her eventual hostile reaction in the event that they called on Austria for assistance against their own rebellious subjects.⁶

The danger of France's adverse reaction became imminent in early 1831 when revolutions broke out in Modena, Parma and the Papal States and Austria's military intervention became a distinct probability. France threatened with counter-action, and some French diplomats

⁵ H. A. C. COLLINGHAM, *The July Monarchy. A Political History of France 1830–1848*, London, New York 1988, p. 186.

⁶ COLLINGHAM, pp. 187–190; E. de GUICHEN, *La révolution de Juillet 1830 et l'Europe*, Paris [?], p. 171; N. JOLICOEUR, La politique étrangère de la France au début de la monarchie de juillet. De la non-intervention à la contre-intervention (1830–1832), in: *Revue d'histoire diplomatique*, 121, 2008, pp. 11–29.

even claimed that a war in such a case was inevitable. All this rhetoric had two aims: first, to win public support at home, and, second, to deter Austria from unilateral actions and force her to cooperate with France on the issue of resolving Italian problems, thereby sharing the influence with her. However, Metternich did not want to yield in what was for him and Austria so crucial a matter as the crushing of the revolts in Italy, and he did not hesitate to send Austrian troops to the aid of the three regimes threatened by revolution. The intervention was so prompt and successful that France was assigned to the role of a mere bystander who finally had to accept the outcome. Until that moment, however, the Italian rulers were severely threatened by the prospect of a war between the two Great Powers that would have definitely brought the Apennines into conflagration.⁷

To placate France Metternich agreed with negotiations in Rome on the improvement of the Papal administration, a measure that would appease the aggrieved inhabitants of the rebellious regions. The French government could thus present its policy as humanitarian and liberal, but in fact this merely masked France's real aim: to force Austria to recall her troops from the Papal States as soon as possible owing to the approaching parliamentary elections in France. Metternich, who wished to strengthen the moderate political forces in France, finally gave way; when this happened, the French lost most of their interest in the reforms. This reformatory concern actually never was a genuine aspect of French Italian policy, which was primarily directed against Austria's influence in the following years, and subsequent events soon proved this when another revolt broke out in the Papal Legations on the turn of 1831.⁸

When the Papal troops failed to defeat the insurgents, the pope again asked Austria for military intervention, which took place in late January 1832. At that moment, however, the French government did

⁷ A. J. REINERMAN, Metternich, the Powers, and the 1831 Italian Crisis, in: *Central European History*, 10, 3, 1977, pp. 206–219.

⁸ W. BAUMGART, *Europäisches Konzert und nationale Bewegung. Internationale Beziehungen 1830–1878*, München – Wien – Zürich 1999, pp. 278–279.

not remain passive and reacted by sending troops to the Papal town of Ancona in the Adriatic; the French soldiers occupied the town, arrested high Papal dignitaries and hoisted the French flag over the citadel. The way in which the French expeditionary force seized the town was shocking, but in principle the main problem lay in the fact that France invaded a country in peace time. From the point of public law this was an obvious act of aggression, but given the unequal strength of the two countries the pope could do nothing more than repeat formal protests against the violation of his sovereignty. Since Austria was not willing to wage war with France on behalf of Ancona, the pope finally reconciled himself with the unrequested occupation of Ancona by the French and formally agreed in mid-April 1832 that the town would remain in the French hands until the evacuation of the Legations by the Austrians, which did not happen before late 1838. This, however, did not alter the fact that the sovereignty of the Papal States had been seriously attacked.⁹

The French occupation of Ancona was a serious blow to international law and was generally understood as such by European governments and the public. This act of disdain of a strong nation towards a weak one weakened the trust of smaller countries, naturally in particular those in Italy, in the fairness of the European States System. They were horrified by the ease of the aggression and the acquiescence of the other Great Powers to this infringement of legal norms. Across Europe people recalled the Battle of Navarino in 1827 when the British, Russian and French fleets destroyed the Ottoman naval forces in peace time, much like the French expedition to Ottoman Algeria in 1830 against the Ottoman sultan's will: the crucial legal difference was

⁹ N. BIANCHI (ed.), *Storia documentata della diplomazia europea in Italia dall'anno 1814 all'anno 1861*, Vol. 3: *Anni 1830–1846*, Torino 1867, pp. 101–114; F. FALASCHI, *L'occupazione francese di Ancona del 1832*, in: *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 15, 1928, pp. 118–142; M. GISCI, *Un episodio dell rivalità franco-austriaca nello Stato Pontificio*, in: *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 17, 1931, pp. 365–447; G. NATALI, *La rivoluzione italiana del 1831–1832 e sue immediate conseguenze*, Bologna 1956, pp. 106–110.

that the Ottoman Empire was situated outside the European States System, whereas the Papal States were, or rather should have been, protected by the public law of Europe. However, the reality proved to be very different from theory and the Europeans could see how insecure the smaller European countries could be against the dominance of the Great Powers: the latter's aggression first towards the sultan and then the pope demonstrated it could be aimed at other European monarchs at any time. The Ancona affair signified for the ruling elites in Italy the climax of France's efforts to violate their sovereignty by the principle of non-intervention through which she tried to limit the other states' freedom of action on the international scene. Austria, although acting in perfect compliance with the legal norms, also suffered from this affair since the Italian rulers observed that she did nothing to defend the pope's sovereignty, the Sardinian king even being disappointed that she did not declare war on France owing to the occupation of Ancona.¹⁰

Another reason for the distrust of the existing political system of Europe was presented to the Italian monarchs by the so-called Sulphur War of the spring of 1840. The cause of this affair must be sought in 1838 when the king of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand II, granted a French company the monopoly on the trade with Sicilian sulphur, thereby harming the interests of the British merchants. The cabinet in London tried for some time to persuade the king to revoke his decision, and when this did not happen, in the spring of 1840 the Foreign Secretary, Henry John Temple Viscount Palmerston, ordered the British fleet to seize commercial vessels sailing under the Sicilian flag. This act of hostility in peace time forced Ferdinand II to yield and with the help of France's mediation to surrender completely to the British predominance: the result of the whole affair was the king's

¹⁰ M. GISCI, Un episodio dell rivalità franco-austriaca nello Stato Pontificio, in: *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 17, 1931, pp. 365–447; N. RODOLICO, Un disegno di Lega italiana del 1833, in: *Archivio storico italiano*, 93, 1935, pp. 232–233; D. LAVEN, Austria's Policy Reconsidered. Revolution and Reform in Restoration Italy, in: *Modern Italy*, 2, 1, 1997, p. 19.

humiliation, the abolition of the monopoly in July and the payment of indemnities to both the British and French merchants.¹¹

The British actions in the whole affair were not only aggressive with the capture of about fourteen Neapolitan commercial vessels by British warships though no war had been officially declared but also illegal because the Neapolitan king had not violated any treaty stipulations between the two countries. This opinion on the illegality of the British conduct was stated later not only by several historians and experts on international law but also by contemporaries, including British Queen Victoria's legal advisor, who changed his mind only under pressure. It was not international law but the wielding of power that shaped international relations, and Ferdinand II had to bow under the weight of British might. As American historian and expert on this topic Dennis W. Thomson recently stated, "*the British Government was accustomed to having its way with Naples for many years. Faced with resistance from unexpected quarters, Palmerston reacted with anger and disbelief. It was unthinkable that an Autocratic ruler of a lesser State, whose role was to cooperate or acquiesce, would presume to challenge the Foreign Policy of a Great Power*".¹²

Much like the Ancona affair, the conflict over Sicilian sulphur was generally observed by the European public. The people, even far beyond the Alps, could not fail to notice that when faced with this act of aggression by one Great Power, no other tried to defend the weak Kingdom of the Two Sicilies against its unjustified claims. Metternich criticised the British conduct but did not want to protest too much on behalf of the inept Sicilian king against Great Britain's overwhelming maritime power, especially when he needed her cooperation in the more serious Near Eastern crisis, the Russian tsar did not want to upset

¹¹ H. ACTON, *The Last Bourbons of Naples (1825–1861)*, London 1961, pp. 111–126; J. A. DAVIS, Palmerston and the Sicilian Sulphur Crisis of 1840. An Episode in the Imperialism of Free Trade, in: *Risorgimento*, 1, 2, 1982, pp. 5–22; D. W. THOMPSON, Prelude to the Sulphur War of 1840. The Neapolitan Perspective, in: *European History Quarterly*, 25, 2, 1995, pp. 163–180.

¹² Cited in E. di RIENZO, *Il Regno delle Due Sicilie e le Potenze europee 1830–1861*, Soveria Mannelli 2012, p. 34.

Palmerston for the same reason, France was Britain's accomplice and Prussia had no direct interests in Italy. Consequently, the members of the Concert sanctioned this international crime through their silence, something the weaker countries saw all too well and which gave them another reason to distrust the Concert's willingness to be fair.¹³

The fear of the dictatorship of the Great Powers over other smaller European states was connected with the aggressive conduct of some of the former outside the Continent, in other words in the regions situated outside the public law. For the Sulphur War, the Opium War between Great Britain and China was of the greatest significance: the grounds for the British conduct in both conflicts were identical – the effort to impose on the two countries Britain's own commercial conditions concerning, in the first case sulphur, in the second one opium. In both cases the British argued with freedom of trade; however, this merely masked their economic imperialism, fittingly named later the imperialism of free trade. The similarity between their actions towards the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and China was obvious to a considerable number of Europeans who began to fear that the aggressive policy pursued against the states beyond what they thought of as "civilisation" would be implemented towards those they considered "civilised", in other words that the protection offered by international law was even less reliable than ever before.¹⁴

This widespread sense of inferiority and vulnerability was strengthened during the second half of 1840 owing to the Rhine Crisis caused by the Near Eastern crisis mentioned above. When France disagreed with the other Great Powers about the settlement of the ongoing crisis in the Ottoman Empire and found herself isolated and humiliated when they decided to proceed without her concurrence, she began to threaten a war on the Rhine and in Italy from the end of July. The whole affair was finally settled peacefully, but until the winter Europe

¹³ M. ŠEDIVÝ, Metternich and the Anglo-Neapolitan Sulphur Crisis of 1840, in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16, 1, 2011, pp. 1–18.

¹⁴ M. ŠEDIVÝ, Italy during the Rhine Crisis of 1840, in: *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire*, 22, 3, 2015, pp. 486–504.

was seized with a considerable war-scare that also seized the Italian countries. Although they had nothing to do with the whole dispute among the Great Powers, they could hardly escape a war because of France's probable invasion of Italy in her effort to attack Austria. In this event, Piedmont would be the first Italian state to be dragged into the conflict, but one could hardly expect that central Italy would escape the same fate, especially when France threatened to support her war campaign with revolutionary propaganda using the discontent of European liberals and democrats against their conservative governments. Regarding the actual discontent of the Italians with their living and political conditions, the outbreak of rebellions throughout the peninsula was predictable.¹⁵

The Italian countries without exception were unsurprisingly eager to maintain their neutrality in the event of war. However, they greatly feared that the Great Powers would not allow them to do so and, contrary to the public law, would force them to choose sides. This particularly held for Piedmont because she possessed the best fighting army of all Italian countries, of course with the exception of Austria, and controlled important Alpine routes from France to the Apennines. The temptation came from France as well as the allied four Powers, the latter being less scrupulous and finally forcing the country to express sympathies for their case. This little respect for the neutrality of smaller countries was another expression of the Great Powers' limited regard for the international law when they did not find complying with it to be favourable to their interests. The Italian governments therefore had one more reason for concern about the conduct of the Great Powers, especially when the Sulphur War was in living memory and the Ancona affair by no means forgotten in late 1840: the latter contributed to the widespread fear of a new French military expedition against a strategic point on Italian coast, and this eventuality was hotly debated not only in Italy but also in other parts of Europe.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

The above-mentioned affairs led to the decrease in the confidence of Italian governments in the fairness of the existing international system, an apprehension also shared by some Italians. It is certain that the same feeling led to the increase of geopolitical thinking in Germany, which contributed to the more chauvinistic and aggressive opinions of some German nationalists against the hostile and self-serving conduct of Great Britain, Russia and France; it is also evident that Italian nationalists also counted among the reasons for the unification of Italy the necessity to put an end to the interference of foreign Powers into Italian affairs. It was a certain paradox that they primarily disliked Austria though she behaved with much greater respect towards the precepts of international law than either France or Great Britain. This, however, meant little for both the Italians dissatisfied with the political system they lived in and the rulers jealous of Austria's power and led to the situation where Italian liberals and democrats hated Austria for her role as an anti-revolutionary policeman and the rulers disliked her efforts, albeit quite mild, to guide them.¹⁷

This widespread aversion towards Austria climaxed in 1846–1848 owing to several affairs inciting Austrophobia among the Italians, above all the economic conflict between Vienna and Turin concerning the transport and sale of salt and Piedmont wines, the annexation of Cracow by Austria in the autumn of 1846 that was strongly opposed by the Italian rulers guarding their sovereignty as well as those Italians calling for national independence, and the strengthening of Austrian troops in the Papal town of Ferrara during the summer of 1847 that was generally regarded in Italy as illegal and an affront to the pope. Consequently, the constitutional and especially national movements in Italy from late 1847 were inflected with anti-Austrian hatred. The fact that some criticism of Austria's Italian policy was exaggerated or even invented was not important for that moment; when Piedmont attacked the Austrian empire in March 1848 in order to deprive it of its Italian possessions, and with this step openly breached the order of the

¹⁷ C. GATTERER, *Erbfeindschaft Italien-Österreich*, Wien – München – Zürich 1972, p. 10.

Congress of Vienna, she won general approval throughout the Apennines.¹⁸

One can thus see that the conduct of some Great Powers, not always legal, towards Italy had repercussions against the whole European States System, paradoxically striking the one among them that manifested considerable respect for the public law. The explanation for this outcome was in part given above but not in full – it is also necessary to search for it in the conduct of the Italian countries themselves, which reveals that the whole story was not black and white but that the Italian rulers were also partly responsible for the decay of the European States System after 1815.

The position of the Italian monarchs vis-a-vis the Great Powers was often weakened by their mutual distrust, jealousy and commitment to their independence, which resulted in their reluctance to assume cooperative obligations like the German princes did in the German Confederation that preserved the independence of its member states but, simultaneously, offered them a solid kind of protection against external threat. As for their relations with Austria, the Italian monarchs usually exploited her willingness to help them against revolutions when necessary but were otherwise generally unwilling to pay anything for this protection and attentively guarded their sovereignty. The most suitable examples were the actions of Ferdinand II and Sardinian King Charles Albert, both counting on Austria's support in times of need but unwilling to fulfil their obligations towards this Power if it was not advantageous for them. Even worse for the Habsburg Monarchy, the Sardinian king desired to enlarge his dominions at its expense when presented with an opportune moment to do so, which happened in March 1848 when the revolutions broke out in Lombardy and Venetia. Charles Albert opened a military campaign with the aim of expelling the Austrians from Italy, not for any nationalist reasons which were entirely alien to him but for traditional dynastic ambitions of the House of Savoy.¹⁹

¹⁸ G. F.-H. BERKELEY – J. BERKELEY, *Italy in the Making. January 1st 1848 to November 16th 1848*, Cambridge 1968, p. 64.

It was therefore not Austria but Piedmont that became in the latter part of the Pre-March Period the most serious threat for the geopolitical status quo in Italy. Actually Metternich was forced to pursue a rather passive policy and nothing changed the well-known Ferrara affair that was actually a storm in a teacup exaggerated by Italian patriots. Their zeal, on the other hand, was cleverly exploited by Charles Albert in order to win popular support for his personal ambitions, which he connected with those seen as “Italian”. Not only did he allow the spread of anti-Austrian feelings in his kingdom but he also contributed to it through the salt-wine affair, making himself the guardian of Sardinian or, for those who wanted to believe it, Italian independence against the alleged aggressiveness of Austria.²⁰

In reality the Austrian Empire attracted Charles Albert’s attention not because of her aggressiveness that was more imagined than real – Austria acted throughout the whole period in a more moderate way than France and Great Britain – but because of her decaying power and Italian possessions. The Sardinian king was in the position of a beast smelling the blood of a wounded prey, and a trophy would definitely add much glory to his crown. He would never have dared to act in a similar way, for example, towards France, which was in a better financial state than Austria, had territorial ambitions at his expense (Savoy and Nice) and could use revolutionary propaganda against him, especially after the February Revolution in 1848 that established a French Republic. In brief: the Sardinian kingdom’s war with Austria in that year could not be excused by any moral sophistry – it resulted from

¹⁹ F. BOYER, *La Seconde République, Charles-Albert et l’Italie du Nord en 1848*, Paris 1967, pp. 24–25; A. COLOMBO, Carlo Alberto e la vertenza austro-sarda nel 1846, in: *Il Risorgimento italiano*, 68–69, 1932, pp. 1–31; G. CONIGLIO, Orientamenti della politica estera napoletana nel 1832–34, in: *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, 73, 1953, pp. 311–317; F.J. COPPA, *The Origins of the Italian Wars of Independence*, London – New York 1992, p. 147.

²⁰ R. A. AUSTENSEN, *Metternich and Charles Albert. Salt, Tariffs, and the Sardinian Challenge, 1844–1848, The Consortium of Revolutionary Europe 1750–1850*, Athens (USA) 1986, pp. 384–394.

the territorial hunger of a smaller state that felt overburdened by the limits of the order of the Congress of Vienna.²¹

It is open to discussion how far Charles Albert's conduct in 1848 was influenced by his dislike of the imperialistic tendencies of European Powers and resulting distrust of the European States System, and consequently to his reluctance to obey the rules of the latter. In any case, from 1830 to 1848 Italy witnessed scant willingness on the part of the Great Powers as well as the Italian states themselves to contribute through cooperation and restraint to the pillars that upheld the system. Italy, much like the Ottoman Empire, was an unstable area with dangerous potential for European peace. If in the 1850s the Ottoman Empire caused the first war among the Great Powers since 1815, then, unsurprisingly, Italy produced the first territorial conquest in Western Europe (not taking into the account the Russo-Ottoman War in 1828–1829) since the same year. This fact should not be forgotten when one attempts to evaluate the functioning of the European States System of the Pre-March Period in an overly positive way.

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the role that Italy played in the European States System in 1830–1848 from a new, more realist perspective paying particular attention to the policy of Metternich's Austria in the Apennines. As it attempts to prove, from 1830 to 1848 Italy witnessed considerable reluctance on the part of the Great Powers as well as the Italian states themselves to contribute through cooperation and restraint to the strengthening of the pillars that upheld the system. Italy, much like the Ottoman Empire, was an unstable area with dangerous potential for European peace, and it was no accident that the peace restored in 1815 was disturbed for the first time in Western Europe during 1848 in Italy.

Keywords

Austria; Metternich; Italy; Pre-March Period; European States System; European Concert; Diplomacy; International Law

²¹ F. R. BRIDGE – R. BULLEN, *The Great Powers and the European States System 1814–1914*, Harlow 2005, p. 108.