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The Italian diplomacy during the twenty years of Fascism

Prof. Lorenzo Castellani

SUPERVISOR

Alessandra Bongiovanni
102432

CANDIDATE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the subject of the Italian diplomacy during the twenty years of the fascist regime, through an analysis of the foreign policy of that era and the conduct of several key diplomats of the time. Special emphasis is placed on the contributions of three distinguished figures in Italian foreign affairs and diplomacy: Galeazzo Ciano, Giuseppe Bastianini and Bernardo Attolico. Specifically, in each chapter of this research, there are reported the events that directly involved these individuals, their personal observations and their actions. A lot of attention is put on how each of these characters contributed to the development of the Italian international relations, in particular the one with Germany, since it was one of the main features of the fascist foreign policy. The objective of this research is to delineate the progressive transformation brought by the fascist regime to the Italian foreign policy and to elucidate how this shift determined significant developments within the country.

The research was conducted by utilizing historical essays, articles from journals of foreign policy, biographies and autobiographies which provide testimonies of the events under examination.

INTRODUCTION

Italian diplomacy is one of the oldest diplomatic bodies in the international panorama. Before entering the subject of this thesis, it is necessary to give a brief review of the history of Italian diplomacy from the Italian unification until the fascist era. The foundation of this body formally dates to the rise of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, but its roots are more ancient and go back to the creation of the first diplomatic corps in the Savoy State, under the rule of Vittorio Amedeo II, who created the secretariat of the foreign affairs in 1717. We can say that the Reign substantially inherited the diplomatic traditional culture and organization of the Savoy State. Indeed, even after the Italian unification, many of the administrative and political structures created under the ducal survived and were incorporated in the Kingdom. In particular, the diplomacy effectively maintained the same organization, and its staff was simply enlarged with the entering of diplomats belonging to the other pre-existing States. The main points of the foreign policy of the Savoy State consisted in the necessity to prevent the French and Austrian predominance in Italy, the achievement of a central position in the European balances, the capacity to intervene and negotiate in the European affairs and the interest for the political developments in Europe. To a certain extent, some of these principles were brought to a national level and formed the basis of the new Italian foreign policy.

Following the rise of the Kingdom, the formation of a new political culture gradually took shape. This new culture enclosed two traditions: the diplomatic tradition of the pre-unitary States, whose politics aimed at the increasing of power of the State, and the new liberal values of the ruling class of the Italian Risorgimento, focused on the creation of a unitary State¹. In this stage, Italy pursued a foreign policy aimed at the preservation and defense of its interests. Precisely on the basis of these interests, Italy joined the defensive alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, known as the Triple Alliance, whose realization contributed figures like Pasquale Stanislao Mancini, Costantino Nigra and others. Such accord was a treaty of defensive alliance, but it was intended as a tool to solve some problems which the Italian diplomacy had at heart, namely the reaching of a relevant position in the international field and the finding of a peaceful solution for the issue of

¹ L. Monzali, *La diplomazia italiana dal Risorgimento alla Prima Repubblica*, Milan: Mondadori, 2023, p. 39

the Italian populations in Austria. The plan was to annex the Austrian territories occupied by Italian communities and unify the country. Although, when the outbreak of the Great War, Italy had to review its positions. Indeed, despite the alliance, Germany and Austria-Hungary triggered the conflict without first consulting Italy and without recognizing its right to obtain territories in turn of the participation in the war, and moreover, the unexpected intervention of Great Britain posed a threat to the Italian security in the Mediterranean. On these assumptions, Italy moved away from the Alliance and went for neutrality. However, Italy could not keep its position long and at the end it was forced to enter the conflict alongside the Triple Entente (Russia, Great Britain and France).

The decision to enter the war was not determined by a bellicose will but by the pursuing of the Italian national interest; in particular the obtaining of the territories necessary for the achievement of the national unity and the State security. In fact, the coalition with the Triple Entente, ratified by the Treaty of London, included great benefits for Italy and its international position. The pact determined that in exchange of the Italian intervention in the war, Italy had the right to southern Tyrol, the region of Venice Julia (Istria and Trieste), part of Dalmatia (Fiume excluded), some compensations as regards the frontiers of the Italian colonies in Africa, and a part of Anatolia in case of partitioning of the Ottoman empire. The agreement satisfied different needs and was in line with the traditional values of the Italian foreign policy: the complete unification of the country and the conquest of hegemony in the Adriatic. However, after the end of the war and the victory of the Triple Entente, the Italian expectations were betrayed.

The Italian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 was willing to enforce the Treaty of London and even more, added to its claims the city of Fiume, whose population was largely Italian. Yet, this prospect conflicted with the claims of the Slavic people and the dominant role of the United States at the conference. In the first place, the US wasn't bound to respect the treaty, since it wasn't one of the signatory countries; and secondly, the Italian demands opposed some of the principles presented by US president Woodrow Wilson regarding the set-up of the new world order: the self-determination of people and the establishment of borders on the basis of nationality. The ethnic situation of the lands claimed by the Italian government was complex. Indeed, in the region of Venice Julia, the cities were mainly inhabited by Italians, while the countryside was populated by Slovenians, and in Dalmatia the Italian element was outnumbered. In these circumstances,

the ethnic criterion could not be applied. Moreover, Wilson was more concerned with ensuring and satisfying the interests of the newborn Yugoslavia, at the cost of the Italian claims. Finally, after a series of negotiations, Italy was granted the South-Tyrol, Trieste and Istria, excluding Dalmatia and Fiume. The peace conference turned out to be a failure for the Italian diplomacy, and the responsibility for this unsuccess was attributed to the political leaders of that time that according to the public opinion were unable to demand the full respect of the treaty. As a consequence, the political institutions got weakened. In addition to that, the dramatic consequences of the First World War led to a crisis of the institutions and values of the liberal State in Italy. In fact, the conflict overturned the traditional social, cultural and political values of the European societies. In this sense, the raise of fascism in Italy was the result of such transformations.

The fascist movement was substantially a coalition of diverse political forces and orientations held together by its leader Benito Mussolini. When he took office in 1922, he became president of the Council of Ministers and minister of the interior, and at the same time assumed pro term the position of foreign minister. However, in the initial phases of the regime Mussolini had to rely on non-Fascist support and to seek cooperation with elements outside of the party. Those called on to associate with Mussolini in terms of execution of the fascist policy were the bureaucrats, and among them officials of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many of them, with only a few exceptions, agreed to cooperate with the regime and its new foreign minister. Despite their political and cultural alienation to fascism, the majority of the Italian diplomats optimistically accepted the advent of Mussolini, considered as a powerful leader capable of restoring the Italian domestic policy. In their view, Mussolini offered a remedy for the Italian problems both on the national and international side, by giving strength and order to the internal policy on which to base a strong foreign policy. As Raffaele Guariglia, one of those diplomats that cooperated with fascism, wrote in his memoirs "Ricordi": "To present to the world the man as capable of bringing new strength to our country, but without transgressing the bounds of international life...I chose collaboration not because I was convinced of the absolute good and utility of the new regime, but out of fear of the fatal consequences that its sudden collapse might have on the international position of the country..."²

² A. Cassels, *Mussolini's early diplomacy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 5

Moreover, initially the guidelines of the fascist foreign policy weren't so different from the ones of the liberal governments: the consolidation of the Italian influence in the Mediterranean and in the Balkans, the prosecution of an expansionist policy in Africa, the increase of the Italian importance in the international panorama.

On the other hand, many fascist representatives sensed the Italian diplomats as part of a body which was alien to the fascist movement. This is because the Italian diplomacy was one of the institutions that best belonged to the liberal establishment and its functionaries possessed a cultural, social and political background completely diverse from the one of the fascists leaders, who sometimes were provincials without any international experience. Moreover, the diplomatic body was considered as part of the ruling class that didn't defend the Italian claims after the Great War, responsible for the renunciation of Fiume and Dalmatia and for the "mutilated victory". For these reasons many fascist politicians demanded the innovation of the diplomatic body and the fascistization of the foreign ministry. Mussolini instead realized the utility of the old-guard diplomats. These diplomats possessed specific competences that the fascist personnel did not have. In moving his first steps in foreign policy, Mussolini used the pre-existing diplomatic corpus and cooperated with it (for example the Secretary General Salvatore Contarini, the head of cabinet Giacomo Paulucci de' Calboli, Tommaso Tittoni). Moreover, the appointment of respected diplomats to the top ambassadorial posts was appreciated abroad and served to calm the concerns of the foreign States on fascism. Indeed, when Mussolini first came to power in 1922, it was difficult to tell what the Italian foreign policy would have been since apparently Mussolini didn't have one initially. In fact, in making his first speech as president of the Council of Ministers before the parliament, Mussolini proclaimed: "Before achieving this position, we were asked on all sides for a program. It is not programs which we are lacking in Italy: only men and the will to apply programs. All the problems of Italian life have been solved on paper, but the will to translate them into facts is lacking. This will, firm and decisive is presented by the government today".³ Even before taking office, it was impossible to deduce his position regarding the foreign affairs from the incoherent statements he made in the newspaper he owned "Popolo d'Italia". He called for the strict application of the Treaty of Versailles and at the same time proposed the review of the reparations and the colonial provisions. Again, he declared

³ A. Cassels, *Mussolini's early diplomacy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 9-10

Dalmatia and Fiume sacred to Italy and at the same time supported the Treaty of Rapallo which substantially didn't secure Dalmatia or Fiume.

From these statements little could be understood about his future intentions, but before his rise little attention was given to his declarations outside of Italy. However, Mussolini's appointment was felt in Europe with apprehension. He was a radical nationalist and could potentially be a threat to peace. However, he managed to appease these concerns. In his public statement to the press Mussolini proclaimed the intention to continue the collaboration with France and Great Britain. Moreover, Mussolini's government was in line with the European political trend which was conservative, and he was seen as a defender against bolshevism.

The first crack in the relation between the classic diplomacy and fascism took place in 1928, when many fascist politicians entered the diplomatic career without competitive examination, contrarily to what the norm required. However, until 1936 a real fascistization of the foreign ministry didn't take place; indeed, initially the so called "ventottisti" had little influence on the foreign policy and covered marginal positions within the foreign ministry.

The collaboration between the regime and the diplomatic staff deteriorated when Galeazzo Ciano (whose origins I will discuss later) became minister of Foreign Affairs. Under his direction, the Italian foreign policy took a different turn. With the approval of Mussolini, he promoted (at least at the beginning) a new foreign policy, pro-German and anti-Western, which was in contrast with the pre-fascist political doctrine. In order to gain consensus, Ciano removed the diplomats that opposed the new policy and replaced them with fascists (like Bernardo Attolico, Luca Pietromarchi, Giuseppe Bastianini, Filippo Anfuso), who came to cover top positions. Despite the permeation of the fascist ideology in the diplomatic culture, the old liberal tradition remained alive for two reasons mainly. In the first place a total fascistization of the ministry never took place because of the short lasting of the regime, which prevented a full replacement of the diplomatic staff. Another element that limited the complete fascistization of the Italian diplomacy was the political heterogeneity within the fascist party itself. Despite the loyalty to the regime, many fascists disagreed on some points of its foreign policy, like the alliance with national-socialist Germany. Indeed, some fascist figures reported to Mussolini the risks of the reconciliation with Germany and tried in every way possible to bring Italy back to the

right path and to stop the anti-western policy undertaken by the government. For example, Attolico, ambassador in Berlin from 1935 to 1940, tried to inform the Italian government on the bellicose intents of Germany and made every effort to find peaceful solutions in order to avoid the conflict. His disagreement earned him the aversion of Hitler and Ribbentrop and at the end he was sent back to Italy. Again, another diplomat, Fulvio Suvich tried to stop the anti-American policy of the government and to reapproach Italy with the US.

In the following chapters I will discuss more specifically the action of some important personalities of the Italian diplomacy under fascism, in particular: Galeazzo Ciano, Giuseppe Bastianini and Bernando Attolico.

CHAPTER ONE - GALEAZZO CIANO

Gian Galeazzo Ciano was without any doubt one of the major personalities within the regime and profoundly marked the fascist foreign policy due to the important role he covered, as minister of foreign affairs.

However, before describing the political and diplomatic action of Ciano, it is useful to focus on his family origins.

Born in 1903 in Livorno, Galeazzo was the son of Costanzo Ciano, admiral of the Italian navy and later fascist politician. His father gained popularity after the events of Cortellazzo (1917) and the so called “mockery of Buccari” (1918), which won him the title of national hero. Subsequently, he pursued the political career and stood for election in 1919 in the lines of the fascist party with success, becoming deputy of the Kingdom. The adherence of Ciano to fascism can be explained by his conservative inclination and by his tendency to violence for the resolution of conflicts, common to many fascists and to those who fought in the Great War. However, soon after his election, he entered in conflict with Mussolini due to their contrasting positions; indeed, Ciano was a monarchist, while Mussolini had republican tendencies. Here is an example: when Mussolini ordered the new fascist deputies to not attend the speech of the king before the opening session of the Chamber, Ciano and others opposed and outvoted him.⁴

However, besides other little episodes, Costanzo Ciano didn't have any other disagreements with Mussolini, and proved to be loyal to the regime and to the Duce.

Thanks to his unquestioned loyalty and his prestige, he was appointed as undersecretary of the Navy and chief of the mercantile Navy. Moreover, in 1928 the king created him earl of Cortellazzo and Buccari. In addition, in 1934 he was elected as president of the Chamber of deputies and president of the Chamber of Fascists and Corporations. Moreover, apparently in a secret document, known only by the king and the interested party, Mussolini designated Costanzo as his successor, in case of his early death: probably the Duce thought that initially this could prevent the war for succession between the highest hierarchs.⁵

⁴ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 30

⁵ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 61-62

Given the successes of the father (from being a simple admiral to being an earl for war service), Galeazzo profoundly admired him. He was profoundly affectionate to Costanzo and considered him as a superman, or according to the poetic thought of Gabriele D'Annunzio (close friend of Costanzo) "Übermensch". He had a real reverential fear towards his father and deeply respected him. It is important to underline these aspects of the relationship between father and son, because (at least initially) Galeazzo proved the same admiration, fear and respect for Mussolini.

However, despite Costanzo's membership in the fascist party, Galeazzo was never conformable to the regime. For example, when he was a scholar, he never took part to any assembly or event of the fascist movement. Later on, the government tried to backdate his subscription to the National Fascist Party in order to demonstrate his adherence to fascism from a young age, and in addition he was given the reputation of "squadrista". But the truth is that Galeazzo was never interested in fascism. To this end, the testimony of his friend Giorgio Amendola, opponent of the regime and future member of the Italian Communist Party, is significant: "In front of me, he admitted his detachment from fascism, as if his position was obliged. If he could decide on his own, he would have been on our side. Once I asked him...why he didn't depart from fascism. 'Not even if I were crazy!' he replied. 'Given that my father is minister and member of the Great Council, my carrier is guaranteed.'"⁶

Moreover, he often showed his hostility towards fascism, and he even complained about his father's involvement in the regime. Ciano acknowledged the advantages and the defects of fascism: on the one hand the anti-bolshevism and conservatism, and on the other hand, the anti-bourgeois position and the "gross" attitude.

From these episodes we can deduce that his adhesion to the movement wasn't due to a real approval of the fascist ideology, but due to opportunism.

After the end of his university studies, he entered the diplomatic career through competitive examination in 1924.

Initially, he got a desk job at Palazzo Chigi. During this first job, he had the occasion to meet Mussolini. Unlike many others that felt the encounter with the Duce as something

⁶ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 39-40

of extraordinary, Ciano wasn't touched by it. Such lack of emotions is explained by the fact that Ciano wasn't a fascist.

As first task abroad, he was sent as vice-consul to Rio de Janeiro, but due to an incident with a Brazilian authority⁷, he was then moved to Argentina, where he worked as second secretary of embassy. In 1927 he was moved to Beijing and remained there until 1929, when he was called back in Italy for a short period. During his brief permanency in the country, he met Edda Mussolini, the first and favorite daughter of the Duce. After a rather short courtship, they married in 1930. After their marriage, Ciano was sent again in China, but with a superior rank; indeed, he was appointed general consul (presumably as a result of the so convenient wedding). During his permanence in Shanghai, he proved to have good diplomatic qualities and got different satisfactions. For example, he was responsible for an important financial agreement between Italy and China in 1931, which consisted in a considerable Italian loan to China. Also, he presided the peace commission for the resolution of the Chinese civil conflict burst in 1932 between the troops of Chang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung. These first successes increased the diplomatic stature of Ciano. Ciano's career took a new turning point when, once back in Italy, Mussolini appointed him chief of his press office in 1933. This choice can be explained by Mussolini's tendency to choose trusted people for important tasks. He was convinced that kinship implied loyalty, and for this reason he put relatives in relevant positions; for instance, the direction of the "Popolo d'Italia" was assumed by Arnaldo Mussolini, brother of the Duce.

The press office was an extremely important institution for Mussolini both on the political and journalistic sides. Through this office, he led all the other journals and practically the nation. Even before becoming leader of the government, he understood that the press was a formidable tool to shape the public opinion, and as soon as he seized power, financed fascist newspapers, acquired non-fascist journals and tried to impose fascist directors. All these actions were aimed at censorship and most importantly, at propaganda. The press had the purpose to emphasize the glory of fascism and to contribute to the fascistization of the country. Through the press office, Mussolini organized the propaganda, which was fundamental for the consolidation of his power during the first decade of the regime.

⁷ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 53

Indeed, in a memorandum of 1931 Lando Ferretti, chief of the press office before Ciano, wrote: “The press must be instrument of propaganda of the Italianity and of the regime”.⁸ In order to reach this purpose, the journals pointed at the mythization of Mussolini, presented as a popular idol, in order to take hold on the crowd; secondly, they had the role to praise the regime.

As the job became more relevant, the position of chief had to be covered by a loyal and competent person, familiar to the world of journalism. For this reason, Ciano was the most suitable person to hold the office; indeed, in 1922 and 1924 he worked for several fascist journals (“Nuovo Paese” and “L’Impero”) as theater vice-critic. Although his journalistic background was rather irrelevant, Ciano at least knew the environment.

In 1934 the press office was transformed in undersecretariat for press and propaganda and in 1937 it became ministry of popular culture. By making these changes, fascist Italy meant to imitate nazi Germany, that since the beginning of its regime instituted a proper ministry for propaganda.

Since his appointment as chief of the press office, Ciano began his close collaboration with Mussolini. Indeed, the person who held the position was the one to see Mussolini more often. The Duce received everyday the chief of the press office in order to give him directives based on the information obtained by the undersecretary of the domestic affairs, the undersecretary of the foreign affairs and the party’s secretary. In this period the relationship between Ciano and Mussolini was idyllic. Ciano was subjugated by the charm of Mussolini and started to profoundly admire him; on the other hand, Mussolini appraised his son-in-law for his intellectual qualities and abilities. Indeed, as Mussolini once said to his ex-lover, Angela Curti Cucciati: “Ciano is a good guy and he is extremely intelligent: a state employee, but valuable. He will succeed...not because of me: but because of his merit.”⁹, and despite the future events, he never changed his opinion about him.

As a matter of fact, Ciano performed this task competently. He immediately understood the role of the press in the consolidation of the regime and of the power of Mussolini and for this reason he introduced different innovations.

⁸ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 83

⁹ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 79

For what concerns journalism, Ciano financed young aspiring journalists by giving them a maintenance of 1000 lire, and in return they had to write some articles for the press. Ciano provided these subsidies in order to bond these future journalists to the regime and build consensus for fascism, and most importantly to increase his personal power. Indeed, one of his greatest weaknesses was his vanity. Ciano always had the desire to be liked and admired and, both as minister of the popular culture and as minister of the foreign affairs, he was surrounded by adulators, to the point that we can talk about a proper “Court of Ciano”.

Less than one year later, after his appointment, he created a special division, responsible for collecting and analyzing the opinions of the foreign journals about fascism, which depending on the content, were published or not. Moreover, in 1934 he constituted a higher committee for the supervision of communications made through radio and in 1935 he made a general inspectorate for theater and music. However, Ciano gave his major attention to the radio. Indeed, the regime actively worked on the empowerment of radio and cinema, as it acknowledged the potential of these tools in order to involve the population in the social and political life of the country. Indeed, the government made every effort to promote the use of the radio by the Italians, combining political and economic interest. Suffice to say, in 1927 the number of those who possessed a radio was about 40 000, while in Great Britain there were 2 250 000 people owning a radio. Consequently, the regime provided for the installer of devices in schools and stimulated the enterprises to produce less expensive and more affordable devices. By the early 30’s the radio was so spread that it had a large audience.

As the radio became widespread, it was used for propaganda purposes. In fact, Ciano instituted the radio journal, a program where the news was reported and commented by a journalist in the interest of the regime. Indeed, in preparation of the transmission of the new radio program, the “Radiocorriere” wrote: “Informing and interpretation, under the fascist point of view, of Italian or international facts...”¹⁰

The radio then proved to be a powerful tool in other fields; for example, it acted as a catalyst to the Italian interest in the war in Ethiopia.

¹⁰ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 101

In the period immediately before the Ethiopian conflict (3rd October 1935 - 5th May 1936), Ciano worked hard in terms of propaganda as undersecretary of the popular culture. The incident of Ual-Ual in 1934 (which consisted in a cross-border fight between the Italian Somalia and Ethiopia), was the right pretext for calling into question the colonial claims of Italy. In fact, in the Italian perspective, the annexation of Ethiopia provided a solution for the lack of natural resources and the economic struggles of the country. Moreover, this would have placed Italy on the same level of the other colonial powers.

In anticipation of the Italian expedition in Ethiopia, Ciano used every propagandistic tool in order to give a semblance of legality to the Italian initiative. The undersecretariat, under the directives of Ciano, started a real defamatory campaign against Ethiopia. Many documents and pamphlets against the country got published. These were aimed at demonstrating that Ethiopia was not a sovereign State and was not suitable for being a member of the League of Nations, and that the Negus didn't respect the obligations taken in 1923 to civilize the country (in particular the abolition of slavery). Other publications highlighted the Italian right and duty to bring civilization to Ethiopia, the merit of Italy for bringing progress to Africa. Renzo De Felice, in analyzing the role of the media in the war in Ethiopia, wrote in "Mussolini il duce. Gli anni del consenso": "Never as in this occasion fascism managed to mobilize and use the potential of the monopoly on information and on the contemporary techniques of mass propaganda. Every instrument was used at its maximum: press, radio, cinema, massive organizations and schools."¹¹

The regime fomented the population by emphasizing the Italian national pride and the sentiment of fight between the poor and the rich States. The nations that opposed to the Italian conquest of Ethiopia were represented as egoistic, since they wanted to deprive Italy of its merited position as colonial power; in particular, Great Britain was the most hit country by the Italian propaganda due to its rigid opposition towards Italy.

The Italian claims on Ethiopia were supported by the necessity to acquire natural resources (which Italy did not have) in order to increment the productivity of the industries. The ministry for the popular culture of course highlighted these economic prospects, which brought consensus. The propaganda even focused on many other different aspects. Nothing was left unattended, even the basic instincts; for example, thousands of photos of naked Ethiopian women were printed and diffused. The fascist

¹¹ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 123

propaganda leveraged on everything that could appeal the crowds: the Christianization, the commercial and economic development, the military glory, the creation of an Italian Empire. In this occasion, Ciano carried out his work egregiously.

With regards to the Ethiopian campaign, Ciano had to actively participate in the fights. Since he was son of a war-time hero, a hierarch and son-in-law of Mussolini, he had no other choice than taking part in the war. The Ethiopian conflict was a great opportunity to Ciano to acquire military prestige and to achieve the same reputation of his father. He was sent to Africa one month before the starting of the conflict as commander of the air squadron “Disperata”.

During the initial and middle phases of the conflict, Ciano fought in the war, but at the same level of every other soldier. The only noticeable action was committed in the last stage of the war, when he committed the so called “mockery of Addis Ababa”, in resemblance of his father’s deeds. In the April 1936, some days before the conquest of Addis Ababa by general Pietro Badoglio, he flew over the capital and threw pennants of the “Disperata”. Despite the attacks of the enemy artillery, the airplane was not shot down and took the way back. At that point, when the war was over, Ciano returned to Italy as a hero, exactly as his father.

On the 9th of June 1936, Mussolini left his position as minister of foreign affairs and appointed Ciano instead. At age 34 he became the youngest minister of foreign affairs in Italian history. As new minister, Ciano had to continue the Ethiopian question on the diplomatic side. After the end of the war, the aims of Italy were the recognition of the empire and the cessation of sanctions by the League of Nations. This last point was quite easy to achieve since not every member State was in favor of the sanctions and the foreign governments didn’t obtain the full application of the sanctions. Indeed, the League of Nations withdrew the sanctions on the 4th of July.

The political panorama profoundly changed after the war: the German occupation of the Rhineland, the burst of the Spanish civil war and the reconciliation between Germany and Italy. In order to avoid this last point, France and Great Britain tried to gain the Italian favor.

During the Ethiopian affair Ciano showed for the first time his immaturity as minister of foreign affairs. Indeed, one of his first actions was rather grotesque: he personally ordered a group of Italian journalists to whistle during the speech of the Ethiopian Negus Hailé

Selassié at the commission of the League of Nations in Geneva. As Alfredo Signoretto, one of those journalists, wrote: “The fact had no precedence; such a scandal never took place in the Assembly of the League...we kept on whistling for at least 15 minutes; the Negus was nervous and the foreign delegates showed their disappointment; Titulescu, delegate of Romania...shouted ‘Faites taire ces sauvages!’”¹²

In this episode we can recognize the ambiguity of Ciano. Although he was one of the political figures that were ideologically alien to fascism, by using this trick (which in my opinion is shameful for a higher diplomat), he demonstrated his adhesion to the methods of the regime in order to attack and denigrate the enemy. Moreover, following this unfortunate episode, Ciano put pressure on the Romanian government for the firing of Titulescu due to the insult addressed to the Italian journalists. Since the foreign government refused to do so, Ciano suspended the economic agreements between Italy and Romania. For such a trivial incident, Ciano undermined the relationship between the two countries.

This episode demonstrated the changing brought by fascism to the old and sophisticated diplomatic world, which gradually became a demonstration of force.

However, it is interesting to see the reasons behind the appointment of Ciano as minister of foreign affairs. Mussolini appointed him not as an awarding for his war time service, but probably as part of a long-meditated decision. It is reasonable to say that Mussolini wanted to test his son-in-law as his possible successor. The most suitable people to take his place could be hierarchs like Grandi, Balbo, Bottai and Farinacci, but Mussolini didn't trust them and was often in contrast with them. Inevitably, the choice could be only Ciano, since he always obeyed to the Duce and was incredibly loyal. Indeed, Ciano proved a profound admiration towards Mussolini, very close to devotion. Suffice to say, in occasion of a speech of Mussolini on the radio, Ciano “started to cry like a baby”.¹³

As minister of foreign affairs Ciano overturned the traditional foreign policy. Ciano may be seen as the principal initiator of the Italian pro-German foreign policy, but it is important to clarify that in this occasion Ciano acted with the approval of Mussolini.

Someone thinks that the pro-German attitude of Ciano was a result of his ambition to replace Suvich, who was against Germany; however, ambition couldn't be the only

¹² G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 143

¹³ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 165-166

explanation. Ciano, before achieving this position, believed that a coalition between Germany and Italy would have served the Italian interests and that Italy could use the German bogey against the western democracies. Although, Ciano was naïve to think that a poor and weak country like Italy could submit a powerful and rich nation like Germany to its will.

However, the relationship between Germany and Italy was pre-existing; indeed, according to a telegram sent by Mussolini to Grandi regarding the worry of Chamberlain about the reproachment between the two countries in 1935: “I authorize you to deny the news about the Italo-German relations. There’s nothing. There’s only a better atmosphere...which one day could become something more, if the fools of Ginevra and London will continue their policy against Italy and its regime.”¹⁴

The first demonstration of Ciano’s sympathy for Germany was in occasion of the first encounter between Mussolini and Hitler in 1934 in Venice. Indeed, in an official report the German ambassador, Hassell wrote: “Galeazzo Ciano has a sympathizing attitude towards the meeting Mussolini-Hitler. He sees in the nationalist socialist movement...an enduring historic movement which will prevail exactly as fascism did...on Ciano’s advice, Italy should reach a solid agreement with Germany...”¹⁵

However, the encounter didn’t have a positive outcome. Ciano himself confessed to his friend Orio Vergani what impression he had about Hitler: “He is not a man. He is a fool...He said that we need to attack Europe as long as it is not prepared for the war. How? He suggested, for example, to invade France. He is sure to manage to do so. If we don’t intervene... Mussolini himself was astonished. He punched the table with his hand and said no. Hitler has one purpose, war and revenge...”¹⁶

The meeting between the two dictators was so disastrous that Ciano had to stop his pro-German action.

Although, Ciano continued to cultivate the relationship with Germany on a personal level, through his brother-in-law Massimo Magistrati, who was sent as advisor of the Italian embassy in Berlin and his sister Maria Ciano.

After having secretly kept the relationship with Germany, Italy formally reproached to the country after the Ethiopian war. Indeed, according to a German report written during

¹⁴ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 265-266

¹⁵ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 266-267

¹⁶ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 267-268

the war: “Before leaving (for the war in Ethiopia), Ciano explained in a confidential meeting with his collaborators of his ministry, that the general trend of the Italian foreign policy should be totally reviewed. France would have betrayed Italy...In each point of view, it would be useful to Italy to reach agreements with Germany.”¹⁷

This kind of policy was totally in contrast with the policy of the foreign ministry, which was pro-French.

The pro-German policy adopted by Ciano started to have the approval of Mussolini. After the end of the Ethiopian war, Ciano personally resumed the relationship with Germany, by having a conversation with the press officer of the German embassy, to whom he confessed that he wasn't responsible for the policy of the ministry of foreign affairs, but that as director of the propaganda he was accountable for the pro-German policy of the press.

Moreover, when Ciano became minister of the foreign affairs, his wife Edda was visiting Berlin; this was a sort of start of the pro-German policy under the direction of Ciano. One of his first successes was the recognition of the Italian empire by Germany. The only contentious issue was the one regarding Austria. In July 1936, Germany and Austria concluded an advantageous economic agreement under the patronage of Italy, with the hope that this would have temporarily calmed the German expansionist ambitions.

In the meanwhile, the reconciliation between Germany and Italy had international resonance. During a speech in Milan in November 1936, Mussolini pronounced for the first time the famous word “axis”: “This vertical Rome-Berlin is an axis to which every European State can contribute under the spirit of collaboration and peace.”¹⁸ At the same time, he made an explicit appeal to Great Britain in order to achieve an agreement based on the mutual acknowledgment of their own interests. In this occasion, Mussolini acted as balancing power, which was the position so long desired by the Italian diplomacy and the regime. Great Britain accepted the Italian invitation and the two countries concluded several advantageous agreements, one of them renowned as the Gentleman's Agreement: the two parties committed to not change the status quo in the Mediterranean, to not harm their reciprocal interests, to guarantee the freedom of navigation and to improve their relationship. However, this pact had little or no value.

¹⁷ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 270

¹⁸ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 275

In the meanwhile, Italy started to pursue a diplomatic action in the Balkans, which led to the concluding of some agreements with Yugoslavia, Austria and Hungary. In that period, Italy was in a privileged position and finally reached the position of “decisive weight”. One year after his appointment as minister of the foreign affairs, Ciano was satisfied with diplomatic successes: the creation of the Axis, the pact with Great Britain and the friendship with the Balkan countries.

However, a change in the attitude of Ciano and Mussolini gradually took place. Mussolini was ever more convinced to improve the relationship between Italy and Germany, while according to Ciano it was convenient to remain cautious and to keep all the channels open to other alliances, like the one with Great Britain. For example, in September 1937, Ciano confessed to Bottai: “I’m going to Berlin to test the German temper. But we don’t have to tighten the relationship too much. Germany has to be only a ground for maneuvers. Now I have to curb Mussolini, since he is excited about the German military organization.”¹⁹

The psychological factor is relevant in order to explain Mussolini’s attitude towards Germany. The admiration that the Nazi showed towards him and the sense of loyalty started to have a great impact on his decisions. One of the first signs of this change in attitude was given by his speech during the Olympic games in Berlin in 1936, where he greatly praised Germany and unbalanced in its favor. As he said, “The fact that today I am in Germany doesn’t mean that tomorrow I will be elsewhere... The important thing is that our two great countries will be united in one firm decision.”²⁰ Indeed, throughout the foreign policy of the regime, Mussolini was obsessed with concepts like honorability and respect for the alliances at any cost, which led to the disastrous future outcomes.

The speech raised concern in the international panorama and also in Ciano. He foresaw the potential dangers of a solely pro-German policy: “Will the solidarity of regime be sufficient to hold together two countries, whose race, society, religion and tastes are opposed? Nobody can accuse me of hostility to the pro-German policy. I was the one to start it. But I wonder if we have to consider Germany as the final goal, or rather as a ground for maneuvers...”²¹

¹⁹ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp.281-282

²⁰ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 282

²¹ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 283

Despite his concerns, Ciano underestimated the consequences of pro-German drift of the Italian foreign policy. Indeed, one of his greatest weaknesses was his inability to think in the long term.

The Duce's visit in Berlin was a significant sign of the Italian friendship towards Germany, but Mussolini was very careful to not take any official obligation. Instead, he was more interested in entering the anti-Comintern Pact with Japan and Germany. Ciano in particular was favorable to the stipulation of a similar agreement between Japan and Italy since his strong anti-communist thinking. Eventually Italy entered the pact on the 6th of November 1937 and Ciano was exalted since he was at the center of the negotiations. However, his enthusiasm was soon dampened by the advancement of Hitler's claims on Austria. Both Mussolini and Ciano were well aware that the Anschluss was inevitable but at least agreed with the Germans to be informed around the time and the modality in which the union would have happened. Nonetheless, Hitler asked for the complete nazification of Austria, which was clearly an ultimatum, without first consulting the Italian government. Mussolini and Ciano were upset by this happening, and the minister of foreign affairs was inclined to find an agreement with Great Britain. Indeed, Ciano strived to find a rapprochement with London and ordered Grandi to start the negotiations with the British government as soon as possible. This anxiety increased after the realization of the Anschluss in March 1938, and eventually in April the Italian and British governments reached a deal, according to which Italy would have stopped the intervention in the Spanish civil war and Great Britain would have officially recognized the Italian empire. This was an important step towards the western democracies and the agreement was particularly appreciated in Italy, where there was apprehension regarding the Anschluss. Moreover, the annexation of Austria put Germany in a powerful position, which conferred the leadership of the Axis.

Although, Ciano and Mussolini were not willing to abandon the Axis and the Italian foreign policy still consisted in maintaining the friendship with Berlin without being bound to it, despite the many proposals of Germany to form a clear alliance. In the meanwhile, in that period some negotiations with France were in progress, but eventually failed due to the franco-phobia of Mussolini and the excessive demands of France. The Duce made a clean break with the talks, even if Ciano was in favor of the deal, but at the

same time didn't take action in order to save the negotiations or to temper Mussolini's attitude.

In the summer of the same year, a serious incident took place: the Czech crisis. Germany pretended the cession of the Sudetes, and this called into question France since it was allied with Czechoslovakia. The conflict seemed inevitable, and Italy had no other choice than to fight with the Germans, but the situation got saved at the latest. At the request of the British ambassador Lord Perth, Mussolini acted as intermediary and proposed to Hitler to institute a conference in Munich to peacefully solve the crisis. The Führer eventually accepted and the conference took place from 28th to 30th September. The result of the conference was basically the satisfaction of the German claims. However, the Munich Conference was a success for the international prestige of Italy which had the merit to have preserved peace in Europe.

In the aftermath of the Munich events, there was an exacerbation of the relations between France and Italy, due to the French effort to conclude an agreement with Germany (which would have deprived the Italian exclusiveness in the friendship with Germany) and the claims of the fascist government on some French territories: Tunisia, Corsica, Savoy, Djibouti and participation in the Suez Canal.

Despite the readiness of the French government to find a compromise, the negotiations failed because of the mutual animosity of Mussolini and the French ambassador François-Poncet, and the sending of Italian troops on the Libyan-Tunisian border. In all of this, Ciano fomented the Duce's French-phobia and defined the French people as abject.

This worsening of the Italian relations with the western democracies led Mussolini to take a decisive step. He informed the German foreign minister von Ribbentrop of his will to reach a definitive agreement with the nazi government. This was a crucial shift in the Italian foreign policy and Italy abandoned the balancing position of tiebreaker in Europe and bonded to Germany. Ciano approved and was overwhelmed by delusions of grandeur. Given the German successes and the passivity of the western democracies, he thought that Italy could achieve anything thank to the alliance with Germany.

On the 8th of January 1939, Ciano and Mussolini accepted the agreement with Germany which also gave a solution for the German population in South Tyrol.

However, Ciano soon started to regret the pact with Germany. Indeed, some months later, Hitler showed the true extent of the nazi foreign policy. His first moves were the

incorporation of Bohemia to the Reich and the creation of a German protectorate in Slovenia. Ciano was outraged, as he wrote in the diaries: “This is serious, even more that Hitler reassured many times that he wouldn’t have annexed even a single Czech...In the meanwhile, a message arrives...The Duce is depressed and doesn’t want to give the news to the press (“the Italians would laugh at me, every time that Hitler invades a State, he sends me a message”)²². Despite this happening, Mussolini wasn’t willing to abandon the alliance, and Ciano was even more suspicious. In fact, this episode had important consequences on Ciano’s beliefs: he started to re-examine the fascist foreign policy and most importantly the figure of the Duce. From that moment on, the admiration of Ciano gradually fell since Mussolini’s indecision and passiveness in front of the German offenses. From then on Ciano fought for the overthrow of the alliance and for convincing Mussolini to take the distance from Germany. He wrote: “The events of these days overturned my judgment on the Führer and on Germany: he is unfaithful and tricky and no political agreement can be done with him. From now on, I’m working for an agreement with the western powers.”²³ However, Ciano was never able to prevent the Iron Pact which was signed on the 22nd of May 1939. Indeed, during the negotiations between von Ribbentrop he loyally followed the instructions of Mussolini. By doing so, Ciano probably didn’t want to take the responsibility for the pact, pretending to simply act under the directives of Mussolini.

On the other hand, Mussolini decided to continue the pro-German policy. He was moved by the sense of honor and loyalty towards Germany and believed that the collapse of the alliance would have undermined the stability of the regime and his personal credibility. However, the confidence of Mussolini faltered after the disastrous encounter between Ciano and von Ribbentrop on the 11th of August in Salzburg. After the many warnings of the Italian ambassador Attolico on the imminent invasion of Poland, Ciano arranged an encounter with his German counterpart and was devastated. Although Ciano reaffirmed the impossibility of an Italian intervention in a European conflict, von Ribbentrop explicitly clarified the German intention to attack Poland and trigger a conflict in Europe. From then on, Ciano became anti-German and wrote in his dairies: “I’m disgusted by Germany, its leaders and their actions. They betrayed and fooled us. They want to involve

²² G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 340

²³ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 343

us in something that we didn't want and that can harm the regime and the nation...we don't intend to take part into a conflict that we didn't want nor triggered.”²⁴

Ciano immediately informed Mussolini of the real intention of Germany. Mussolini was afraid of the conflict, despite the bellicose rhetoric of fascism. However, the Italian abstention from the conflict would have been a betrayal towards the agreement with Germany, and Mussolini couldn't stand a similar offense to his reputation. Additionally, he thought that the German victory was very likely, which would have brought great advantages to the Italian ally. Ciano tried with every mean possible to persuade the Duce to not enter the conflict, and leveraged on the fact that the Hitler in the first place was the traitor because of his deceitful behavior. Although the Second World War burst on the 1st September 1939, the Italian intervention took place on the 10th June 1940. During that period, Ciano made every effort to discourage Germany by for example delivering an impractical list of all the equipment that Italy needed for fighting in the conflict. In addition, on the 16th of December he made a speech which had to put a symbolic end to the Axis; in the speech he openly accused Germany, Hitler and von Ribbentrop of having triggered the conflict ignoring the Italian will. The speech pleased the western powers and irritated Germany. However, Ciano's efforts weren't sufficient to refrain Mussolini and eventually Italy entered the disastrous conflict.

It is important to say that Ciano's attempts to save Italy didn't stop with the Italian intervention. In January 1943, he even proposed to Mussolini to make a separate peace with the Allies, just as other countries did. This action determined the end of the political career of Ciano, which in February was dismissed as minister of foreign affairs. Mussolini took this decision as he could not continue the war with a minister that operated for a separate peace. In addition, this pleased the German government that was mad at Ciano. The relationship between Mussolini and Ciano was irreversibly undermined. Indeed, on the 25th of July 1943, Ciano as hierarch of the regime voted for the destitution of Mussolini, which contemporarily signed the end of the Duce and the death sentence of Ciano.

²⁴ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 408

CHAPTER TWO - GIUSEPPE BASTIANINI

Giuseppe Bastianini was the one of the most loyal followers of the fascist ideology.

Born in 1889 in Perugia, Bastianini (differently from Ciano) was a fascist from day one. He enrolled as a volunteer and took part in the First World War in 1917. He fought as second lieutenant in the strike team “Arditi”. This experience led him to appreciate the dynamic and strong programs of fascism.

After the end of his military service, he returned to his native city and intensely engaged in the local political fight. He adhered to the National Fascist Party from a young age and in 1920 he was one of the founders of the militant fascist group in Umbria. He actively participated in the fights in Perugia and Umbria and gradually became one of the three main exponents of the Perugian fascism. Moreover, he intervened in the Milan fascist conference in 1921 where he voted in favor of the participation of the fascist deputies to the royal session of the Chamber, and also in the Orvieto conference where he supported the proposal of transformation of the fascist groups into a party.

This engagement in the political activities won him the consideration of the national hierarchies. Indeed, in November 1921 Bastianini was named vice secretary of the National Fascist Party together with Starace and Terruzzi.

In 1922 he was involved in the organization of the march on Rome. He participated to the congress of Naples, where Mussolini personally informed him and other few people of the modalities of the operation. When Perugia was designated as headquarter of the general command, Bastianini gave instructions to the local fascists to occupy the city.

Given this political background, we can say that Bastianini was one of the political figures that best belonged to fascism. Just like many other fascists, he came from the province and grew in the political environment of his city; indeed, he believed that fascism was “a provincial phenomenon with different programs and characteristics for each county.”

Bastianini probably adhered to fascism because he saw it as the only possible resolution for the national disorder and for the communist threat. Indeed, in his memoirs he wrote some words that suggest the extent of the general aversion towards communism in the first postwar period: “Memory often plays tricks on the Italian people, but it is licit to say

that those who lived in 1921 and are still alive can't have forgotten that in that year...the very existence of the nation was put in danger and that every action, individual or collective, not authorized by the provincial socialist-communist directions was dangerous. In the military sphere, no more outdoor ceremonies...In the religious sphere, no more rituals outside of the church...In the individual sphere, discrimination of the citizens who were not registered to the communist organizations.”²⁵

He added: “In that period, bolshevism was the only enemy to fight; the nations threatened by it showed new forms of patriotic romanticism and civil idealism; each of them found its own hero: Turkey Kemal, Poland Pilsudski, Germany Hitler, Portugal Salazar, Spain Franco and Italy Mussolini.”²⁶

Moreover, Bastianini in his adhesion to the regime was moved by a sincere admiration towards Mussolini. Indeed, he was fascinated by the Duce since their first encounter at the office of the “Popolo d'Italia”. He described that episode with these words: “I feel like an object that he is examining in his hands, but it's a pleasant feeling, that warms up my words...This, together with the magnetic fluid that he releases, immediately assures him that control over the man, to which only a few people can resist. And, if that day I was like captivated, it was not due to the enthusiasm or to my lack of experience, since other men told me to have felt the same for him...I wasn't surprised to be already devoted to him, and I was proud of it.”²⁷

His “infatuation” towards Mussolini led him to become more bond to the fascist ideology and the regime.

The advancement of the political career of Bastianini was rather rapid.

Indeed, after Mussolini came to power and the government was formed, Bastianini covered different positions. As vice secretary of the party, he wrote a report to inform the Duce of the internal crisis of the party, which was affected by internal fights and personalisms. Due to the disorder of the party, he resigned as vice secretary. Until 1923 he was also part of the Great Council. From 1924 to 1926, he covered the position of organizer of the Italian fascist groups abroad.

²⁵ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, pp. 8-9

²⁶ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, pp. 14-15

²⁷ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 6

In 1927 he entered the diplomatic career. Indeed, in those years the government began the process of fascistization of the Italian diplomacy and Bastianini was one of those fascists that were directly introduced in the diplomatic service. However, despite the lack of experience and preparation, he managed to carry out the new task with balance and efficiency. He was first sent to Lisbon in 1928 and to Athens in 1929 as plenipotentiary minister. He was then ambassador in Warsaw from 1932 to 1936. He worked in a period that was particularly delicate for the relationship between Poland and Italy. Indeed, in 1933 Italy entered the Four-Power Pact. This agreement was sponsored by Mussolini and was aimed at the cooperation between the four great European powers (Italy, Germany, France and Great Britain) and at the survival of peace in Europe. This agreement was made on the basis of the eternal aspiration of mediator and balancing role. However, Poland was suspicious about this pact, since it feared that there could have been a revision of the borders with Germany, which implied Danzig and the Polish Corridor. In addition, the exclusion of Poland from the pact was an offense to its national pride.²⁸

Since Italy was the conceiver of the pact, the relationship with Poland soured.

However, Bastianini worked concretely for the improvement of the economic and political relations between the two countries.

In fact, even after the end of his diplomatic service in Warsaw, he suggested to Mussolini to examine the opportunity of a friendly relationship with Poland, since it was the first country that opposed to the economic sanctions imposed by Ginevra on the Italian government due to the Ethiopian question.²⁹

In 1936, Mussolini left the direction of the ministry of foreign affairs and appointed his son-in-law Ciano as his successor. In that year, Bastianini was called back in Italy to cover the position of undersecretary of the new minister.

This advancement should have been an important step in the career of Bastianini, but actually, he had few satisfactions from this job. Probably speaking, Mussolini wanted a loyal fascist with a strict morality to assist Ciano, but the latter didn't appreciate this choice. Indeed, Ciano didn't esteem Bastianini and in his diaries he wrote some harsh criticisms about him: "He is a fool, but he is loyal", "Even if he is not smart, he is a loyal

²⁸ P. Quaroni, *Il Patto a Quattro*, "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali" 1, No. 1/2, 1934, p. 64

²⁹ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 51

person at least” and “He is not very intelligent, he doesn’t see far and that little he sees is incredibly dark.”³⁰

Presumably, Ciano felt humiliated by the choice of Mussolini, also because even before his entry in diplomacy he asked for the recommendation of Bastianini.³¹

Moreover, Ciano was aware of the fact that he was an outsider for the fascist “aristocracy” and was considered as a parvenu.

Ciano immediately showed his contempt for Bastianini. Indeed, when the new undersecretary of foreign affairs arrived at Palazzo Chigi, no office was prompted for him. As he wrote: “In order to settle so vainly at Palazzo Chigi, I had to buy a table, a sofa and two chairs...with those I could transform the antechamber in a proper office.”³²

Ciano reserved to him only ordinary mansions, like the administration of the ministry, of the current practices and of the lower personnel. Despite the continuous requests to view the most important acts and the reports of the diplomatic missions and the demand to be informed about the decisions of Ciano, Bastianini was simply ignored. In this way Bastianini was excluded from every political affair.

The absurd obstruction of Ciano impeded Bastianini to carry out his job in front of the functionaries of the ministry and the foreign diplomats. As an example, he reported in his memoirs that he acknowledged the first expedition in Spain and the occupation of Albania when these facts were already happening. Moreover, he was left out of fundamental conversations, like the ones with von Ribbentrop regarding the relationship with Germany and the Iron Pact.

In addition, the animosity of Ciano was alimented by the open criticisms of Bastianini that irritated him. In fact, the two of them were often in disagreement, but they never had a true fight, since Bastianini often forgave Ciano for his rudeness and his outbursts.

The humiliation suffered by Bastianini in that context was so harsh that he tried to resign from his position. In one particular occasion, he begged Ciano to send him abroad since he found his job totally useless. However, Ciano held Bastianini and confessed that every position in the ministry was powerless since no one could act on his own initiative, neither his advises could be accepted. Bastianini asked why he didn’t resign then, and Ciano replied: “I’m ready to do so, if the others follow me, however everyone complains, and

³⁰ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, pp. 187-188

³¹ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 51

³² G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 259

no one firmly tells him that he (Mussolini) can't continue in this way. They fear to offend him... If you assisted to the Council of ministers, that lasts one hour because no one speaks apart from him, you would feel even more humiliated.”³³

However, despite the alienation of Bastianini from the political affairs of the ministry, he had the opportunity to observe in first line fundamental moments that led to a radical shift in the Italian foreign policy: the worsening of the relationship with the western democracies, the Spanish civil war, the formation of the Axis, the German occupation of Austria, the Czech crisis and the invasion of Poland.

Regarding the change in the directions of the foreign policy brought by Mussolini, Bastianini was doubtful since the first moment of the alliance between Italy and Germany, and foresaw the harmfulness of the German ally even before Ciano.

For instance, in occasion of the German invasion of Austria, he showed his contempt towards the German authorities. On that same day, the general Von Hepp held a conference regarding colonialism in Rome and Bastianini had the task to hand an award (the Great Cordon of the Crown of Italy) to the debater. However, he didn't attend the convention as a sign of protest.

Another example of the disinclined approach of Bastianini is given by the cold greeting he gave to the adviser of the German embassy, Von Pless: “he came towards me saying ‘What an event!’, and I replied with a so sharp ‘yes’ that I left him breathless.”³⁴

Ciano instead, realized the true extent of the danger after the German invasion of Prague. In that occasion, Ciano defined von Ribbentrop as “dangerous and sinister.”³⁵

However, Bastianini was more forward-looking than Ciano. Indeed, he wrote in his memoirs: “After having spent more than three years in Warsaw, it didn't occur me to see the Germans invading Prague to be persuaded about the accuracy of the views of Tacitus on those people. They really are like a forest which sometimes needs to be trimmed.”³⁶

After the resolution of the issue of the Sudetes, Bastianini even suggested to expel and send to Germany those Tyrolians who craved for the German citizenship, as he thought that this could solve a contentious issue (when Mussolini learnt about this episode, he admonished Bastianini).

³³ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 272

³⁴ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 296

³⁵ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 323

³⁶ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 296

Bastianini also made some important considerations about the behavior of Ciano. According to him, Ciano was wrong in not warning von Ribbentrop about the repercussions of the German expansionism on the European relations (especially with Italy) and in following the directives of Mussolini so blindly. Ciano lost the great occasion to overturn the situation and avoid the fatal Iron Pact. However, after the conclusion of the pact, the functionaries of Palazzo Chigi thought that this could somehow limit and refrain the German actions, but eventually the situation escalated in August 1939.

On the 22nd of August 1939, the Italian ambassador in Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, arrived in Rome to report some crucial information regarding the future plans of Germany. Bastianini immediately received him and the two of them visited Mussolini. Attolico reported that after a conversation with von Ribbentrop, he had the certainty of the German intention to invade Poland and to provoke a war. After having heard those words, Mussolini declared that Italy had no other choice than honoring the alliance and following Germany. Both Attolico and Bastianini were astonished. Mussolini started to talk about the Italian honor and the personal promise he made to the German people that Italy would have followed its ally. He was obsessed by the damage that the non-intervention in the war would have brought to his reputation: “They won’t call me a traitor. No, this time the insult of ‘Verräter’ won’t be holden against us!”³⁷

Attolico and Bastianini desperately tried to dissuade him and argued that Germany in the first place was betraying the soul of the pact, and that Italy could not be bound by a unilateral action. In that occasion, Bastianini fiercely fought for the Italian non-intervention and frankly went against the Duce. He reported in his memoirs the speech he made and the furious reaction of Mussolini: “I intervened again, making the error of not measuring my words and the effect that they would have had on his pride. ‘Duce, you can’t make this war, you are not in the condition to do so... You can’t, neither morally, neither physically. You would put in danger everything that Italy has reached from Cavour until you, not because of a mandatory national necessity, but due to a Hitler’s decision. Duce! I beg you to consider that you don’t have enough resources to fight on at least eight fronts, from Albania to north Africa, from south Libya to the Alps, from Ethiopia...’ He didn’t let me finish, and he pounced on me, yelling a phrase that needs to be paraphrased: ‘So you think that for 17 years I did nothing.’ I replied that I didn’t believe that, that I,

³⁷ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 71

more than every other Italian, knew the great struggles he made, and that for this reason I refused that the insane action of our ally could threaten the results of so much struggle.”³⁸

Despite the rant of Mussolini, Attolico and Bastianini corroborated their words by bringing the evidence of the insufficiency of resources for the Italian entry into war, and suggested to send a letter of formal notice to Germany aimed at appealing to the clauses of the agreement, and the declaration that Italy refused to support any unilateral action. However, Mussolini wasn't willing to take a so drastic decision and eventually (thanks also to the efforts of Ciano, who in the meanwhile was called back in Italy by Bastianini) after a long mediation, opted for the middle way.

Indeed, soon after the meeting with the Duce, Bastianini and Ciano worked all night long for the drafting of the letter meant for Hitler. On the 23rd of August they came out with an excessive list of military requirements for the Italian entry in the world conflict, which had the purpose to underline the Italian unpreparedness for the intervention, and to discourage Hitler. With regard to the letter, Bastianini admitted in his memoirs that it wasn't a masterpiece of diplomacy, but it prepared the ground for the so convenient formula of non-belligerence, which Italy used for the initial part of the conflict.

After the burst of the Second World War, Ciano sent Bastianini to London as ambassador on the 14th of October 1939. The reason of this choice laid in the fact that Ciano wanted a loyal person and a supporter of the policy of non-intervention in order to negotiate with the British government. Indeed, Ciano wrote in his diaries. “This action will have an effect on the world balances and will serve to normalize our relations with Great Britain.”³⁹

As undersecretary of foreign affairs, Bastianini already had relations with the British authorities. For instance, in occasion of the imminent invasion of Poland, the British ambassador Percy Lorraine visited Bastianini to inform him that Great Britain looked at the Polish developments with the utmost attention and that it would have acted on the recognition of the obligations taken with Poland. This implicitly meant that Great Britain would have intervened in case of the German invasion of Poland.

As an attempt to preserve peace, Bastianini suggested to Lorraine to organize a meeting between Göring and the Polish foreign minister, Beck, in order to clarify the real German

³⁸ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, pp. 71-72

³⁹ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Mila: BUR, 2005, pref XI

claims, which could have led to the lessening of the relationships between Germany and Poland. The encounter never took place. However, Bastianini wrote: "I do justice to the British government, recognizing that on that same day it proposed to Warsaw the meeting suggested by me."⁴⁰

When Bastianini arrived in London, he openly declared that his diplomatic mission consisted in reinforcing and developing the interests of Great Britain and Italy in the spirit of trust and friendship. This statement was appreciated by the British diplomatic environment that welcomed the nomination of Bastianini. Even the prime minister Neville Chamberlain said to the new ambassador: "You don't understand how glad I am to see you here in London, and how much satisfaction your appointment as ambassador produced in this country."⁴¹

The British government was satisfied by the position taken by Italy and was well disposed to accommodate the Italian requests.

Indeed, Great Britain had the merit of an initiative that consisted in the reaching of an agreement with France on the Italian territorial claims. Indeed, Bastianini talked for long to the British authorities about the Italian claims on some French territories, and Great Britain took the initiative to intervene in favor of Italy with the French government. Such intervention was aimed at facing the question of the Italian relations with France and at opening negotiations for the recognition of the Italian interests in the French territories. Such initiative was welcomed by Bastianini and by the Italian ambassador in Paris, Raffaele Guariglia, who strived for the reaching of an agreement.

However, these efforts didn't have success and were nullified by the obstruction of Mussolini, who refused any kind of agreement and was illusioned by the German initial victories. Indeed, Bastianini and Guariglia went to Rome to support those opportunities of agreement which would have reinforced the Italian position, but they were badly received and returned annihilated to their embassies without any result.

Moreover, the Italian press published a report that underlined the problems that the British naval blockade against Germany caused in the Mediterranean. This resonated in the British press and clouded the favorable atmosphere that Bastianini created. In addition, in Rome some anti-British incidents occurred; for instance, some fascist groups varnished

⁴⁰ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 74

⁴¹ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 191

the British cars. All these incidents were aimed at creating tensions between Great Britain and Italy, which Bastianini tried to soften by minimizing those facts and the asper tones of the Italian press.

The appointment of Bastianini as ambassador in London wasn't appreciated by the German authorities, that perfectly knew that he would have acted against their interests and Berlin labelled him a pro-British and an anti-German.

Bastianini indeed worked against the German interests and operated for the improvement of the relations between Italy and Great Britain, and not because he was pro-British, but because he was objective in considering the damage that the war would have caused to Italy. For instance, after the incident of the seizure of eleven Italian ships containing coal by the British authorities, von Ribbentrop tried to take advantage from this episode in order to reinforce the relationship between Germany and Italy. He was planning to announce to the Italian population that he would have doubled the delivery of coal from Germany, but Bastianini anticipated him and reported to the government the release of the Italian ships and the assurance that Great Britain would have continued the coal exportations to Italy. Although, despite the resolution of the problem, the incident led Mussolini to become more severe towards Great Britain.

However good the work of Bastianini was, eventually he didn't succeed in reaching an agreement with the British authorities and in avoiding the Italian intervention in the war. Even after the appointment of Winston Churchill (who had much more bellicose ideas than Chamberlain) as new British prime minister, a few last efforts were made to heal the relationship between the two countries. On the 26th of May 1940, Lord Halifax, minister of foreign affairs, reaffirmed the will of the British government to examine the political questions between Italy and Great Britain and to discuss some issues that could be solved with the mutual satisfaction of the two parties. Even more, on the 16th of May Churchill sent a personal telegram to Mussolini, in which he asked whether it was too late to impede the conflict between Great Britain and Italy.

However, Mussolini never replied neither to the offers of Halifax, nor to the message of Churchill. Instead, he sent a telegram to Hitler on the 30th, which announced the Italian will to honor the alliance with Germany and the entry in the conflict by the 5th of June.

So, at the end Bastianini didn't manage to carry out his task and to render those services that Ciano hoped for. On the 10th Mussolini officially made the declaration of war against

France and Great Britain and three days later Bastianini left London together with 200 co-nationals that were willing to return in their homeland.

Some important considerations have to be made on the conduct of Great Britain and Italy in that occasion.

Given the inaction of the French army and the advancement of the German troops in France, Great Britain could no longer count on its ally and in fact found itself isolated. For this reason, the British authorities repeatedly proposed initiatives of negotiated peace to Italy, given its position of non-belligerence. Indeed, Great Britain looked at Italy and Mussolini as a possibility for the resolution of the conflict that needed to be considered with great care. Chamberlain, indeed, confessed to Bastianini on one occasion: “I’m sure that Mussolini perfectly knows that at the end there will be need for him”.⁴²

Great Britain hoped for an Italian mediation in order to make the war end, so that Bastianini wrote to his ministry: “Here they keep looking at Mussolini in relation to the end of the conflict.”⁴³ However, the words of Bastianini clashed with the silence and opposition of the ministry and of the Duce.

Under the British point of view, there was no doubt that in case of the Italian entry in the conflict, Great Britain would have had no other choice than mobilizing its military forces. On the other hand, the non-belligerency was a privileged position for Italy and it represented a decisive weight for France and Great Britain. The non-belligerency not only gave to Italy the opportunity to conduct the game, but was also the surest defense of the Italian interests. Indeed, the non-belligerency was the only thing that prevented the British military intervention. Bastianini and other functionaries of the ministry knew that Italy could not afford a war on several fronts, while Great Britain could count on the many recourses of its empire. Hence, Italy had the great opportunity to restore peace in Europe and consolidate its position. Indeed, Bastianini remembered in his memoirs: “What a great horizon opened before our country this time!”⁴⁴

However, Mussolini impeded any kind of reconciliation between the two countries because of his vain concept of “honorability” and loyalty to Hitler, and at the end, he didn’t catch the opportunity to turn the tide of the conflict and of Italy.

⁴² G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 198

⁴³ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 198

⁴⁴ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 205

Bastianini, once back in Italy, took part in the military campaign in Greece, where he was awarded with a merit badge. Subsequently, Bastianini was named governor of Dalmatia by Mussolini on the 7th of June 1941.

After the German invasion of Yugoslavia, its territory was partitioned between Germany and Italy, which had one third of Slovenia, Montenegro, the province of Fiume, Zara, and the provinces of Spalato and Cattaro. For the Italian nationalists the conquest of these territories was the resolution of an issue that afflicted Italy since the end of the First World War. When Bastianini took office in Zara, he had to confront a situation that was complex. In Dalmatia there were two resistance movements (the Chetniks and the communists of Tito) that opposed the Italian forces and that made attacks. In addition, the German troops tried to intrude in the Italian territories and the German authorities in the territory of Zagreb pursued anti-Italian activities; indeed, Bastianini forbade the entry of German citizens in Dalmatia.

During his office as governor, Bastianini had the merit to give asylum to the Jews that escaped the racial persecutions of the Germans. This action won him the aversion of von Ribbentrop, who called him “honorary Jew”.⁴⁵ Indeed, Bastianini was averse to any kind of violence and didn’t implement the racial laws over the territory of Dalmatia.

However, on the 6th of February 1943, one day after the firing of Ciano as minister of foreign affairs, Bastianini was called back in Italy and was appointed undersecretary of the foreign affairs, under the direction of Mussolini. In this new role Bastianini, who was aware of the disastrous conditions of Italy, pursued an anti-German policy. For instance, he tried to create a coalition of “minor” States (Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania), which had the purpose to enforce the position of Italy in the axis against Germany.

However, the most decisive action taken by Bastianini was the initiative of contacting the Allies. Bastianini convinced Mussolini of the necessity to explore other alternatives and to investigate the real intentions of the enemies. Eventually, with the consent of the Duce, Bastianini could take the initiative. He planned to have a messenger that should have taken direct contact with the Allies in Lisbon. Although, this plan was never enforced, due to the near decline of Mussolini.

⁴⁵ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 288

Indeed, on the 16th of July, a group of fascist exponents demanded to Mussolini the gathering of the Great Council and on the 22nd Dino Grandi presented to the Duce the order of the day, through which he was deposed as head of the government.

On the 24th Bastianini attended the session of the Great Council even if he was not a member; indeed, he could participate as undersecretary of the foreign affairs. He voted in favor of the order of the day of Grandi. To Bastianini this gesture wasn't a sign of treason, since Mussolini in the first place betrayed the fascist ideology.

However, after the fall of Mussolini, Bastianini didn't hold any other diplomatic or governmental position. Guariglia, the new minister of foreign affairs under the government of Badoglio, appointed him ambassador in Ankara, but eventually he refused, and afterwards was forced to escape in Switzerland due to the death condemnation by the tribunal of Verona.

Bastianini renounced to this new task because of the anti-fascist inclination of the new government; indeed, he was a fascist and he did not intend to deny his past political choices. Until the end, he decided to stay coherent with his political orientation and in his inmost he remained a loyal follower of the fascist ideology.

CHAPTER THREE - BERNARDO ATTOLICO

Born in 1880 in Bari, Bernardo Attolico was a diplomat during both the First and the Second World War period. As a diplomat that lived in that complex era, rich of so many dramatic happenings, he witnessed some crucial moments for the Italian internal and foreign policy: the burst of the First World War, the first post-war period and the crisis of the liberal power, the rise of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War. As part of his diplomatic career, he covered important positions in the League of Nations and in Moscow. Particularly significant was his job as ambassador in Berlin where he had the opportunity to witness the evolving of the relationships between Germany and Italy since the war in Ethiopia until the burst of the Second World conflict.

Hence, Attolico served during both the liberal age and the fascist era. Indeed, he started his career before the advent of Mussolini and continued to work during the fascist period. Given the work path of Attolico, we may observe that he was a statesman with a long experience and great competence, rather than a politician strongly linked to the fascist party (like Bastianini was). He was loyal to the Italian State and during his career he always acted in favor of the national interests, instead of fostering the fascist ideology. For this reason, we may note that he was a technocrat rather than an ideologist. Indeed, Attolico never manifested himself as a supporter of fascism in its most radical expressions.

In the initial phase of his career, he entered the commissioner for immigration in 1907 and was sent to the United States as inspector for the Italian migration. Afterwards, he was moved with similar mansions to Canada and Turkey.

In 1914, on the eve of the starting of the First World conflict, he was named secretary of the royal commission for the commercial agreements. Once Italy entered the conflict, he was sent to London as representative for the ministry of agriculture, culture and commerce. Then, when he enrolled in the conflict, he was sent again in London as chief of the Italian civil delegation for the purchase of military goods, and subsequently, in concession with this task, he represented Italy at the War Purchase and Executive and at the Allied Maritime Transport Executive.

These tasks were a turning point for the career of Attolico. Indeed, in addition to the precious international experience he acquired, he came in close contact with Francesco

Saverio Nitti, future Italian president of the council of ministers. In fact, when Nitti came to power, he employed Attolico for diverse diplomatic jobs.

In 1919, Attolico covered an important position as technical adviser of the Italian delegation at the Paris peace conference, where he was particularly appreciated by the representatives of the other nations. Due to his good knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon world, in September of the same year he was sent in Washington as general commissioner for the financial and economic Italian affairs in September of the same year, with the aim to implement the new Italian foreign policy, based on the idea of a full ideological and economic collaboration with the US.

Despite not having entered the diplomatic career with the traditional route, in November he was named extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister of second class by the council of ministers. In this way Attolico entered the diplomatic career with one of the highest grades.

Given his new rank, Attolico gradually came to cover higher positions. In 1920, he started to work in the League of Nations, where he had a quite rapid advancement of career. At first, he took the direction of the transit section of the League, and afterwards he was named director of the armament section in 1921. Finally, in 1922 he was made general vice secretary of the League and he maintained the role for four years. These years in an international organization were significant for the formation of Attolico.

In 1924 he was elevated to a higher rank, until reaching the status of ambassador and assuming the direction of the Italian embassy in Rio de Janeiro in 1927. This new role enforced the position of Attolico in the diplomatic environment.

After three years in Brazil, Attolico was offered a job opportunity, in which he gave proof of his diplomatic abilities. Indeed, in 1930 he was designated as Italian ambassador in Moscow. Attolico operated in a period that was complex for the Italo-Soviet relations, due to the incompatibility of ideology of the two regimes, namely fascist and communist. However, he managed to improve the relation between the two States, by promoting economic and commercial agreements. However, his greatest result was the Italo-Soviet pact of friendship and non-aggression signed on the 2nd of September 1933. Indeed, he was one of the authors of the treaty, which was the consequence of the Soviet Union's ambition to be integrated in the international panorama, and of Mussolini's will to guarantee the Italian security, by reaching agreements with eastern European States. At

the end of the mandate of Attolico, the relations between the two countries were very friendly. These successes were the result of his neutral and technical approach, thank to which he managed to go beyond the profound ideological differences and to give precedence to the Italian interests.

After having represented the interests of fascist Italy in Moscow for five years, Attolico was called back in Italy and, shortly after, was sent to a country that was considered equally challenging: Germany. Indeed, in July 1935 he succeeded Vittorio Cerruti as Italian ambassador in Berlin. Given the remarkable achievements of Attolico in Russia, Mussolini probably considered him the most suitable person to cover that position, even if there were some inconsistencies between the diplomatic background of the new ambassador and the political environment of Nazi Germany. Indeed, Germany had left the League of Nations years before, while Attolico made his first international experiences there in the twenties. In addition, Attolico never spoke the German language; indeed, this fact even won him the title of “the best expert on Germany that doesn’t know Deutsch”.⁴⁶ However, during his job in Moscow, Attolico already acquired familiarity with the diplomatic environment in Berlin since he often travelled there and he was regularly hosted in the Italian embassy.

Once taken office in the German capital, Attolico actively worked for the improvement of the relationships between Italy and Germany. Indeed, as first task, Attolico was given instructions to observe the German reaction to the Ethiopian war and to unfreeze the relation between the two countries. To this end, he soon started to engage relationships with the main exponents of the national socialist party, in order to feel the pulse of the nation. At this aim, he also assisted to the Nuremberg congress in 1935, in which he realized the extent of the German military rearmament. Indeed, Attolico gave a clear picture of the German situation in one of his dispatches for Mussolini: “The unilateral and violent abolition of the Treaty of Versailles, doesn’t mean anything but the freedom to rearm.”⁴⁷

Given the situation, Attolico clearly predicted that Germany would have constituted the new order in Europe thanks to its great military force. Although, Attolico was not worried

⁴⁶ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 87

⁴⁷ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 89

about the German rearmament and didn't consider it as a danger for the Italian interests. Instead, he considered it as an opportunity to Italy; since France and Great Britain would have been too concerned about the German threat, Italy would have had its way to realize its long-term goals in foreign policy, namely the colonial expansion in Africa and the political, economic and military infiltration in the Balkans.

Precisely for this reason, Attolico believed that it was urgent an improvement of the Italo-German relations and, indeed, the reproachment between the two countries was quite predictable.

Indeed, the two regimes were united by their analog political ideology and by the fight against communism. Moreover, the similarity of their regimes put them on the same front in the fight between the fascist dictatorships and the western antifascist democracies.

The first steps towards the reconciliation between Germany and Italy took place during the Ethiopian war. After the first sanctions of the League of Nations for the Italian aggression in Ethiopia, Hitler seized the opportunity and incremented the exportations to Italy. Moreover, in that occasion Germany became the first supplier of coal to Italy, replacing Great Britain. The crisis between Italy and the League of Nations led to a softening of the German public opinion towards Italy. In fact, Attolico confirmed to Mussolini: "Every day passing is a step closer that Italy makes to the esteem of the entire Germany. This is a sentiment that generalizes and reinforces in each level of the German population...I don't believe that in this moment there's a more sincere country than Germany in supporting the Italian resistance."⁴⁸

In this phase of the Italo-German relations, Attolico was one of the most active supporters of the Italian friendship with Germany and of a decisive shift in the direction of foreign policy. Until then, Italy always had a mediating function in the European balances and followed the decisive weight policy, based on the equidistance from Germany, Great Britain and France. However, such strategy was abandoned and the Italian government began to point at the German bogey in order to destabilize the international order for its own advantage. In this sense, the new political line inaugurated by Ciano since 1936 met the approval and the support of Attolico.

⁴⁸ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler; La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 93

Indeed, the ambassador in November 1935 suggested on his own initiative to Mussolini to follow the German example and to leave the League of Nations as a reaction to the economic sanctions imposed on Italy (even if he in person had served the League in the initial phase of his career). In this way, Attolico didn't act differently from Ciano; in fact, both of them made a serious error of judgment and underestimated the German radical revisionism.

At that point, Italy decided to make a step forward towards Germany and to eliminate the only contrasting element in the Italo-German relations, namely the Austrian problem. Indeed, eventually, on Italian invitation, Germany and Austria concluded a bilateral treaty in which Germany formally recognized the Austrian sovereignty. Mussolini was satisfied by the reaching of this agreement. However, Attolico warned that Germany recognized the sovereignty, but not the Austrian independence, which was a signal of the fact that Germany wouldn't have completely abandoned its territorial claims on Austria. Moreover, a few months earlier (on the 7th of March 1936) Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles by militarily occupying the Rhineland. This fact put Germany and Italy on the same level; indeed, both of them were isolated by the international community and were at risk from economic and diplomatic sanctions. Indeed, as the secretary of embassy Magistrati remembered: "after this common isolation fascists and nazists recognized the mutual need to reinforce their relations".⁴⁹

In addition to that on 25th of October 1936, Ciano and his German counterpart von Neurath signed the "Berlin protocol", which was the basis of the fatal Rome-Berlin Axis. To Attolico, this is a decisive step in the alliance between the two countries, which entered in the phase of the formal agreements. In fact, he favorably viewed the protocol since he contributed for its realization. He considered it as a worthy ground for a political collaboration between the two regimes, which would have allowed them to harmonize their actions in the international field with respect of their mutual interests. However, he did not immediately foresee that this formal obligation would have been one of those errors that indissolubly bound Italy to Germany.

However, the limits of the Italo-German cooperation soon started to appear. For instance, during the Spanish civil war, the cooperation between the two regimes didn't succeed.

⁴⁹ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler; La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 99

Despite the common interest in defeating and removing the red threat from western Europe, Italy and Germany didn't manage to make a common front, due to their different geopolitical interests. Indeed, Mussolini was more concerned about the Spanish issue due to its position in the Mediterranean, while Hitler had no interest in that area.

Contemporarily, the relations between Italy and the western powers worsened due to its intervention in the Spanish civil conflict. At that point any eventual agreement seemed unachievable. In this context, the sphere of action of Italy in Europe became restricted, and the country found itself with no other alternative of alliance. Attolico, despite his approval of the pro-German policy, didn't hope for a solely Italian partnership with Germany, which would have meant the Italian dependency from the Reich. Indeed, Attolico wanted to maintain the Italian political independence. For this reason, he didn't wish for a reinforcement of the Axis, and suggested a more cautious approach to its government. Nevertheless, in November and December 1937 Italy took another decisive turn in its foreign policy: the entering in the Anti-Comintern Pact and the exit from the League of Nations. In this way, Mussolini cut ties with the other powers and politically and economically bound Italy to Germany.

Furthermore, Mussolini was blinded by the warm hospitality of the German population during his visit in Berlin. Indeed, Magistrati noted that: "Mussolini made an evolution towards Hitler. He passed from the initial suspiciousness to...trust and solidarity".⁵⁰

However, Attolico was not of the same opinion. Indeed, the Italian diplomat increased his skepticism towards nazi Germany. He started to become disillusioned about the strict Italo-German cooperation against the British and French order in Europe, which put a threat to the maintenance of peace.

Eventually, the doubts of Attolico were fed by the ministerial reshuffle of Hitler at the beginning of 1938, in which he replaced von Neurath and other moderate ministers with radical national socialists, like von Ribbentrop. This change of the guard signed the beginning of a new aggressive foreign policy, less inclined to find compromises.

The new political line of von Ribbentrop caused a lot of apprehension amongst the Italian diplomats in Berlin and the heads of government of the other European countries.

Indeed, such concern wasn't unfounded.

⁵⁰ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler; La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, pp. 119-120

Soon after, in February Hitler intimidated the Austrian federal chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg to nazify the country and in March the feared Anschluss took place.

In this matter, the Italian embassy in Berlin was unaware of Hitler's meeting with Schuschnigg and of the content of the conversation, and Attolico was informed of this fact only by a reporter of the journalistic agency "Stefani". Attolico was basically cut out from the Austrian events. These happenings took by surprise even Ciano and Mussolini that didn't expect a so violent resolution of the Austrian question. However, eventually Mussolini had to capitulate and to accept the Austrian incorporation in the Reich. The Führer showed his gratitude to Mussolini by sending him a personal telegram that said: "Mussolini, I will never forget this."⁵¹

The "solving" of the Austrian problem didn't reassure Attolico anyway, who predicted that since then it would have been harder for Italy to exert its influence on the Nazi regime. Moreover, Attolico was alarmed by the obsessive idea of the "racial mystique", that gradually became the cornerstone of the German foreign policy. Indeed, he received the evidence of this kind of policy during Hitler's speech in the Reichstag in February 1938, in which the Führer announced that he would have gathered all the German populations in one single State. Attolico worryingly reported to Rome: "Until today a so daring statement has never been made. Clearly, the regained military strength and the centralization of power allowed a so significant stance."⁵² To Attolico it was clear that Germany wouldn't have accepted any kind of limitation.

The extent of the expansionist plans of Hitler became clearer when, shortly after the realization of the Anschluss, the Sudetes question led to the burst of the Czech crisis. The situation was even more critical, since a military aggression of Czechoslovakia would have provoked the reaction of France and Great Britain and inevitably led to the burst of a Second World conflict.

In this context, the diplomatic activity of Attolico was impressive, and he was one of the figures that most committed to the peace preservation in Europe. Indeed, Attolico considered the Czech events with the utmost concern, and was even more worried about the passivity of the Italian government in front of these facts. He believed that the Italian

⁵¹ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 128

⁵² G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 130

hesitation could be interpreted by the international public opinion as an assent to the German expansionistic plans, which would have caused diplomatic problems to Italy. For this reason, Attolico often solicited the foreign ministry to clarify the Italian position within the Axis and in relation to the Sudetes question.

In the meanwhile, von Ribbentrop advanced the opportunity of an open military alliance between Germany and Italy, which Attolico repeatedly refused, as he didn't want to irreversibly bind Italy to the Reich. At the same time, Attolico received by the military attaches the information that the German high command was planning to attack Czechoslovakia by the end of September.

From this moment on, Attolico strenuously fought for saving peace and impeding a military alliance between Germany and Italy. The idea of Attolico was to persuade the German government to act within the international diplomatic environment, by organizing talks between the interested parties for instance. Mindful of the Anschluss experience, he believed that it was necessary to prevent the escalation of the crisis and to avoid the strategy of the *"fait accompli"*. In this task, Attolico relied on the help of some collaborators, like the British ambassador, Sir Neville Henderson and Ernst von Weizsäcker, secretary of State for foreign affairs. Henderson, in particular, put pressure on the British government in order to propose a negotiation with the Reich, since Attolico believed that a concrete proposal was necessary to demonstrate the willingness and the good faith of the other countries to discuss the Sudetes question.

In the meantime, the appeals of Attolico managed to mobilize Ciano, who received the reports of the military attaches. In fact, he did not intend to replicate the Austrian happenings, in which Italy had no power to intervene. The involvement of Ciano was a positive signal for Attolico, since his actions could be more efficient than to the intervention of the foreign minister.

In the first place, Attolico hypothesized the possibility of an international conference for the peaceful resolution of the issue or an encounter between von Ribbentrop and Ciano in order to clarify the real position of Italy in the Czech crisis. However, such meeting never took place. Instead, the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, managed to arrange an encounter with Hitler. The two leaders met twice, but the talks were unsuccessful and every attempt of negotiation was useless.

The situation escalated when on the 26th of September, Hitler imposed an ultimatum on Czechoslovakia for the transfer of the Sudetes region by the 28th of the same month. The situation seemed irreversible, and at that point Attolico expected the worst.

However, on that same day Chamberlain made a last effort to save peace and asked for the mediation of Mussolini. A few hours later, the Duce called Attolico and Magistrati to inform them that he accepted the British proposal and gave instructions to report this fact to Hitler. Attolico, in less than 30 minutes, prepared the document to present to the Führer and rushed to the chancellery of the Reich. Weizsäcker, that was in the building, saw Attolico running towards the office of Hitler, waving in his hand the so important document.⁵³ The Italian ambassador referred the new developments to Hitler, who accepted the proposal of Mussolini. Afterwards, the well-known Munich Conference took place on the 29th of September 1938. For the moment the world peace was safe.

The contribution of the Italian embassy in Berlin was great and even more the efforts of the ambassador Attolico, that in those dramatic moments managed to save the situation. In that case the strategy pursued by Italy was successful to prevent the burst of a conflict; however, in the future events it wouldn't have been possible to limit the nazi expansionism by means of international treaties.

The period following the Munich conference was propitious for the eventual stabilization of the Italian relations with France and Great Britain. Indeed, Attolico believed that Mussolini could take advantage of the moment to move away from the cumbersome alliance with Germany and to regain his political autonomy. Moreover, the Axis was dishonorable and unpopular in the Italian public opinion. However, Mussolini wasn't willing to break the alliance with Germany, and thought instead that the distortion of the international order produced by Hitler could be useful for the realization of some territorial aspirations.

In the meanwhile, the "peaceful" environment created after the Munich agreements was again at risk. Indeed, despite the annexation of the Sudetes region to the Reich, Germany was far from being satisfied. In the plans of Hitler, there was the total collapse of Czechoslovakia. His goals were the dissolution of the entire State, the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia to the Reich and the institution of a Slovakian puppet State.

⁵³ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler; La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 142

Attolico had the first hints of what was coming when Hitler invited the Czech president Emil Hacha and his foreign minister to Berlin. The Italian ambassador feared that Hitler could repeat the modalities that brought to the Anschluss. Indeed, the Führer intimidated his guests (just like he did with Schuschnigg) to sign a document that granted Bohemia and Moravia to the Reich.

The Italian government and embassy in Berlin had to face for the second time a *fait accompli*. In light of these events, Attolico insisted on the need to disengage from Germany with his government in order to not be morally compromised with Nazism.

However, the expansionist ambitions of Hitler included also Poland, in particular Danzig and the Corridor. Until 1939, the German government tried to initiate negotiations with the Polish authorities for the peaceful resolution of the contentious issue, but Poland ignored the German proposals. The intentions of Hitler towards Poland became evident on the 28th of April 1939, during his speech before the Reichstag in which he condemned the German-Polish treaty of 1934. To Attolico, who attended the event, the dispute with Poland became official.

In the meantime, Mussolini made another of those irrevocable decisions that indissolubly tied the destinies of Germany and Italy. During the visit of von Ribbentrop in Milan on the 6th of May, he ordered Ciano to immediately conclude the military alliance with the German foreign minister. Von Ribbentrop himself remained surprised and didn't expect such a decisive step. This event shook Attolico deeply; indeed, the ambassador had repeatedly advised his government to exercise caution and prudence regarding Germany, but his recommendations fell on deaf ears. At that point, the diplomat could only place his hopes in the absolute equality of rights between the two countries that the Iron Pact effectively enshrined. Given that Germany and Italy were *de iure* tied, Attolico believed that this could prevent any other impulsive decision of Hitler. Moreover, the agreements were bound by the obligation of information and consultation before implementing any decision. The Italian diplomacy in Berlin wanted to rely on this last point, which assured that there wouldn't have been any other *fait accompli* by Germany.

However, this conviction proved to be false. In fact, Hitler's plans involved waging war against Poland, regardless of the Italian consent.

On the 17th of June, the German-Polish relation soured due to a bellicose speech of Goebbels in Danzig. This incident confirmed to Attolico (that by then was well-acquired

with the Nazi methods) the German intention to start a conflict with Poland. However, this time such concern wasn't shared by the rest of the diplomatic staff in Berlin or by the Italian government, that considered the conflict unlikely. In that context, Attolico was distinguished for being the only one to clearly foresee the German plans.

For this reason, Attolico started to warn his government with messages and telegrams. He also advised Mussolini to organize an encounter with Hitler in order to propose the creation of an international conference for the peaceful resolution of the Polish issue, like it was for the Czech crisis. However, such proposal was never accepted by the Führer. However, the ambassador didn't surrender and urged Ciano for a further attempt of clarification. On the other hand, the Italian foreign ministry was initially irritated by the alarmism of Attolico and gave credit to Magistrati, that considered the situation to be calm. However, he gradually started to change opinion. Indeed, in his diaries he reported: "The insistence of Attolico makes me thoughtful. Either this ambassador has completely lost his mind, or he sees and knows something that completely eludes us", and furthermore "I'm starting to think about the opportunity to meet Ribbentrop. The time to find out how things really stand has come. The stakes are too high to wait for further developments".⁵⁴

On the 12th of August, Ciano eventually agreed to encounter von Ribbentrop in Salzburg, where he received confirmation of the fear of Attolico. Indeed, the German foreign minister openly declared "we want war."⁵⁵

A few days later Attolico and Magistrati went to visit von Ribbentrop to express the Italian opposition to the conflict. Although, he reiterated Germany's firm decision to go to war. This was followed by a heated fight between him and the Italian ambassador. Following this episode, Attolico immediately headed back to Italy in order to inform the Duce of the real German intentions and to personally support the anti-German "campaign" of Ciano. The conversation with Mussolini was reported in the memoirs of Bastianini, that witnessed those dramatic moments: "Duce! In Berlin, despite every norm, every principle and every obligation given by the spirit of alliance, it has been decided to go to war in a few days, presenting us with a *fait accompli*."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 399

⁵⁵ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 167

⁵⁶ G. Bastianini, *Volevo fermare Mussolini, Memorie di un diplomatico fascista*, Milan: BUR, 2005, p. 69

However, Mussolini was unyielding and feared that the world public opinion might accuse him of cowardice and infidelity. However, Attolico desperately tried to persuade the Duce that in that specific case Italy could not be accountable for the violation of the pact, since Germany in the first place infringed a substantive point of the treaty. Anyway, the ambassador didn't succeed in his intent and returned upset and agitated to Berlin.

In the meanwhile, the news of the German-Soviet pact of non-aggression was met with shock in Rome. Indeed, this was the umpteenth unexpected event for the Italian government, that wasn't informed about it. This was another warning signal to Attolico who perfectly understood the meaning of an agreement between Hitler and Stalin; indeed, the alliance with the Soviet Union would have prevented a conflict on two fronts for Germany. Since then, there was no other impediment for Hitler to invade Poland.

At the same time, Ciano urged the Duce on the necessity to avoid the Italian intervention in the conflict that would have been the ruin of the nation, unless Italy wasn't provided with the necessary means for conducting the war. Having made this decision, Attolico was given the task to inform Hitler of the Italian needs. This time the Italian refusal was unequivocal, even if it was hidden behind the pretext of the lack of resources. From this arose that exaggerated list of military requirements that served to keep Italy out of the conflict. Given the situation, Hitler could not rely on the Italian military help. The peace in Italy was safe for the moment. Attolico was satisfied with the result.

However, it is necessary to stress the efforts made by Attolico to save peace in Europe. On the 22nd of August, Hitler, probably referring to Attolico, confessed to his generals: "I only fear that, at the last moment, one of those rascals might propose another mediation plan."⁵⁷ Indeed, until the last moments, he tried to persuade Ciano and Mussolini to mediate between Berlin and Warsaw. Anyway, he could not do much more because soon after, on the 1st of September 1939, the fights in Poland began. To Attolico, any last chance of mediation faded when a few days later France and Great Britain sent an ultimatum to Germany for the immediate suspension of the fights. That was the start of the Second World War.

In the initial part of the conflict, Italy availed itself of the formula of non-belligerency, which Attolico wanted to defend at all costs, even against von Ribbentrop that never

⁵⁷ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler; La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 176

missed an opportunity to emphasize the affinity of the destinies of Italy and Germany. However, despite the efforts of Attolico in Berlin and of Ciano in Rome, Italy started to get closer to the intervention alongside Hitler. Indeed, refraining the Duce's belligerent instincts became harder and moreover, he was blinded by the initial German victories. Given these sentiments, Mussolini started to make dangerous statements to the Nazi leadership. In particular, in occasion of the incident of the British seizure of some Italian ships and the German offer to increase the exportations of coal, Mussolini confessed to von Ribbentrop that he hoped in an upcoming Italian intervention.

Attolico was losing his battle. Moreover, he was destabilized by the illness that affected him (a cardiopathy that would have caused his death in a few years).

von Ribbentrop took advantage of Attolico's conditions in order to tell Mussolini that the ambassador was a *persona non grata*.⁵⁸ That was the end of Attolico's mandate in Berlin. When he learnt of this episode, he commented: "I'm not a convenient figure in Berlin! I don't have any doubt that in Rome they accepted this request."⁵⁹

The destitution of the diplomat caused a great displeasure in the staff of the embassy that commented: "We are losing a great teacher and Italy is losing a loyal servant and a brave patriot."⁶⁰ This statement serves to underline the great esteem that the diplomat earned in this environment.

He was assigned to the embassy in the Vatican, where he concluded his career. He left forever the Berlin embassy on the 11th of May 1940. However, before leaving he made a consideration on his work as a diplomat that is worthy of note: "Regarding us diplomats, we have to be like soldiers. But intelligent soldiers... We have to obey to our government, and, at the same time, we never stop to advise and enlighten it, even if it doesn't want to hear our advice. I have always followed this course of action and I will not depart from it until the end."⁶¹

⁵⁸ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 186

⁵⁹ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 186

⁶⁰ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, pp. 187-188

⁶¹ G. Falanga, *L'avamposto di Mussolini nel Reich di Hitler, La politica italiana a Berlino (1933-1945)*, Milan: Tropea, 2011, p. 187

CONCLUSION

This historical research was aimed at exploring the course of the Italian foreign policy during the fascist era. The purpose was to analyze the activity of three key figures of the fascist diplomacy: Galeazzo Ciano, Giuseppe Bastianini and Bernardo Attolico.

All these men were important personalities of the Italian foreign relations, that served in different positions their country during a period full of complexities and unique happenings. Through their work and experience, it was possible to reconstruct the events that led to the shift in direction that fascism gave to foreign policy and the department from the traditional and liberal diplomatic culture.

The decision landed on these three figures, since they came from different backgrounds and had diverse inclinations: an ambitious politician within the regime but without a solid ideological conviction, an early adherent to fascism and later on diplomat, and a technocrat and diplomat with a prefascist formation. Although, all of them were associated by their opposition to the pro-German policy (even if belated in the case of Ciano) and their strenuous struggle for the perversion of peace.

In concluding this research, I will briefly revisit the successes and the dark points in the work of Ciano, Bastianini and Attolico within the framework of diplomacy during the fascist era. However, a necessary preamble is first required: it is exceedingly difficult to assess their actions, particularly to separate the shadows from the highlights, as they lived and operated in a complex and controversial historical period. Indeed, they experienced not only the fascist dictatorship and the Second World War (at least partially in the case of Attolico, who didn't see the end of the conflict since he died on the 9th of February 1942), but also the blatant imperialism, ideologically celebrated as a sign of power and strength by all European countries. Indeed, their successes may be viewed from a different perspective in current times.

The first figure on whom I decided to focus my research was Ciano, since he, more than others, bore significant responsibilities for the trajectory that the Italian foreign policy assumed in the last years of the regime. At the start of his career, he was a promising young man, endowed with strong intellectual capabilities, that entered the diplomatic

career in 1924. In that environment, he gave proof of good skills; especially during his mandate in China where he managed to establish good economic and political Italo-Chinese relations. However, it might be licit to say that his most successful job was the one as chief of Mussolini's press office, where he did an impressive work. Holding this position, he managed to consolidate the regime and the figure of Mussolini. Indeed, he immediately understood how the propagandistic tools were useful to build up consensus among the population, and for this purpose, he incremented the number of instruments that could be used for fascist propaganda and created more institutions in order to render the press office more efficient.

Afterwards, he became minister of foreign affairs. He was named in 1936, becoming the youngest foreign minister in the international panorama. This role was unquestionably the one that solidified Ciano's legacy in history and decisively influenced the course of the future events. Indeed, he was responsible for the initiation of the pro-German policy. Even if he was not the sole architect of it, he had the guilt to foment Mussolini in following this new policy. Given the German military power, Ciano probably believed that Italy could leverage on an alliance to advance its interests and to reinforce its imperialistic ambitions. In believing so, Ciano made the serious error to underestimate the German revisionism; given its military and economic superiority and its richness of raw materials, it was unrealistic to think that Italy could exploit Germany rather than the other way around. Indeed, Ciano more than once defined Germany as a simple "ground for maneuvers"⁶². Given these premises, it was predictable that Italy wouldn't have been at the head of the alliance. He demonstrated a lack of long-term vision in Italian foreign policy, and his reliance on Germany and alignment with Hitler's foreign policy placed Italy in a subordinate position, restricting its diplomatic activity and leading to the isolation of Italy in the international panorama.

In other words, Ciano committed the error to depart from the traditional foreign policy that envisioned Italy as maintaining an equidistant stance from all the European countries and conferred a mediating role to the nation. If Italy had kept that position, it would have been able to maintain relations with every country and to stay at the center of the European balances, having more freedom of action. Moreover, the other blame of Ciano was his inability to exert a moderating influence on the Duce. For instance, in the case of the Iron

⁶² G.B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano, Una vita (1903-1944)*, Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019, p. 281

Pact (when Ciano was already becoming anti-German), his blind obedience prevented him from acting against the Duce's decisions. And even when he decided to openly oppose the Duce, it was too late to disentangle Italy from Germany. However, it is also important to make a consideration: although Ciano's efforts to curb the pro-German policy were belated, it is also true that influencing Mussolini was particularly hard, since his reluctance to follow any advice.

Although, it is right to remember his final efforts to preserve peace and his subsequent betrayal of Mussolini, through which Ciano to a certain extent managed to redeem himself from his earlier passivity and adherence to the reckless pro-German policy.

The second personality that I took into consideration was Bastianini, due to his early participation to the fascist party. Indeed, we might observe that among all the other discussed characters, he was the one that most embodied the fascist ideology. He held prominent positions within the party and became a high-ranking politician and afterwards, he was made diplomat through direct appointment. On these premises, it is licit to think that Bastianini was a man that owed all his fortunes to the regime. He was then appointed as undersecretary of foreign affairs under the direction of Ciano. However, he failed to play a significant role in delineating the Italian foreign policy, due to the monopoly of action held by Ciano and Mussolini. Indeed, in that occasion Bastianini could only conform to the directives of his superiors. However, regarding the reproachment to Germany, he deserved credit for having recognized the detrimental alliance with Berlin earlier than many others. Despite his limited influence, he conveyed his opposition to Germany from the outset. Instead in the diplomatic field Bastianini had a major freedom of action, in particular during his mandate in London. He was one of the ambassadors that best represented the Italian interests in a country considered "hostile" and employed every possible mean to bring Italy closer to Great Britain and France. Moreover, during times of crises, he managed to handle difficult situations and to find diplomatic solutions aimed at minimizing the international damage for Italy.

However, his efforts were consistently thwarted by Mussolini, and at the end he failed to negotiate with the western powers and to prevent the Italian intervention in the conflict.

To sum up, despite his initial unpreparedness, he was a realistic, sensible and balanced figure. Indeed, Bastianini had discrete diplomatic successes (for instance in Warsaw) and engaged good relations between Italy and other countries. However, he failed in having a

positive influence on the political choices of Ciano and Mussolini and in curbing the anti-Western shift in Italian foreign policy. Although, it is necessary to say that these failures didn't depend on his will but rather on that of Mussolini.

The last person to whom I dedicated my research was Attolico, since he witnessed in first person the consolidation of the Italo-German relations. He was certainly the diplomat that fought most vehemently against the policy of alignment with Germany and for the peace preservation in Europe. He was regarded as a skilled diplomat and was respected and holden in high consideration in his environment; this eventually enabled him to maintain relationships between hierarchs of the Nazi regime. However, just like Ciano, he made the initial mistake to rely on the alliance with Germany for the pursuing of the Italian interests. Although, he never wished for the isolation of Italy in the international panorama, and for this reason he suggested caution to his government. As Hitler's foreign policy became more aggressive and ruthless, he urged for an early separation from Germany. Moreover, he is credited with the establishment of the Munich Conference for the resolution of the Czech crisis and in fact, he is recognized for having succeeded in temporarily preserving European peace. Although, beyond that occasion, he couldn't limit anymore the German expansionism by means of diplomacy and to prevent the Polish invasion.

Moreover, he failed in exerting a moderating function on Mussolini that ignored the many admonishments of Attolico. Nevertheless, the diplomat never stopped to advise the Italian government about the dangers of the Italo-German alliance, and even after the Iron Pact, he pushed his government to not follow Germany in the conflict. Given his resistance to the pro-German policy and his continuous contrasts with von Ribbentrop, Attolico incurred the wrath of the German authorities, who obtained his dismissal as ambassador in Berlin. In conclusion, the career of Attolico included numerous diplomatic successes, and indeed he was able to significantly improve the Italian relations with other countries. However, he failed in extricating Italy from the alliance with Germany and in refraining Mussolini in following the ally in the Second World war. Even if, this failure wasn't his responsibility at all, given the fact that he was repeatedly ignored.

To conclude, these three figures of the Italian diplomacy played an important role in the dramatic events that involved fascists Italy. However, even though these individuals were

unable to avoid the unfavorable course of the events that Italy encountered, the responsibility of this failure can't be attributed solely to their actions.

It is certainly true that some of them implemented and approved controversial policies, such as the one regarding the alliance with Germany (in particular in the case of Ciano and Attolico), but it is equally true that when these men sought to act rightly, they were often obstructed by the irrationality and inflexibility of the Duce that *de facto* held the monopoly of the decision-making power in foreign policy. Indeed, it was particularly difficult to curb Mussolini and to temper his hasty and impetuous nature. As Augusto Rosso, another important diplomat that served during the regime, remembered in a volume that documents the history of the Italian diplomatic activity: "That the path he followed was not the right one; that the methods used, of which he was certainly the foremost responsible were often wrong, inconsistent and dangerous; that his decisions were driven sometimes by the wounded self-love or sudden mood changes: all this is something that the impartial historian can't avoid stating..."⁶³

Hence, at the end it is challenging to render a completely negative judgment on a diplomacy that consistently (or nearly consistently) acted in the interest of Italy, while operating within the constraints imposed by an authoritarian regime.

⁶³ A. Rosso, *Quattro momenti della diplomazia italiana*, "Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali" 21, No. 3, 1954, p. 421

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