

# THE CONFEDERAL IDEA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMON STRUGGLE FOR THE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE OF THE ITALIANS AND THE PEOPLES OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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## Abstract

The confederal idea, as a panacea for the intricate situation in Central and Eastern Europe, spanned a large part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many Italian patriots showed an interest in it. Mazzini spoke of the confederation, while upholding the role reserved for the “historical nations,” Poland and Hungary. In his opinion, the Habsburg Empire was undoubtedly to be overthrown and Hungary was to gain full independence. Nevertheless—like the Czech František Palacký—he wanted to preserve a strong *État du centre* that would protect Central Europe from a Germanic or Russian expansion. That State would have been a Confederation with Hungary at the center, but with the respect of the rights of other nations. Garibaldi also dreamed of and proposed United States of Europe and a specific solution for the Central and Eastern regions. Very active, especially in 1862, was Marco Antonio Canini, a promoter of the confederal idea among the Hungarian exiles, Prince Cuza, the Serb Garašanin and the Greek and Bulgarian patriots. The international framework and the gradual success of nation-states prevented the implementation of the confederal projects in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More significant achievements of the confederal idea can be found in 19<sup>th</sup> century history.

**Keywords:** confederation, national awakening, Central and Eastern Europe.

The confederal idea, as a panacea for the intricate situation in Central and Eastern Europe, spanned a large part of the nineteenth century and continued to live, more or less fervently, in the twentieth century. In our century, it finds a *sui generis* application in the European Union, and is it not clear whether others applications of a different kind will be found. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the greater and the lesser Pan-Slavism (Russian and Polish, respectively) were not entirely far from

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<sup>1</sup> On the “protomartyr” of the Hellenic Risorgimento see *Rigas Fereos. La Rivoluzione, la Grecia, i Balcani*, ed. Lucia Marcheselli, Trieste, Lint 1999; and Francesco Guida, *La Grèce, les Principautés roumaines et l'étincelle de la révolution nationale: de Rigas Fereos à Tudor Vladimirescu*, in “Quaderni della casa romena di Venezia,” Bucharest, 2/2003, pp. 136–142.

that idea; Bakunin's project for the whole Eastern Slavia was fully immersed in it; the Trialistic projects of reform of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Austro-Slavism, were strongly imbued with it. On this confederal idea was based, moreover, the project (18<sup>th</sup> century, one thinks!) of the proto-martyr of the Greek Risorgimento, Rigas Fereos,<sup>1</sup> but Yugoslavian aspirations, whether Croatian or Serbian, were also close to it.

The confederal idea<sup>2</sup> was heard by some protagonists of Hungarian politics, especially those who lived in exile after the failure of the two-year revolutionary period of 1848–49, and of the war of independence from Austria. The same convictions were shared by some foreign, western observers, particularly in Italy.

Mazzini spoke of the confederation, while upholding the role reserved for the historical nations, Poland and Hungary.<sup>3</sup> Rather controversial was his idea about the Magyar Crown of St. Stephen, about which he had written much earlier (the well-known paper *Dell'Ungheria*, of 1833). He would have wanted a strong and vast Hungary to continue to exist as a major exponent of a Confederation including other states.<sup>4</sup> Although he never had any responsibility in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (with the brief exception of the Roman Republic, in 1849), it is clear that geopolitical considerations played a role in this opinion. The Habsburg Empire was undoubtedly to be overthrown and Hungary was to gain full independence. Nevertheless—as the Czech František Palacký also observed—one could not do without a strong *État du centre* that would protect Central Europe from a Germanic or Russian expansion. Therefore, Hungary not only had to be strong, but also to bring together other peoples in a confederal bond around Budapest. Faced with the resistance of Kossuth and other Hungarians to surrender some territories that were historically, but not ethnically Magyar, Mazzini came to recognize in 1856: “So Transylvania will never be Romanian? I am not saying this: I believe it will be. But I believe that insisting on it now is fatal and unpolitical.”<sup>5</sup> This sentence is not in line with the *tranchant* tone of Mazzini's oratory and it makes us precisely

<sup>2</sup> For a recent excursus on the limited success of this idea see Lázló Csorba, *I popoli dell'Europa centrale e l'idea ottocentesca della Confederazione danubiana*, in *Dalla Giovine Europa alla grande Europa*, ed. Francesco Guida, Rome, Carocci 2007, pp. 215–224.

<sup>3</sup> Among various articles, I recall here: Giuseppe Mazzini, *Nazionalità. Unitari e federalisti (1835)*, in *Scritti editi e inediti, Edizione nazionale*, Imola, Galeati, VI, pp. 3–41; Idem, *Nazionalità. Qualche idea su una costituzione nazionale (1835)*, ivi, VI, p. 127; Idem, *Un mot sur la question polonaise*, ivi, VII, p. 232. Compare the essential Giuseppe Pierazzi, *Mazzini e gli slavi dell'Austria e della Turchia*, in *Mazzini e il mazzinianesimo*, Atti del XLVI congresso di Storia del Risorgimento, Rome, 1974, and also Francesco Guida, *Mazzini e il problema delle nazionalità con particolare riguardo all'Europa orientale*, in *Le lotte secolari di italiani e bulgari per la creazione di uno Stato indipendente*, Sofia, Gutenberg 2006, pp. 299–321.

<sup>4</sup> He stated that “the new Europe tends to be constituted by masses, not by fractions”; see Giuseppe Mazzini, *Dell'Ungheria*, in *Scritti editi e inediti*, cit., III, pp. 87–127.

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Mazzini, Letter to N. Fabrizi, 21 April 1856, in *Scritti editi e inediti*, cit., LVI, p. 192.

understand how aware Mazzini was of the national contrasts, which prevented a satisfactory collaboration between the oppressed nationalities. He died before seeing the era of competing irredentism, typical of Central and Eastern Europe; however, he knew well and criticized the harsh clash between nationalities that took place during the two revolutionary years 1848–49, a conflict that played in favor of the Habsburgs and generally of the conservative powers. Against those counterproductive choices for the national revolutions, he tried to act, not unlike the Piedmont's rulers or the Polish exiles gathered around Czartoryski.<sup>6</sup> Everything was in vain and even *post res perditas*, waiting for a new and luckier opportunity, he was unable to fully reconcile the adverse national elites, mostly from other countries than his.

The confederal projects devised after 1849, some of which were novel compared to those of the thirties and forties, all remained on paper, both because of the decisive influence of international policy generally dictated by the major European governments and because it was impossible to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement between the parties. Mazzini himself, however, in designing confederations to solve the problems connected with the coexistence of different peoples in the same regions, made some mistakes. When, for example, he attributed to the Greek nation large territories inhabited by Slavic populations, he did not behave differently from Napoleon I who, a few decades earlier, had spoken of seven million Greeks,<sup>7</sup> underestimating one of the crucial problems of the European balance of the twentieth century. I am talking about Macedonia, the center of the so-called “powder keg of Europe.” He could not have imagined that it was precisely in Macedonia that the most striking case of nation-building would take place, thanks to a handful of stubborn intellectuals (such as Krste Misirkov),<sup>8</sup> nor the lasting Serbian-Bulgarian hostilities, nor, finally, the political choices of Tito. He knew, however, that even in the Balkans he was favoring a historic nation, Greece, which had also had the merit of being the first to awaken and reconstitute itself into a nation state (albeit incomplete). These were years in which the first signs of a Bulgarian reawakening were not yet perceived in Western Europe (the Macedonian revival was not even conceivable; the Albanian rebirth had not really begun and the Serbian revival was not yet colliding with the Hellenic Risorgimento). I also wonder if Mazzini was influenced by the confederal project dating as far back as the late eighteenth century of the Hellenic proto-martyr Rigas

<sup>6</sup> Angelo Tamborra, *Cavour e i Balcani*, Turin, ILTE 1958; Pasquale Fornaro, *Risorgimento italiano e questione ungherese (1849–1867)*. Marcello Cerruti e le intese politiche italo-magiare, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Francesco Guida, *Problemi del risveglio delle nazionalità balcaniche durante l'epoca napoleonica*, in *Il risveglio delle nazionalità nel periodo napoleonico*, Pisa, Giardini editori 1982, pp. 119–146.

<sup>8</sup> Marco Dogo, *Lingua e nazionalità in Macedonia. Vicende e pensieri di profeti disarmati. 1902–1903*, Milan, Jaca Book 1985.

Fereos, already mentioned.<sup>9</sup> It was only in the sixties and especially with the well-known meeting in 1869 with a delegation of the Young Bulgarians (the scholars Genova and Šarova have written extensively about it)<sup>10</sup> that his vision changed, at least in part. From a strictly ideological point of view, one can observe that for the Genoese all nations were to acquire full independence and manifest and fulfill their mission; only afterwards should they enter into a fraternal union with the others. Instead, in the case of the Danubian–Balkan area the two phases would have been contemporary, almost denying that some nations had a mission. This seems to be a contradiction in Mazzini’s vision; in actual fact, we know that, instead, the national independence of each individual people preceded the attempt to establish a federal state.

Garibaldi had a very different approach to the confederal idea, or indeed one only somewhat similar to Mazzini’s. Since his youth—after the well-known meeting with the Sainsimonists of which his mother complained<sup>11</sup>—he had believed in the internationalist and pacifist narrative. He often noticed its limits, its superficiality, its verbiage, even at the Geneva Peace Congress of September 1867, where he was also elected president, a few weeks before he began the unfortunate march on Rome interrupted in Mentana. In the light of those ideas, he hoped for a large Confederation, the United States of Europe.<sup>12</sup> At a lower level, he believed that confederal combinations could promote peace between nations: it was the case for a new Rhine Confederation, that would heal the wounds caused by the Franco-Prussian war. At the same level, he called for cooperation between the peoples of the Danubian-Balkan area. And here is a point of contact with Mazzini: both of them, in fact, putting aside the core of their ideological convictions, considered it opportune to resolve, through the confederal solution, the practical problem of the relations between the nations of that region, otherwise not solvable in a fair and satisfactory way for all. Certainly Garibaldi did not formulate a theory on the matter, as the man of action that he was, and signed the *Proclama ai popoli d’Oriente* (Proclamation to the peoples of the East), dated Brescia, 10 April 1862. It was a text that was not entirely his own and rather generic but, at the same time, respectful of the choices that the people would make. For him, they had to choose for themselves how to organize and run their lands after the inevitable collapse of

<sup>9</sup> Rigas had imagined a multiethnic state in which the Greek nation would have a role of *prima inter pares* and above all of educator of the more backward others. See *Rigas Fereos. La Rivoluzione, la Grecia, i Balcani*, cit.

<sup>10</sup> Liudmila Genova – Krumka Šarova, *Il movimento nazionale rivoluzionario bulgaro e le idee di Mazzini*, in *Il mazziniano nel mondo*, II, cit., pp. 334–349.

<sup>11</sup> Alfonso Scirocco, *Garibaldi. Battaglie, amori, ideali di un cittadino del mondo*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2007, pp. 14–18.

<sup>12</sup> See the Garibaldi’s *Memorandum to European governments*, 23 October 1860); see also Alfonso Scirocco, *Garibaldi*, cit., pp. 358–361; Romain H. Rainero, *Giuseppe Garibaldi, dal patriottismo italiano al progetto di unione dell’Europa*, in *Giuseppe Garibaldi fra guerra e pace*, ed. Piero Del Negro, Milan, Unicopli 2009, pp. 53–66.

supranational empires. In essence, however, both Garibaldi and Mazzini seem not to have fully understood or not to have reflected satisfactorily on the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, social, political and economic complexity of the peoples subjugated by the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. Not to mention the additional national problems existing within the borders of Prussia, then Germany, and of the Tsarist Empire.

A historical phase in which the formulation of confederal projects became more frequent and intense can be identified in the early sixties. Among the various protagonists of that period emerges a Venetian exile from his city, Marco Antonio Canini, a sufficiently well-known figure of the Italian Risorgimento, especially in relation to his activity as a political agitator and cultural operator in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> Venetian, born in 1822, he had time to see a crucial phase of the Risorgimento, participating in the phase of revolutionary preparation of 1846–47 and then finding a place in the events related to the Republic of Venice (where he clashed with Manin for his ideas until he was arrested and expelled) and to the Roman one. With Rome fallen into French hands, like many others, he took refuge in Greece, where he remained for many years. Except for a brief interlude, he remained in the Balkans until 1859. From that observatory, he saw—also as a correspondent from Constantinople of the “Opinione”—the Crimean crisis<sup>14</sup> and later the union of the Danube Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, as well as the second Italian war of independence. Well-connected in the Romanian political circles, he thought to support the Italian cause from afar by publishing a newspaper<sup>15</sup> that attracted the hostility of Austrian diplomacy and, after the armistice of Villafranca, also of the French one (he had accused of treason the ‘man of December 2’, i.e. Napoleon III), which obtained its expulsion from the Principalities. The return to Italy—always under careful Austrian control—allowed him to experience the important moment that the Italian nation was living at that time. He participated as a journalist, disappointed that he was unable to have any weight or influence over the events. After moving from Turin to Naples, with the well-known Spanish revolutionary Fernando Garrido, he presented Garibaldi with the project of a Hispano-Romanian legion that failed. The Romanian volunteers

<sup>13</sup> Allow me to refer to my *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico*. Marco Antonio Canini, Rome, Edizioni dell'Ateneo 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Francesco Guida, *Une importante source italienne sur l'Empire ottoman et la guerre de la Crimée*. Marco Antonio Canini, in *The Crimean War 1853–1856. Colonial Skirmish or Rehearsal for World War? Empires, Nations, and Individuals*, ed. Jerzy Borejsza, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Neriton, Instytut Historii PAN, 2011, pp. 425–457.

<sup>15</sup> Canini called it *Buletinul resbelului din Italia* (Bulletin on the Italian War) and published, in 1859, a short biography of Garibaldi. Many years later, he commemorated the first anniversary of his death: Marco Antonio Canini, *Commemorazione di Giuseppe Garibaldi: discorso tenuto in piazza San Marco il 10 giugno 1883*, Venice, Fontana 1883.

were to be drawn mainly from the ranks of the Hungarian Legion, including elements of various ethnic origins.<sup>16</sup>

Even much later, there were interesting pages in Canini's biography, but here we must underline that idea of his which seems to me no one else shared. Beyond its dubious concreteness, it reveals his good knowledge of the Eastern question. For him, the role of the Magyar nation in future political upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe remained essential, but that of other nations was not secondary. A comparison with Mazzini's well-known pages and Garibaldi's uncertainties is enough to convince us that we are dealing with a good knowledge of the local situations and of the contrasts that were no longer potential at the time. His long stay in the Danubian Principalities and his own activity as a history writer<sup>17</sup> proved useful. In truth, fifteen years earlier, in 1847, on the eve of the revolutionary two-year period, Canini himself had hypothesized in his first book, *Pio IX e l'Italia*, an Eastern Confederation or Slav-Hungarian Confederation, divided into three Principalities, headed by Vienna, Budapest and Warsaw. Alongside Hungarians and Slavs, it would have included three million Germans from Austria and Transylvanian Saxons, as well as Dalmatians and Wallachians from Hungary, representing the Latin element. The Confederation could have contributed to the European balance alongside the existing (Russia, England, France, Spain) and future (Germany and Italy) powers waiting to liberate the Balkan peoples.<sup>18</sup> The project, one should note, is profoundly different from what he would agree with the leading exponents of the Hungarian emigration in 1862.

*Si parva licet componere magnis*, even the greatest exponent of the struggle for Hungarian independence, Lajos Kossuth, was able to change his beliefs over the years. When, in the summer of 1849, the Magyar Revolution was in agony, he came to an agreement that was little more than instrumental—the Wallachian Nicolae Bălcescu contributed to it—with the Romanians of Transylvania, who had until then fought against the Hungarian soldiers, acting as *de facto* allies of Vienna.<sup>19</sup> In the first period of exile, *post res perditas*, in one of his constitutional

<sup>16</sup> *Vingt ans d'exil par un ancien émigré vénitien*, Paris, Baudry 1868, p. 183; Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico. Marco Antonio Canini*, cit., pp. 164–166; Ștefan Delureanu, *Românii alături de Garibaldi în expediția celor o Mie*, in “Studii. Revista de istorie,” 35, 1982, 12; idem, *Garibaldi. Om și mit*, Bucharest, Paideia, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Francesco Guida, *Marco Antonio Canini et l'ethnogenèse du peuple roumain*, in “Studia historica,” *Analele universității “Dunarea de jos,”* Galați, 2002, I, pp. 87–101.

<sup>18</sup> *Marco Antonio Caninio veneziano osa intitolare Pio IX e l'Italia e dedicare alla futura guardia civica lombardo-veneta questi sciolti e rime*, Lucca, Baccelli e Fontana 1847, pp. XXXVIII–XLIII.

<sup>19</sup> Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor de la origini pînă în zilele noastre*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1992, pp. 167–169; Péter Hanák (edited by), *Storia dell'Ungheria*, Milan, Franco Angeli, 1997, pp. 128–129; Gizela Nemeth – Adriano Papo, *Storia e cultura dell'Ungheria: dalla preistoria del bacino carpato-danubiano all'Ungheria dei giorni nostri*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino 2001. It is known that Bălcescu died a few years later in Palermo; Castilia Manea-Grgin, *Between history and politics. The Romanian historian and revolutionist Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852) and his*

projects, Kossuth gave a little more to the minorities included in the Crown of St. Stephen, but not enough to make a common fight possible. In particular, since 1859 the union, albeit personal, between Wallachia and Moldavia, with the consequent birth of a Romanian state on the borders of Transylvania, had led him to a further adjustment of his position. The project that he published in 1862 included, in fact, also that double Principality, besides Transylvania and many other political-administrative entities, internal (Croatia) or external (Serbia) to the Empire. All of them would enjoy autonomy and representation in the planned Confederal Parliament of Budapest. It was a considerable step forward in the attempt to reach an agreement among the peoples in the full fervor of the Risorgimento, but subsequent historical events did not allow us to verify whether the project was feasible.<sup>20</sup> In the meantime, to the most tenacious Hungarian nationalists, Kossuth seemed to be too complacent towards the Slavs and Romanians, especially with regard to the fate of Transylvania, as Pasquale Fornaro pointed out.<sup>21</sup> The Magyar exile felt obliged to write some Clarifications (*Schiarimenti intorno al progetto della Confederazione danubiana*) in which he basically recanted on the possibility of the Transylvanian populations to detach themselves from the Kingdom of Hungary, appealing to the historical reasons, that is to say, the union that linked the two lands since the early Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup>

Only a few years later, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the same promoter of the project no longer believed it was applicable to the ethno-political reality of Central-Eastern Europe. That author was Canini who in 1862 had the best opportunity (not the only one) of his life to appear on the stage of history. Fundamental was the network of relationships woven in the Turin environment, with both Italians and foreigners, and the entry into Freemasonry. In particular, the correspondence and collaboration with General

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*unidentified grave in Palermo*, in *La Sicilia, il Mediterraneo, i Balcani. Storia, culture, lingue, popoli*, ed. Matteo Mandalà, Palermo, Mirror 2006, pp. 53–64; Antonio D'Alessandri, *Sulle vie dell'esilio. Rivoluzionari romeni dopo il 1848*, Lecce, Argo, 2015, pp. 57–68, 118–120.

<sup>20</sup> The project was published in "L'Alleanza," a newspaper published from February 1862 to October 1867 in Milan by the Hungarian Ignác Helfy, very close to Kossuth, with the economic support of the Italian government. Helfy, for his participation in the revolutionary two-year period, experienced the Hungarian prisons; in 1854, he arrived in Padua where he had graduated in philosophy and then taught in Mantua, finally making contact in 1859 with his politically exiled compatriots. See Vincenza Maria Fornario, *L'"Alleanza" giornale italo-ungherese di Milano*, in *Annuario 1937*, Studi e documenti della R. Accademia d'Ungheria di Roma, 1938, pp. 211–215. The text of the project can be read in Lajos Pasztor, *La Confederazione danubiana nel pensiero degli italiani ed ungheresi nel Risorgimento*, Rome, Bussola 1949, pp. 97–99.

<sup>21</sup> Pasquale Fornaro, *Risorgimento italiano e questione ungherese (1849–1867)*, cit., pp. 204–209; cf. László Csorba, *I popoli dell'Europa centrale e l'idea ottocentesca della Confederazione danubiana*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> Pasquale Fornaro, *Risorgimento italiano e questione ungherese (1849–1867)*, cit., pp. 210–214. Daniel Varga, *Il ruolo dell'Italia per la realizzazione del progetto della Confederazione Danubiana del 1862*, in "Italianistica Debreceniensis," 25, 2020, pp. 146–161. Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico*, cit., pp. 173 ff.

György Klapka continued over time.<sup>23</sup> The Venetian fully accepted Klapka's project of the Danubian-Balkan Confederation, which undoubtedly represented an enormous progress compared to the national jealousies and contrasts that had weakened the resistance of the Hungarian revolution thirteen years earlier against the conservative powers, up to the drama of Világos. It is not clear whether Canini collaborated in the drafting of the final text, but this seems very likely. The documentation, as well as Canini's recollections, published a few years later and fully concurrent with it, show almost unequivocally that he drew up the well-known project later published by Kossuth on the "Alleanza." Relations with the former head of the Magyar revolutionary government were certainly less intense and friendly: in April 1862, the dispute between the two was aimed at getting Kossuth to accept the collaboration with Klapka and the confederal project which he had not yet made public. However, in order not to deliver the full text into Kossuth's hands, Canini had preferred to rewrite the project, changing its form but not its substance.<sup>24</sup>

At this point, he had the ideological consent of the two leading exponents of Hungarian emigration and was entrusted with a propaganda mission to Bucharest and Belgrade. However, the letters that Canini took with him to Romanian and Serbian soil were only Klapka's, including a letter of credit essential to support himself for several months. After all, the two exponents of the Hungarian political emigration did not get along well, as was later proved by an attempt at conciliation made on 2 January 1863 by Lodovico Frapolli, who had recently become a leading Freemason in Turin.<sup>25</sup> The Venetian—certainly not endowed with his own means—had other sources of financing, but limited, uncertain ones, which caused

<sup>23</sup> Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico*, cit., pp. 173 ff.

<sup>24</sup> This is Canini's version, quite credible although not supported by irrefutable evidence. The documentation that Kossuth and Klapka produced actually confirms his statements (see the recently published Daniel Varga, *Il ruolo dell'Italia per la realizzazione del progetto della Confederazione Danubiana del 1862*, in "Italianistica Debreceniensis," 25, 2020, pp. 146–161; but Canini was not a 'mazziniano'). The Venetian affirmed (*Vingt ans d'exil*, cit, p. 175) that the publication of the project was for him a surprise, not advantageous for the mission he was about to carry out. On the other hand, Kossuth himself seems not to have wanted the diffusion of a text that he still believed to be a work in progress, in short, to be completed after appropriate contacts. He also declared that he had signed and not drafted the text (Lajos Pasztor, *La Confederazione danubiana*, cit., p. 58, based on the memoirs of Kossuth). However, it does not seem likely that Canini was able to convince Helfy to publish it, without the consent of the political referent of "L'Alleanza," that is, the leader of the Hungarian exiles. It can be concluded, but without absolute certainty, that the initiative of the publication was a mistake of the editor of the newspaper.

<sup>25</sup> In Luigi Polo Friz, *La Massoneria italiana nel decennio post unitario. Lodovico Frapolli*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1998, pp. 56–63, one can follow the story of the deepening disagreement between Kossuth (flanked by Türr) and Klapka (followed by the majority of Hungarian exiles) not only about the leadership and programs of the Magyar emigration, but also about the Hungarian Masonic lodges established on Italian territory, in competition with each other.



an enormous dispersion of energy.<sup>26</sup> He had, in fact, a grant from the Italian government to carry out a task entrusted to him by the king (without President of the Council Rattazzi being aware of it): it was a matter of sounding out the terrain for the candidacy of Vittorio Emanuele II's son, Vittorio Amedeo, to the Greek throne. In Greece the position of King Otto, who was forced to abdicate a few months later, was in fact getting weaker and weaker. The historian Walter Maturi called it "operation Amedeo." That operation was destined to continue until 1863—the Italian minister in Athens himself, Terenzio Mamiani, participated in it—and to fail with the election in 1863 of the Danish Wilhelm of Glückburg (second son of the future king of Denmark Christian IX) to the Greek throne, with the name of George I.<sup>27</sup>

Before leaving in 1862 Canini had contacts with other Hungarian exponents such as Ferenc Pulszky (his wife joined the Cultural Society he founded at the time) and with Italians such as Luigi D'Ancona, who served as an intermediary with Vittorio Emanuele II. Incidentally, we note that they were both affiliated to the same lodge as Canini.<sup>28</sup> From Garibaldi he obtained (writing it on his behalf) that *Proclama ai popoli d'Oriente*, which however did not say anything about the future confederal order. Nevertheless, he was not assigned a precise mission, not even in relation to the Hellenic question, about which the Venetian counted on the repetition of the expedition of the Thousand on Greek-Ottoman territory.<sup>29</sup>

The two missions—like other non-political cover missions—failed. The reasons for this failure seem clear. Rattazzi did not support Canini to the end, nor was there an authoritative intervention of the king, careful not to learn too much and, moreover, interested in operation Amedeo but much less in the confederal project. The Moldo-Wallachian prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza and the Serbian Prime Minister Ilija Garašanin were not in the political position to have full access to the project, for reasons of international politics and indeed also national politics. However, they did not disdainfully reject the advances made by Canini: this explains why the mission on the Danube did not stop much sooner than it did later.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Maturi, *Le avventure balcaniche di Marco Antonio Canini*, in *Studi in onore di Gioacchino Volpe*, Florence, 1958, II, pp. 563–627; Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico*, cit., pp. 174, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Maturi, *Le avventure balcaniche di Marco Antonio Canini*, cit., pp. 567 ff. George I reigned for exactly fifty years: he was killed by the anarchist Alexandros Schinàs, on 18 March 1913.

<sup>28</sup> Luigi Polo Friz, *La Massoneria italiana nel decennio post unitario. Lodovico Frapolli*, cit., pp. 56, 58

<sup>29</sup> Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico*, cit., pp. 178–179. The text can be read in Costas Kerofilas, *La Grecia e l'Italia nel Risorgimento italiano*, Florence, 1919, pp. 174–175.

<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account *Vingt ans d'exil*, cit., pp. 204–240; see Walter Maturi, *Le avventure balcaniche di Marco Antonio Canini*, cit., pp. 625–643 and Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento*

The failure of the multiple mission almost cost Canini his life and he went back to Constantinople and then to Italy, only to return to Greece to continue Operation Amedeo.<sup>31</sup> Naturally, the interesting personal events of the Venetian were in the background compared to some basic observations on the failure, then and afterwards, of the confederal idea. The Serbs, Romanians, or Croats were not the most suitable interlocutors to realize it. The Serbs and Romanians now had national states, albeit embryonic, to which they could refer and could not accept to subordinate their constitutional identity, still frail and in progress, to a supranational structure (especially if the capital had been Budapest), even if different from the one (Ottoman Empire) from which they had partially emerged. On the contrary, the idea of Serbia as the Piedmont of the Balkans, i.e. the unifying function of Belgrade among the southern Slavic peoples, began to take hold, with the inevitable clash with Vienna and Budapest.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, at the same time, among the most aware exponents of the Moldo-Wallachian elites (more than among the Transylvanian Romanians) the conviction that the entire Romanian nation could one day unite, naturally to the detriment of the Hungarian nation, socially and politically dominant in Transylvania, was beginning to emerge.

The Croats themselves, subjects of the Habsburgs, strongly disliked the political-administrative link with Hungary (although dating back to the beginning of the millennium) and continued to resent it even after the *Nagodba* or Compromise concluded in 1868 with Budapest, in the wake of the one signed between Budapest and Vienna the previous year. The Croatian ruling class sought to defend their individuality and autonomy, hoping to enjoy within the Habsburg possessions a political condition equal to that enjoyed by the Hungarian nation, avoiding its protection. I will not go into detail about the existence of a pro-Yugoslav minority movement among the Croats.<sup>33</sup> There were therefore no preconditions for the realization of the confederal idea, the contours of which were almost fading into utopia. When, in the early twentieth century, as Archduke Franz Ferdinand hoped, plans were made to transform the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a federal one (the best known was the work of the Romanian Transylvanian Aurel

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*balcanico*. Marco Antonio Canini, cit., pp. 188–202. On Garašanin see David MacKenzie, *Ilija Garašanin: Balkan Bismarck*, East European Monographs, New York, Boulder 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Francesco Guida, *Marco Antonio Canini e la Grecia: un mazziniano suo malgrado*, in “Balkan Studies,” 20, 1979, pp. 343–392 (particularly 361–374).

<sup>32</sup> Stevan K. Pawlovitch, *Serbia. La storia al di là del nome*, Trieste, Beit 2010; Clissold and others, *Storia della Jugoslavia*, Turin, Einaudi 1969, pp. 142–143. The reign of Mihajlo Obrenović’s successor, Milan, who remained in the shadow of Vienna, was very different in terms of foreign policy.

<sup>33</sup> Rita Tolomeo, *Korespondencija Josip Juraj Strossmayer – Cesare Tondini de’ Quarenghi*, Zagreb, Posebna Izdanja “Arhivskog Vjesnika” 1984; Jože Pirjevec, *Serbi, Croati, Sloveni. Storia di tre nazioni*, Bologna, Il Mulino 2002, pp. 109–110; Ludwig Steindorff, *Croazia. Storia nazionale e vocazione europea*, Trieste, Beit, 2008.

Popovici),<sup>34</sup> they remained a dead letter and were swept away by the Great War. They reappeared between the two world wars, but in a new guise: a possible confederation or something similar to it had to be the result of the free choice of nation-states risen from the ashes of the empires.<sup>35</sup>

The meeting between Kossuth and Canini in 1862 was not the last; they met again 14 years later, in 1876. The events in the Balkan Peninsula induced the Venetian to go to the Baraccone di Collegno (Turin) to the illustrious exile, “aged but nevertheless robust.” At that time the second crisis of the East was underway, triggered by the revolt of the Christian populations in Herzegovina and Bosnia, but then turned into open war between Turkey, on the one hand, and Serbia and Montenegro, on the other, waiting to end with the much more important Russian-Turkish conflict of 1877 and the Berlin Congress. Canini invited Kossuth to encourage the Hungarians and the Southern Slavs towards a mutual understanding and, maybe, yet another attempt at confederation. It was probably a reshuffling of Canini’s old proposals, even if in the meantime there had been some political innovations, the most important of which was the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. The Magyar exile seemed to barricade himself behind a repeated “I don’t remember” and markedly expressed his refusal to an agreement with the Southern Slavs with a lapidary “never, never, never.” Canini replied: “Sir, you can apply to the Magyars what was said of the French emigrants: they have forgotten nothing and learned nothing.” It is not clear if the new confederation project was published once again (as in 1862) by Ignác Helfy (originally Helfer), the former director of “L’Alleanza” in Milan and, after his return home, a member of the Pest Parliament. With him, Canini affirmed to have contacts through the representative of Temesvár (Timișoara), Babes.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Die vereinigten Staten von Grosse-Oesterreich*, (The United States of Greater Austria), Leipzig 1906.

<sup>35</sup> Francesco Guida, *Federal Projects in Interwar Romania: an Overvaulting Ambition?*, in *For Paece in Europe*, eds. Marta Petricioli and Donatella Cherubini, Brussels, Peter Lang 2007, pp. 229–258.

<sup>36</sup> Canini reported his meeting with Kossuth the following year in the Neapolitan paper “Il Pungolo” of 29 September 1877. Unfortunately, there are no matches for his story. After the *Ausgleich* Helfy had founded in Milan a newspaper, “Magyar Magyar,” opposed to the Compromise between Vienna and Budapest. In 1869 he had moved to England; he then returned to his homeland to be elected deputy in 1872, perhaps at the suggestion and certainly with the support of Kossuth (cf. Vincenza Maria Fornario, *L’“Alleanza” giornale italo-ungherese di Milano*, cit.). It is well known that in the Hungarian Parliament the deputies of the extreme left also sat, still following the old leader, exiled in Italy, hoping for independence. See Árpád Welker, *Between emancipation and antisemitism: Jewish presence in parliamentary politics in Hungary. 1867–1884*, in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University 1999–2001*, Budapest, CEU 2002 (note 38: “For Helfy this return from exile was also an existential question: when he realised he could not make a living from his editorial activity in Europe, he chose to work as a politician in Hungary. Kossuth was not satisfied with the choice but he was ready to support Helfy’s ambitions”). I cannot indicate if and where Helfy had publicized Canini’s new ideas, which perhaps concerned in the first instance a Confederation or at least an agreement also concerning the nationalities of the Kingdom of Hungary.

For completeness it must be said that—probably shortly after the meeting with Kossuth—on 8 August 1876 Canini founded a League for the liberation and brotherhood of the Slav-Hellenic peninsula (which had Giuseppe Garibaldi as its honorary president). It was one of the strands of the vast movement present in Italy and other European countries in favor of the insurgents of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Among the founders, the best-known name was that of Garibaldi's doctor, Timoteo Riboli. The League aimed to help the Balkan peoples free themselves from Turkish rule, but also to encourage the establishment of a Confederation between the Southern Slavs and the Greeks. Several nation-states would be part of it, enjoying a broad autonomy. The Romanians and Hungarians were not part of the project or, perhaps, were left out of it after the aforementioned conversation.<sup>37</sup>

It should be remembered that the following year, 1877, the Hungarian public opinion sided with the Turks against the Russians, celebrating the victory of Osman Pasha at Plevna (Pleven) as 'revenge for Világos'.<sup>38</sup> In August 1877, Kossuth declared himself in favor of Turkey, while the Magyar community of Salzburg sent a telegram of solidarity to Turkey, the "sister nation of our dear Hungarian homeland."<sup>39</sup> In short, after the beginning of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Canini's proposals found Kossuth in a much more rigid position than in 1862. The already mentioned reasons of the contrasts between the nationalities remained on the table and, once the Hungarian nationality had assumed an explicitly dominant role after 1867, even the old revolutionary leader, who had not accepted the *Ausgleich*, was not inclined to accept new confederal projects. A pan-Slavist such as the Russian General Ignat'ev, also in 1877, stated in a conversation with Canini that "Kossuth's demeanor shows what the much touted liberalism of the Hungarians actually consists of. It consists of the oppression of the minority by the majority."<sup>40</sup> Certainly, the general of the tsar could not give lessons on democracy to anyone (in 1881–82 as Minister of the Interior, he was the protagonist of an episode of tremendous anti-Semitism), but it is true that the new structure of the Dual Monarchy had weakened or rendered unrealistic the projects inspired by the federal or confederal idea. Above all, they had made them less popular with Hungarian politicians: in the agreement with Vienna, they found an easy way to stifle the aspirations of national minorities living within the borders of the Kingdom of Hungary. All the more so because Kossuth, who lived in a unitary and centralist state, such as Italy, did not have to view these projects with sympathy and aspired to make Hungary a unitary and independent state.

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<sup>37</sup> Francesco Guida, *L'Italia e il Risorgimento balcanico. Marco Antonio Canini*, cit., pp. 284–290. The League was not very successful, despite the activism of its leader who also maintained relations with the government in Belgrade.

<sup>38</sup> As reported in the newspaper "Roma," 24 September 1877.

<sup>39</sup> The two news items appeared in "Il Pungolo" of 23 August 1877.

<sup>40</sup> "Il Pungolo," 27 September 1877.