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The Opening of the Italian Legation in Belgrade in 1879 and Relations between Serbs and Italians in the 19th Century

Abstract: This essay focuses on the opening of the Italian diplomatic Legation in Belgrade in 1879 after the Serbia's independence. This new beginning of the Serbian-Italian political relations is seen in the framework of the reorientation of the Italian foreign policy after the fall of the French Second Empire and the rise of the Imperial Germany. A great role in this process was played by Count Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano, former Secretary General of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Kingdom. He was entrusted to open the Italian Legation in Belgrade and in Bucharest, thus inaugurating a new phase of the Italian action in South-eastern Europe and the Eastern affairs. This question is analyzed in a broader chronological space such as the long tradition of cultural and political exchanges between Serbs and Italians during the epoch of the national Risorgimento.

Keywords: Italy, Serbia, diplomatic relations, Risorgimento

On 26 September 1879, Count Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano (1836–1908) arrived in Belgrade as extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister.¹ The Legation of Italy was opened, and thus the newly independent Principality of Serbia and the Kingdom of Italy, which had been ruled for a few years by the historical Left, established stable diplomatic relations. As is well known, however, the political relations between Italians and Serbs were much older and dated back at least thirty years, to the time of the revolutions of 1848. Therefore, this paper is divided into two thematic parts. The first traces, in broad strokes, the highlights of those relations through most of the 19th century, up to the moment when Serbia gained independence in 1878, following the decisions of the Congress of Berlin. The second deals with the events that led to the opening of the Italian Legation, seen as a moment of reworking of Rome's policy towards Belgrade and framed in the perspective of the above mentioned long

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¹ Historical and diplomatic archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter ASDMAE), Rome, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Italy (hereinafter MAERI), b.1411: Tornielli to Cairoli, Belgrade, September 26th 1879.

tradition of political relations and constituting the ground on which the Italian government set the policy of the newly unified Italy towards the small Serbian state.

1. Serbs and Italians in the Risorgimento

The reconstruction of Serbian-Italian relations during the Risorgimento has been fruitfully carried out throughout the 20th century and has often been inevitably affected by the different phases that marked the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia and, more recently, by the events that took place on the other shore of the Adriatic in the 1990s.² During the 19th century, the relations between Serbs and Italians became relevant due, firstly, to the common aspiration to form their respective nation-states that were to give political recognition to an already culturally formed nation. The outcomes of those historical paths were rather dissimilar due to the different political and economic conditions in which the two peoples found themselves, but also due to their different historical and cultural traditions. Yet, starting from the revolutions of 1848, thanks to the initiative of the ruling class of the Kingdom of Sardinia, relations between the Serbs and the Italians became concrete and, in the period between 1849 and 1878, the Principality and the Serbian communities of the Habsburg Monarchy were seen by the Italian political elites (both moderate and democratic) as the nexus of the Eastern Question and the place where there was the highest chance of a change in the international balance of powers.

Before 1849, direct relations between the Serbs and Italian society were sporadic. One may mention here the Piedmontese doctor Bartolomeo Silvestro Cuniberti, personal doctor and associate of Prince Miloš Obrenović, who published a work on Serbian affairs in the first half of the 19th century.³ Moreover, in the work of great patriots and intellectuals, such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Niccolò Tommaseo (just to mention two of the most relevant), interest in the Slavic world and, consequently, in the Serbs and Serbia existed even in the years preceding the Revolutions of 1848.⁴ An attentive observer of the international

² A. D'Alessandri, "Afterword" In S. K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia. La storia al di là del nome*, (Trieste: Beit, 2010), 321–332; A. D'Alessandri, "La dissoluzione della Jugoslavia e i Balcani visti dall'Italia". In *Dopo la pioggia. Gli Stati della ex Jugoslavia e l'Albania (1991–2011)*, ed. Antonio D'Alessandri and Armando Pitassio, (Lecce: Argo, 2011), 17–33.

³ B.-S. Cunibert, *Essai historique sur les revolutions et l'indépendance de la Serbie depuis 1804 jusqu'à 1850* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1855).

⁴ J. Pirjevec, "Mazzini e gli slavi dell'Austria e della Turchia" In *Mazzini e il mazzinianesimo* (Atti del XIV Congresso di storia del Risorgimento italiano (Roma: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1974), 301–412; by the same author, *Niccolò Tommaseo tra Italia e Slavia* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1977); N. Stipčević, *Dva preporoda. Studije o italijansko-srpskim*

reality of his time, such as the Piedmontese historian and politician Cesare Balbo, could draw attention to certain internal political events in the Serbian Principality, which took place between 1842 and 1843, and which led to the change of the ruling princely family (from the Obrenović to the Karađorđević dynasty).⁵ In the two-year revolutionary period of 1848–1849, the first direct relations of the Savoy Piedmont with the political world of the Serbian Principality were established. The interconnection between Italian affairs and the Eastern question was then clearly identified. The first official Italian diplomatic mission to Belgrade was dispatched in 1849. It was entrusted to Consul Marcello Cerruti, an envoy of the government of the Kingdom of Sardinia, headed by Vincenzo Gioberti. At the beginning of that year, in fact, as the war effort against Austria was being reorganised, the Autonomous Principality of Serbia was attributed a strategic function and a key role in the framework of both the ongoing struggle in Hungary against the Habsburgs and as the link that connected it with the Italian question. The Sardinian consul's mission was part of the Italo-Hungarian political arrangements aimed at cooperation between Turin and Pest in the struggle against Austria, their common enemy.⁶ When the Sardinian consulate in Belgrade closed towards the end of 1849, due to the failure of the Piedmontese initiatives in the war that took place in March of that year, the diplomat who, albeit indirectly, continued to follow Serbian political life was Baron Romualdo Tecco, Minister Resident of the King of Sardinia in Constantinople.⁷ A firm believer in the intimate dependency between the Eastern Question and the Italian question, he continued in the following years to contribute, from his post in Constantinople, to the elaboration of an eastern policy of the Savoy kingdom, laying the ground for the policy pursued shortly afterwards by Cavour.

The post-1849 relations between Serbs and Italians can be divided into two phases: firstly, those linked to the unification of the Peninsula, which lasted from the 1850s until 1861 and, secondly, those of the 1860s, which saw the Ital-

kulturnim i političkim vezama u XIX veku (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1979), 13–61; more recently: A. D'Alessandri, "L'eupeismo mazziniano tra teoria e realtà: il caso degli slavi del Sud". In *Dalla Giovine Europa alla Grande Europa*, ed. Francesco Guida (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 129–146.

⁵ A. D'Alessandri, "Cesare Balbo e la Serbia", *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, CIV II (2017), 7–24.

⁶ P. Fornaro, *Risorgimento italiano e questione ungherese (1848–1867). Marcello Cerruti e le intese politiche italo-magiare* (Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 1995); G. Quazza, "La politica orientale e balcanica del Regno sardo nel 1848–49", *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, XXXV II-IV (1948), 151–167.

⁷ G. Quazza, "La politica orientale sarda nei dispacci del Tecco (1850–1856)", *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, XLVIII IV (1961), 663–680.

ians grappling with the Venetian question and the Serbs in the Principality attempting to lead a movement to liberate South-eastern Europe from Ottoman domination. Sardinian consular personnel were therefore constantly present in Belgrade; suffice it to mention here the names of Francesco Fortunato Astengo and Stefano Scovasso, the last representative of Savoy Piedmont, who succeeded Eugenio Durio in February 1861, and the first consul of the new Kingdom of Italy (until the end of 1867).⁸

Regarding the first phase, let us recall that the Kingdom of Sardinia, following the Treaty of Paris of 1856, became one of the six protector states of the Ottoman Empire's Christian populations and states. However, Cavour's initiative for an active policy on the Danube began shortly afterwards, at the end of 1858 when, after the Plombières Agreement, a war with Austria was again being prepared. The idea was then to reorganise an insurrection against the Danubian monarchy among the various nationalities subject to it, such as Serbs, Croats, Romanians and Hungarians. In fact, an attempt was made to readapt the strategy of 1849 to the new situation and the changed international context, while at the same time attempting to coordinate the official diplomatic actions with the covert and parallel action of grassroots initiatives, which could be traced back to the democratic and revolutionary line-up of European national movements. In this context, the Principality of Serbia once again took on fundamental strategic importance in the eyes of the subalpine ruling class. It was thus decided to reopen a consulate in Belgrade in March 1859, a task entrusted to the aforementioned Astengo.

During the two-year period of Italian national unification (1858–60), however, despite the absence of concrete moments of collaboration between Serbs and Italians, Count Cavour pursued a policy towards the Ottoman Empire and its vassal governments informed by the conviction, already present in the intuitions of the Polish prince Adam Czartoryski and others, that the regeneration of Europe and the solution of national problems would be possible through a broad rethinking of the international political framework, then strongly influenced by the Eastern Question.⁹

⁸ Lj. Banjanin, "Francesco Fortunato Astengo, console del Regno sardo a Belgrado", *Studi piemontesi*, XXVIII 1 (1999), 181–198; about S. Scovasso (1816–1887) si veda *La formazione della diplomazia nazionale (1861–1915)*, *Repertorio bio-bibliografico dei funzionari del Ministero degli Affari esteri* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello Stato, 1987), 668–669.

⁹ A. Tamborra, *Cavour e i Balcani* (Turin: Ilte, 1958). About Czartoryski, whose character has been studied in detail by various historians, we could cite two older works: M. Handelsman, *Czartoryski, Nicholas 1er et la question du Proche Orient* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1934) and by E. Di Nolfo, *Adam Jerzy Czartoryski e il Congresso di Parigi* (Padua: Marsilio, 1964).

The authorities in Belgrade, however, were not fully prepared to commit themselves directly to an eventual conflict against the Habsburg “giant”. Just as in 1848–49 a cautious approach had been maintained (the influx of Serbian volunteers across the Danube had been favoured, but there had been no direct intervention by the Principality), so in the face of the war events involving France, the Kingdom of Sardinia and Austria in 1859, Belgrade remained on the sidelines. Significant in this regard is a remark by Ilija Garašanin, who was not in political office at the time. In April of that year, he wrote a memorandum entitled *Nekoliko reči o ratu u Italiji* (A few remarks on the war in Italy) in which he saw the Italian unification process as a model to be followed rather than an ally with whom to conduct a common struggle. He was aware of the profound differences between Italy and Serbia on the one hand and between Italy and the Danubian (Austria) and Balkan (Turkey) worlds on the other. This made a concrete alliance hardly feasible. Instead, it was possible to skilfully insert oneself into the diplomatic game of the Powers, as the Kingdom of Sardinia was trying to do at the time, in order to realise its objectives.¹⁰

Having reached the goal of national unification, the newly-born Italy, towards the end of 1861, reduced its activism in the Danubian-Balkan area and, consequently, in Serbia. The Savoyard Piedmont was replaced by the new unified Kingdom, i.e. a state with major internal adjustment problems and considerable international responsibilities. Grappling with the problems related to the recent proclamation of unity and, above all, fighting for its own international recognition, Italy, led by Baron Bettino Ricasoli, settled in those months on conciliatory positions essentially aimed at keeping the Balkan region quiet. In particular, it was vital for the Italian government, at least at that delicate moment, to obtain an agreement between the Christian populations and the Ottomans. The instructions sent to Constantinople to Marcello Cerruti (then the regent of the Constantinople Legation) had the same tone: “a policy of conciliation seems to us to be in the present conditions the healthiest and most useful for both sides”.¹¹ In this way, Ricasoli hoped, no disagreements would arise with the Sublime Porte and the other Powers, nor would Italy lose the sympathy of the Christian populations of the East.

About a year after the Unification, in June 1862, a crisis broke out between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire, following the Turkish shelling of Belgrade. This was the first important international test of the Kingdom of Italy, in which the representatives of Victor Emmanuel II's government, found them-

¹⁰ D. Mackenzie, *Ilija Garašanin: Balkan Bismarck* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1985), 224–226.

¹¹ Ricasoli to Cerruti, Turin, 12th December 1861. In *I documenti diplomatici italiani* (hereinafter DDI), series I, vol. I, 525–526.

selves defending, before the plenipotentiaries of the Great Powers of Europe, the legitimacy of the recently completed unification process and Victor Emmanuel II's new title of King of Italy, and no longer of Sardinia.¹² However, the era of the struggles of the Risorgimento was drawing to a close and it was precisely in that phase that the new eastern and Balkan policy of the Kingdom of Italy began to take shape, amidst many contradictions. In this new policy, there was no longer any place, at least from the point of view of the governments in office, for revolutionary solutions to problems (both internally and externally).

In essence, the dilemma of Italian-Serbian political relations immediately after unification was as follows: to count on the potential of the government in Belgrade, and possibly also of the national movements in South-eastern Europe, for the completion of Italian unification or to initiate its own autonomous power policy to achieve this goal? This contradiction was present throughout the 1860s and up to the Capture of Rome in 1870, although on several occasions (for instance, the alliance with Prussia in 1866) the latter option seemed more preferable, although without losing sight of the former. Perhaps it was also this hesitation that was the reason for the dubious results achieved in foreign policy by the Kingdom of Italy in the 1860s. After the annexation of Veneto, a new chapter opened. The Italian foreign policy after 1866 increasingly evolved into the policy of a Great Power, which was entering by right into the vast game in which the Eastern interests of the major European states had been pitted against each other for more than half a century. The words used by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Di Campello, in July 1867, effectively summed up the policy of the Kingdom of Italy at the end of the 1860s with regard to eastern affairs and, therefore, Serbia as well: "[...] any upheaval that could take eastern affairs off the peaceful track cannot be favourable to the real interests of Italy, which for many reasons is being led at this time to concentrate all efforts on the reorganisation of its internal affairs."¹³

In short, for an open competition with the Great Powers, Italy had to wait until it too became a true Great Power: an autonomous action of the new unitary state in the eastern concert, moreover, would not have been conceivable as long as, due to its position in the international framework, determined by its still incomplete unification, Italy was forced to maintain a waiting position which, especially after the fall of the Second French Empire, meant isolation.

¹² A. D'Alessandri, "The Muslim Question in Serbia: the 1862 Bombardment of Belgrade and the Newborn Kingdom of Italy". In *Italy's Balkan Strategies (19th-20th century)*, ed. V. G. Pavlović, (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2014), 29–43.

¹³ Instructions given by Minister of Foreign Affairs Di Campello to Minister Caracciolo di Bella in St. Petersburg on July 29th 1867 in DDI, series I, vol. IX, 91.

Until 1878, therefore, Italian foreign policy was essentially one of settling and repositioning in an era of great change.

With the fall of the Right in 1876, it was the men of the Left who represented Italy at the Berlin Congress. On that occasion, Italy was too weak to implement an energetic policy and the government in Rome was left empty-handed. After all, it had not asked for anything, not least because Italian politicians were still loyal to their Risorgimento cultural background of respecting the principle of nationality on which the new unitary state had been founded. For the time being, therefore, a neutral attitude to the Eastern Question continued to be maintained, also because the men in power felt mostly distant from the issues of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. The problems they perceived as closer were the balance in the Mediterranean (the Tunisian question) and the relationship with France, as well as the question of irredentist lands (relations with Austria-Hungary) and, later, attempts at colonial expansion. However, as Pietro Pastorelli has observed, a new element in the Left's foreign policy was that, thanks to the alliance with Germany, both the problem of the country's strategic security and that of the completion of unification could be solved, favouring a gradual "reorientation" of Austria in accordance with the concepts of Cesare Balbo.¹⁴

2. *The opening of the Italian Legation in Belgrade*

The new season of Italo-Serbian relations in the aftermath of the Congress of Berlin must therefore be seen taking into account this new element, i.e. the tendency towards greater collaboration with the Imperial Germany as well as the long tradition of relations during the previous decades, of which the most salient points have been summarised so far. Finally, it must be remembered that a not insignificant role in the choices concerning Italian diplomacy in those years was also played by the complex rotation and rationalisation of diplomatic personnel and representations abroad.

This circumstance, i.e. the fact that Italian foreign policy was in a phase of transition and transformation in the period between the end of the Second French Empire and Italy's accession to the Triple Alliance, did not mean losing sight of or neglecting issues relating to the Balkans and so-called European Turkey, which had long been the table around which the interests of the European Powers were compared. In addition to the major figures that directed foreign policy at the time, there were also other leading figures in Italian diplomacy who

¹⁴ P. Pastorelli, "Il principio di nazionalità nella politica estera italiana". In *Nazione e nazionalità in Italia*, ed. Giovanni Spadolini (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1994), 188.

hoped for a repositioning of the country's international status. Although with decidedly more Austrophobic accents, some figures, such as Count Giuseppe Tornielli, were advocates of a rapprochement with imperial Germany.

Before going to Serbia, the Piedmontese diplomat had been Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry from April 1876 to December 1878.¹⁵ In his unpublished diary from those years, Tornielli noted down some remarks on the effects French foreign policy could have on Italy and stated (in June 1877) that “never will Italy place itself in a field where it will not be alongside Germany. Union with Germany is our strength against those who would attempt to undermine our national existence”.¹⁶ Tornielli was convinced of the solidity of the relations between Rome and Berlin and identified it as the cornerstone of future Italian foreign policy. At a time when the Eastern Question was increasingly attracting the attention of European governments, the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry was expressing deep concern about the plans for the territorial enlargement of Austria-Hungary to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, about which there were various rumours in diplomatic circles. He saw such a possibility as a serious threat to Italy. Tornielli's diary once again contains extensive remarks on this issue, in particular the pages dedicated to the conversation he had with Robert von Keudell, Germany's ambassador to Rome. The German diplomat had observed that Italian objections against a possible Austro-Hungarian enlargement in the Balkans aroused the suspicion that they might attempt to obtain territorial adjustments to the detriment of Vienna, linking the question of Bosnia-Herzegovina to that of Trentino. Tornielli denied such a scenario and observed that the real problem lay in the increase of Austria-Hungary's power and influence in the Balkans and the Adriatic, thus causing damage to Italy. He summarised the position of the government in Rome as follows: “We have never asked and do not ask Austria to cede an inch of land to us. [...]. Our demands were always limited to preserving the status quo of military forces between Austria and Italy in such a way that sooner or later the Empire would not succeed in regaining a predominance over Italy that would be fatal not only to our interests but also to those of the other great powers that see in the independent existence of Italy a guarantee of their own”.¹⁷ Tornielli finally expressed to

¹⁵ On Tornielli's personality see: E. Serra, “Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano”, *Storia e politica*, III 3 (1963), 336–363.

¹⁶ State Archives of Forlì-Cesena (hereinafter ASFC), Forlì, Tornielli Brusati Family Archives, b. 2: note dated June 29th 1877. The unpublished diary of Giuseppe Tornielli covers a rather limited period of time, from June 12th 1876 to December 30th 1877. It mainly contains information about the meetings and conversations he had with various foreign diplomatic figures in the domain of his function as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*: note from July 2nd 1877.

his interlocutor his conviction that a weakened Italy subjected to the dominance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would be contrary to the interests of Germany itself, from which he therefore expected political and diplomatic support.

In a meeting with the British ambassador in Rome, Augustus Paget, which took place a few weeks later, he also observed, specifying his ideas, "that the enlargement of Austria in Bosnia and Herzegovina also affects German interests in that it materially and morally weakens Italy, the natural ally of Germany"¹⁸ and that "in the position of Italy in relation to France and in relation to Austria there is no difference. The moral or material enlargement of one or the other of those two states constitutes a danger for us". Tornielli, in short, was convinced that a genuine balance of power had to be maintained between Italy and its two neighbouring powers to the west and east. The position of the government in Rome was to maintain the status quo, in compliance with the provisions of international treaties, but if the French and Austro-Hungarian neighbours had taken action that compromised the balance between the Powers, then the circumstances would have required Italy to act to obtain the necessary compensation.¹⁹

These ideas, explicitly expressed as they were conveyed in a personal and private diary, provide a framework for understanding not only the spirit in which Tornielli travelled to Belgrade in the autumn of 1879, but also for enriching our knowledge of Italy's foreign policy decision-making processes in those years. Tornielli had a broad and articulate vision of what Rome's foreign policy strategy should have been and it is worth mentioning here one aspect that was fundamental to him: the importance of affairs concerning the Ottoman Empire and the relations between the Powers within the framework of the Eastern Question: "The most pressing concern facing Italy at this time is towards the East".²⁰ Within this framework, however, there were also less convincing considerations by the Italian diplomat, who went so far as to suggest a bold comparison between the Balkans at that time and the organisation of the Italian peninsula in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, revealing an attitude towards those regions with an imperialistic undertone and a substantial underestimation of the national problems of those peoples:

Let us see, for example, whether it is convenient [...] to allow small states without a life of their own to form on the Balkan peninsula, which will necessarily fall into the orbit of Austrian or Russian influence; whether it is in our common interest that a struggle for influence between Austria and Russia be engaged in, which would create a permanent state of unrest in Europe; whether it would not be more advantageous for us and for you to give the small political entities a

¹⁸ Ibidem: note from July 29th 1877.

¹⁹ Ibidem: note from July 30th 1877.

²⁰ Ibidem: note from July 29th 1877.

federative bond, whether it would not be preferable to patronise the formation of secondary states of sufficient importance, to extend Greece, to do something with Montenegro, with Serbia finally, to establish a political system on the Balkan peninsula similar to that established in Italy in 1815, and which in truth had only one very serious defect, that of violating the national sentiment of our country, whereas the Balkan peninsula, populated by different nationalities, would offer no such drawbacks in this respect.²¹

These assumptions, taken mainly from Torielli's private papers, have the advantage of offering a "behind the scenes" look at the Italian attitude towards Serbia and the Balkans, less conditioned by the official formulas of diplomatic correspondence and, probably, more frank and original. The opening of the Italian Legation in Belgrade, where, before Torielli's arrival, only a consular agency was active, run by Luigi Joannini Ceva di San Michele, should also be placed in this framework. After the crisis of 1875–78, the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin had obliged the Balkan states and, therefore, Serbia as well, to implement a series of internal reforms that, once accomplished, would have given the go-ahead for official recognition by the Powers and, consequently, the opening of stable diplomatic relations.²² In the Italian diplomatic documentation concerning Serbia between the summer of 1878 and that of the following year, three main issues stand out: the delineation of the new borders (an international military commission was set up to this end, in which Italy also participated), respect for minority rights (especially of the Jewish community) and, above all, relations with Austria-Hungary, to which the Principality was increasingly bound, not only politically but also economically (exclusive railway concessions, trade agreements and a customs union to be realised within three years).²³ Therefore, the increased importance of Serbia for Italian diplomacy is unsurprising, precisely in light of the energetic Austro-Hungarian actions towards the Principality and the Balkans in general.

The project to open the Legation in Belgrade was tackled in Rome at the same time as the opening of the Legation in Bucharest, another post considered fundamental for Italian interests in Eastern Europe. Delays, especially in Romania, in the application of certain clauses of the Treaty of Berlin had delayed the start of the two new missions. Finally, in the autumn of 1879, Giuseppe Torielli was appointed to inaugurate stable relations with both Serbia and Romania, at a time when negotiations for the international recognition of Romanian indepen-

²¹ *Ibidem*: note from July 30th 1877.

²² ASDMAE, MAERI, *Registri copialettere in partenza*, b. 1210: Depretis to Joannini, February 14th 1879.

²³ ASDMAE, MAERI, b. 1411: Joannini to Cairoli, Belgrade, July 22nd 1878.

dence were to be concluded.²⁴ From a personal point of view, the former Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry was firmly resolved to go to Bucharest and, in a letter to his wife confided that he would never give up unless he was immediately offered something better.²⁵ This uncertain situation dragged on for a few more weeks also because, in those very days, the second government led by Benedetto Cairoli was taking office. Tornielli, moreover, looked to Bucharest as his permanent destination while he had no intention of moving to Belgrade and taking up residence there.²⁶

In the days following the formation of the Cairoli government, therefore, the rotation of diplomatic personnel was arranged and it was decided to entrust Tornielli with that double mission in the two Balkan capitals: "The character of my mission in Belgrade will not change. I will go and open [...] the legation, but the mission will have to be essentially temporary."²⁷ The reasons for this choice were mainly organisational and financial, particularly the budget and diplomatic personnel available at that time.

Tornielli's first impressions of his new location were not enthusiastic. He described Belgrade as a large village, rather picturesque but lacking in any comforts. In addition to some practical difficulties, he joked about the small size and lack of prestige of the diplomatic corps accredited in the Serbian capital.²⁸ In general, Tornielli's private correspondence records his desire to move to Bucharest as soon as possible, considering his stay in Belgrade entirely transitory. On 7 October, he had an audience with Prince Milan and Foreign Minister Jovan Ristić. On that occasion, he was reminded of the commitment and favour that Italy had always shown towards Serbia over the past years.²⁹ This confirmed that the establishment of stable diplomatic relations with Serbia in 1879 was a natural step in the evolution of a long tradition of political ties. However, Tornielli was convinced that Italy's name and prestige alone was not enough to guar-

²⁴ See: D. Caccamo, "L'Italia, la Questione d'Oriente e l'indipendenza romana nel carteggio del consolato italiano a Bucarest (1870-1879)" *Storia e politica*, XVIII I (1979), 65-124.

²⁵ ASFC, Tornielli Brusati Family Archives, b. 6.1: Tornielli to Olga Rostopchine, Rome, July 11th 1879.

²⁶ *Ibidem*: Tornielli to his wife Olga Rostopchine, Acqui, August 19, 1879; About the various reasons why Tornielli was more in favor of Bucharest than Belgrade, among which we should not ignore the higher salary he received as the head of the mission in the Romanian capital. R. Dinu, "Giuseppe Tornielli Brusati di Vergano. Notes regarding his diplomatic mission in Romania 1878-1887", chapter in R. Dinu, *Studi italo-romeni. Diplomazia e società (1878-1914)*, (București: Editura Militară, 2009), 312-314.

²⁷ ASFC, Tornielli Brusati Family Archives, b. 6.1: Tornielli to his wife Olga Rostopchine, Acqui, August 22nd 1879.

²⁸ *Ibidem*: Tornielli to his wife Olga Rostopchine, Belgrade, September 28th 1879.

²⁹ ASDMAE, MAERI, b. 1411: Tornielli to Cairoli, Belgrade, October 10th 1879.

antee an important position in the Principality as: "Sympathy for Italy, as the embodiment of the new right of national determination, is weakened, but not extinguished. It will depend largely on us, I believe, to rekindle and revive this feeling. However, while we should not rush ahead of everyone, we must not be the last ones either".³⁰

After a couple of months in the Serbian capital, he finally arrived in Bucharest in late December, where he stayed until the end of 1887, when he was transferred to Madrid. The Italian government was about to recognise the independence of the Romanian Principality and, therefore, Torielli went there to inaugurate the Legation and stable relations between the two countries.³¹ He also formally held the post in Belgrade, which was in fact entrusted to Alberto Pansa, as *chargé d'affaires*.

Tornielli firmly believed in the importance of political relations between Italy and the countries of South-eastern Europe. In fact, he can be considered one of the advocates of strengthening these relations, even through the opening of structured diplomatic representations. In a letter to Benedetto Cairoli, dating back to his stay in Belgrade, Torielli considered it an absolute necessity for Italy to promote its influence in the region, taking advantage of the general sympathy of the population. Italy had a moral strength that allowed it "to re-establish in its favour the balance of forces that others could upset or break to our detriment". This also meant that the government in Rome should not subordinate its own policy to that of the other Powers; on the contrary, Italy had to promote its own initiatives. The moral strength with which Italy was endowed, according to Torielli, lay in the fact that "for the young nations that are rising, forming or developing in the European East, Italy is the embodiment of the fundamental and regenerating principle of European public law. As such, it is regarded as the advocate and apostle of the rights of peoples yearning for their national reconstitution".³²

Tornielli was nevertheless convinced that his stay in Belgrade had been useful to him and noted in 1879: "By coming here I have acquired a more complete and much clearer understanding of things in these countries that will be the theatre of events that will decide in Europe the question that I consider vital for Italy, of the preponderance of the new law of nations over the ancient system of the balance of states. The interest we have in reviving our influence in these

³⁰ ASDMAE, Fund Alberto Pansa, Correspondence, b. 6: Torielli to Alberto Pansa, Belgrade, October 3rd 1879.

³¹ ASDMAE, Fund Alberto Pansa, Diary (1875–1905), b. 1: note dated December 6th 1879.

³² ASFC, Torielli Brusati Family Archives, b. 1: sketch for Torielli's letter to Cairoli, October 19th 1879.

countries is such that I do not understand how Rome has not yet thought of recognising Rumenia". These considerations, of course, were also linked to the events surrounding his transfer. With respect to Serbia, Tornielli went on to say: "I personally believe that I have rendered a service to the cause of our influence in Serbia by offering to the Ministry to personally inaugurate our diplomatic relations with this principality, the importance of which we do not know or appreciate exactly how important it could be in certain scenarions".³³

Tornielli's activity in Belgrade, however, does not seem to have been particularly conspicuous, given his short stay in the Serbian capital. His main achievement was that he clearly emphasised the need for Italy to pursue an active policy in South-eastern Europe. In fact, in the following years, several diplomats took turns in Belgrade but none of them remained there permanently and thus failed to provide continuity to the Italian presence in Serbia. Only the arrival of Vittorio Sallier de la Tour in 1884 gave greater stability to the Legation.

In the diplomatic correspondence of those years, immediately following Serbia's independence, the recurring element that emerges is, as already mentioned, Austria-Hungary's impetuous political and economic action towards Belgrade. The extension of Vienna's influence in the Balkans, already ensured by the administration in Bosnia, also involved the establishment of close ties with the Balkan principality through economic investments and trade agreements. The issue of railway construction was one of the most effective tools used by the Austrians to increasingly bind Serbia to the Empire, and the political impact of this naturally did not escape the Italian representatives. On the other hand, the Austro-Hungarian government had not ignored the Austrophobic attitude of a man like Tornielli during his weeks in Serbia. The imperial foreign minister, von Haymerle, had complained about this to the Italian ambassador in Vienna, di Robilant, who wrote:

Count Tornielli during his stay in Belgrade would constantly explain his action in a hostile direction to Austria, pointing out to the Serbian government the dangers of the Austrian occupation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also advocating the idea of the Balkan League. Baron Haymerle added that Count Tornielli, now having to go to Bucharest, would do well not to explain his actions there in a manner equally hostile to Austria-Hungary, thus creating embarrassment for the imperial government.³⁴

³³ Ibidem, draft of Tornielli's letter to Depretis, November 4th 1879. The letter (the final version of this letter is preserved among Depretis' letters in the Central State Archives in Rome) is published in full in R. Dinu, "I Missi del Re. Note e documenti riguardanti la storia della Legazione italiana a Bucarest (1879-1914)", chapter in R. Dinu, *Studi italo-romeni*, 278-281.

³⁴ Di Robilant to Cairoli, Vienna, December 15th 1879, in DDI, s. II, XII, 371.

Moreover, the reputation of being an opponent of Rome's rapprochement with Vienna had followed Tornielli for several years. This was an uncommon orientation in the Italian diplomatic circles of the time, largely in favour of reconciliation with Austria-Hungary, which instead, according to Tornielli, should be opposed in its hegemonic programmes towards the Balkans.³⁵

However, the Italian governments, as we know, decided to make choices in a different direction, preferring to remain mostly spectators in the so-called Eastern Question. At the same time, however, Italian diplomacy and the governments in office were well aware of the importance of the two Principalities, Serbia as far as Rome's relations with Austria-Hungary were concerned and Romania as far as relations with St. Petersburg and, again, Vienna were concerned. As we can read in some of Tornielli's letters addressed to Carlo Alberto Maffei di Boglio (Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry) and Giacomo Malvano (Director of the Political Affairs Direction), a major problem was the lack of appropriate instruments: qualified personnel and financial resources that would finally allow Italy not to be a second-rate player in the Eastern Question.³⁶

Tornielli's wishes and proposals therefore did not find fertile ground at the Consulta and, very soon, both Serbia and Romania advanced their process of rapprochement with the Dual Monarchy. In Rome, too, the option of an alliance with Vienna was gaining ground. The alliance with Germany (which the representatives of the Left had hoped for some years already) and with its old rival, Austria-Hungary, gave more determination to the eastern and Balkan policies and strategies of the Kingdom of Italy, opening a completely new chapter even in relations with Serbia itself. The opening of the Italian Legation in Belgrade, therefore, must be interpreted as the epilogue of a long tradition of relations between Italians and Serbs during the 19th century, rooted in the common belief in the principle of nationality. At the same time, it was the starting point for a new season of political relations that, contrary to Count Tornielli's wishes, would long take place under the banner of the Habsburg imperial eagle.

³⁵ See the analysis of L. Monzali, *Italiani di Dalmazia. Dal Risorgimento alla Grande Guerra* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2004), 127.

³⁶ ASFC, Tornielli Brusati Family Archives, b. 1: Tornielli to Maffei, Belgrade, October 25th 1879, Tornielli to Malvano, October 25, 1879.

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