

Italy and the Mediterranean Pact

Katalin PINTÁCSI
Université de Szeged

The idea to create The Mediterranean Pact

After the Second World War the creation of the Mediterranean Pact was strongly connected to the formation of other defence systems, so we can establish that the Mediterranean Pact would have been a security/defence organisation. We have to take into consideration most Mediterranean countries, which are situated out of Europe, were colonially dependent on the Western European countries, and at that time were just starting to fight for their independence. They were sensible towards new political ideas, and some of them were geographically too close to the Soviet Union. The Western countries could not control them as colonies, but they were very important for them. Not only for their strategic position, but these countries are very rich of raw materials also. However, after the Second World War their security was not resolved, because European countries were in a very bad economic situation, due to the damage caused by the war. The only country that was able to assure an efficient defence system was the United States of America. Although at that time the American law did not permit to its states to participate in defence systems out of the continent in peacetime. It was realised only when American Senate accepted the motion of Senator Vandenberg on 11 June, 1948. Before the acceptance of the Vandenberg motion, the United States urged its European allies to find a solution for their security problems without the direct help of the United States.

We do not have the exact date when the Mediterranean Pact was mentioned in political discussions for first time; however, Tsaldaris – the Greek Foreign Minister – during his visit in the U.S. in the August of 1947 mentioned to the Secretary of State, Marshall, the idea to create a Mediterranean Pact. Marshall welcomed the idea. The USA after the Second World War recognised the importance of the Mediterranean region. President Truman extended the containment policy to the Mediterranean region too in March of 1947, but he was convinced that the centre of the defence should be Europe. After the Second World War the United State wanted England to have the controlling position in the area, but at the middle of the 50s it can be noticed that the USA took this position. “The security of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the Middle East is vital to the security of the United States... The security of the whole Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East would be jeopardized if the Soviet Union succeeded in its efforts to obtain control of any one of the following countries: Italy, Greece, Turkey or Iran. In view of the foregoing, it should be the policy of the United States, in accordance with the principles and in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, to support the security of the Eastern

Mediterranean and the Middle East. As a corollary of this policy the United States should assist in maintaining the territorial integrity and political independence of Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Iran. In carrying out this policy the United States should be prepared to make full use of its political, economic, and if necessary, military power in such manner as may be found most effective... It would be naturalistic for the United States to undertake to carry out such a policy unless the British maintain their strong strategic political and economic position in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean and unless they and ourselves follow parallel policies in that area...¹

The country that has control over Italy, Greece and Turkey, has the power to control the Mediterranean. Although, the other very important reason why the USA started to consider the Mediterranean as a valuable region is, the existence of oil. Because of their geographical position at the gulf of the Mediterranean Sea, by ruling these countries the area can be kept very easily under control; perhaps they were the only countries where we can see a democratic political system similar to the western democracies. In the opinion of Tsaldaris, the axis of the Mediterranean Pact would be Italy, Greece and Turkey, and could join them Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. In the view of Bevin, some other countries from the Middle East and maybe in the future Spain could also join the Pact. After his visit in London, where he met Bevin, Tsaldaris in an interview of 22 February 1949 summarises their ideas and discussions on the Mediterranean Pact as follows: „I have proposed to the British Foreign Minister, Bevin, to create a Mediterranean Pact once the NATO would have been created. The realisation shall be made in two steps: in the first step the Mediterranean countries shall be united, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, Great Britain and after we hope Spain. In the second step a Middle East Pact shall be formed with Greece, Turkey, Persia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi-Arabia, Jordan and maybe Pakistan.²

The relation of the Mediterranean Pact with other defence systems

Regarding the problem of the security of the Mediterranean countries in conformity with the European ones, we can see two important periods in the forming of their defence systems. The first one before, and the second one was after the creation of the NATO. But there is an important difference between the two areas. The European defence system was really created; however, the Mediterranean defence system remained only in state of discussions. Real political discussions on it have never been started; the Mediterranean Pact was only an idea mentioned several times by politicians. In an article „Mediterranean Pact” of the Zafer of 28 October 1949, Mucahit Topalak summarises the reasons of the failure of creating the Mediterranean Pact at the time of the idea's emergence:

¹ FRUS 1948. III., 378-NSC Files, lot 63 D 351, NSC 1 Series, Report by the National Security Council, Washington, February 10, 1948.

² In.: Oriente Moderno, Anno XXIV. No. 1-3.

1. The rejection of participation of Spain in the UN.
2. The missing solution for the problems of the colonies in North Africa.
3. Conflicts between Arabs and Hebrews because of the Palestine problems.
4. Conflicts of the Big Syria.
5. The Civil War in Greece.
6. The confused situation in Yugoslavia.

The author of the article concludes that – at the time of writing the article – lots of problems, mentioned above had already been resolved, and new discussions can be started on the creation of the Pact.³

At the time of formulating the Brussels-Pact we can see emerging different ideas to resolve the security problems of the Mediterranean area. When the NATO was created and these countries were left out of the organisation, a new wave of talking on the Mediterranean security problems can be noticed. It is not surprising, because after the creation of the NATO (4 April, 1949) people lived one of the most dangerous periods of the Cold War, when the threat of a real war was incredibly strong (Korean War, the success of the Soviet Union to create an atomic bomb etc). After 1953 it cannot be seen any progress in the defence systems except for the NATO. Greece and Turkey was also able to join the NATO, because the threaten of a real war has diminished. At the time of the creation of the NATO, the Western Allies could not permit these countries to join the organisation because there was a fear that The Soviet Union would see this act as a temptation to surround its territory with a military alliance, and would answer the action with an aggressive step. After the end of the Korean War and the death of Stalin it was not urgent any more to create a new defence system, so the idea of the Mediterranean Defence Pact was forgotten.

The European defence system based on the Brussels Pact – with the acceptance of Italy and West Germany in 1954 - became Western European Union, but it still remained in a strong dependence on the NATO. After 1954, only the creation of a Middle East organisation was mentioned and, it was mainly supported by Great Britain. As Great Britain was losing its control in that area, The Crown hoped to reinforce its position by creating a series of treaties between those countries. Great Britain would have welcomed Italy as a partner in the Treaty of Baghdad, which was a Pact of Mutual Cooperation Between Kingdom of Iraq, the Republic of Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Dominion of Pakistan and the Kingdom of Iran realised in February 1955. Italy was not convinced of the use of the Middle East Pact, and finally the growing conflict between Israel and Arabic countries, and the Suez Crisis in 1956 rendered impossible any solution. The crisis of Suez also resulted different views in the politics towards the Arabic countries among France, Great Britain, Italy, and the USA.

In the framework of the Mediterranean Pact we also have to mention the Balkan Pact, which was realised in February 1953 among Greece Turkey and Yugoslavia. It could be considered the first step towards an Eastern-Mediterranean Pact. When it became more and more clear to the Soviet Union in 1948 that Tito was following an autonomous policy,

³ ASMAE Medio Oriente 1949. Busta 4., Prunas, Embassy of Italy in Ankara to Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

and Yugoslavia was excluded from the Cominform, it became possible for the West to try to get the country into the western sphere. Yugoslavia's geographical position made the country important for the U.S. The Soviet Union with the control over Yugoslavia could get the possibility to have the access to the Adriatic Sea. Besides, Great Britain wanted to create some Balkan Community controlled by the British Empire to maintain its guiding role in the area and to avoid the reinforcement of the Italian influence. Italy of course preferred seeing Turkey and Greece in the NATO because in this case Great Britain would not have had as much power; Italy could have had more importance as a bridge between the Mediterranean and the West. However, Italy due to the question of Trieste would have never joined any agreements made with Yugoslavia until this question was resolved.

The discussions on the Balkan Pact started at the beginning of 1952, almost at the same time when Greece and Turkey entered the NATO. The Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration was signed in February 1953, but a real military collaboration had not been realised yet at that moment.

Italy and the Mediterranean Pact

There is no doubt that the role of Italy in the creation of different international organisations was very special. It is extremely true for the defence systems because the geographical position has a great influence on the formation of any defence systems. Taking this factor into account, Italy could participate in any organisations including both, Western and Mediterranean countries. "Mr. Hickerson stated he believed that Italy was an integral part of Western European security, although she also would be eligible for any Mediterranean arrangement that might be devised."⁴ In addition, in the Mediterranean Italy can vindicate a guiding role based on the traditionally strong relation with the other countries, which has its origin in the time of the Roman Empire. Another factor that helped a better collaboration was that, Italy was not a colonising nation any longer, and because Italy's colonial policies failed, it started to support the independence of the colonised countries in the Mediterranean. Talking about a possible joining of Italy to the Soviet sphere, despite the presence of very strong Communist and Socialist Parties the getting into the power of these parties was not probable so Italy would not join to any organisation of Eastern Europe.

But until the first democratic election was held on the 18 of April 1948, the politicians, who wanted to restate Italy's position in Europe as a medium power and wanted the country join to the democratic powers, were not prepared to accept the entrance of Italy into any military organisation. They were afraid that the opposition would use out the fact that immediately after a failed war they want to join again to a military alliance. The reason was not only this. They were also convinced, that kind of organisations can be really efficient that could see the United States as a member state. When the first discussions were started about the defence systems, at the end of 1947 and

⁴ FRUS 1948, III., 840.20 17-2648. Memorandum of the Sixth Meeting of the Working Group Participating in the Washington Exploratory Talks on Security, July 26, 1948

at the beginning of 1948, it was not sure that America would take part in it. The discussions on the Brussels Pact and on the Mediterranean Pact have a lot in common. The proposal of Bevin, the English Foreign Minister about creating a security alliance among the European countries, was based on that United States suggestion that the European countries should be able to resolve their defence alone, without the participation of the USA. Originally Bevin talked about the formation of three different defence areas: one in the Atlantic, one in Europe and one in the Mediterranean. "The most practical course, in Mr. Bevin's view, is to work for the following three systems: – (i) The United Kingdom-France-Benelux system with United States backing; (ii) A scheme of Atlantic Security, with which the United States would be even more closely concerned; (iii) A Mediterranean security system, which would particularly affect Italy."⁵ In Europe he invited the following countries to join the Pact: France, the Benelux countries and Italy. Italy refused the participation due to the reasons mentioned above. Therefore on the 17 March, 1948 the Brussels Pact was signed without Italy. Although this Pact talks about economic, social and cultural co-operation, the most important part of it is the military co-operation. The birth of the Brussels Pact was very well seen in the USA and some days later The United States and Canada also started Exploratory Talks on creating an Atlantic defence system. Italy's behaviour in front of the Brussels Pact, was interpreted that the sign of unreliability and talking about the future members of the Atlantic Pact its name was neither mentioned.

Partly because Italy refused the Brussels Pact the country was not invited to participate in the Exploratory Talks about the creation of the NATO. There were present only the countries of the Brussels Pact, the United States and Canada. The United States thought that if they invited Italy to be a member they have should face all the problems of the Mediterranean and Italy was too weak militarily to help the functioning of the alliance efficiently. "The inclusion of Italy, for instance, would raise the question of the whole Mediterranean. He suggested that, for the time being, the Brussels Powers should limit themselves to dealing with the security problem of Western Europe by trying to reinforce the Brussels Pact through an association with the United States and Canada."⁶ Consequently the USA continued to support the creation of a Mediterranean Pact in which Italy could have had a guiding role as a compensation for the non-invitation and also the presence of England in the Pact could assure the relation with the NATO. But Italy was not convinced about the utility of a Mediterranean Pact. Examining the reasons for the Italian refusal to accept the invitation of participating in the Brussels Pact we can partly answer the question why Italy did not want to participate in a possible Mediterranean Pact. The reasons for the refusal in both of the cases are very similar:

- Italy was firmly convinced that any kinds of military organisations could not be efficient enough without the membership of the United States.

⁵ FRUS 1948. III., 840.20/3-1148; The British Embassy to the department of State, Aide Mémoire

⁶ FRUS 1948. III., 840.20/7-748. Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Washington Exploratory Talks on Security, July 8, 1948, 10 a.m.

- Italy traditionally had some aversion in confront of England because of their competition in the Mediterranean. On one hand the ex-colonies of Italy were under British Military Administration control after the Second World War and for example in the case of the tragedy of Mogadiscio in Somaliland the British did not do anything to prevent or punish the delinquents. On the other hand it was clear for Italy that in an alliance where the English are the most powerful they cannot do anything against the British dominance. They wanted to see the USA as the leader of the allied parties. England supported the project firmly, because it seemed to be the only way for them to make over the dominance in the Mediterranean area. It is known that at that times the English Colonial Empire started to collapse and the British hoped that they could counteract the dominance of the United States in that way. Here I would like to mention the reaction of France to the Mediterranean Pact. It seem to be obvious that France also wanted to preserve its important role in the area, so the French preferred to create a Mediterranean Alliance under theirs own leadership.

- Italy, after the war preferred to support the economic co-operation instead of the military one because the country did not have enough resources to spend on military expenses, and with the economic integration could have hoped some growth in the economy. Italy, in relation of the Mediterranean countries hoped to move on towards the economic co-operation. For Italy it was extremely important to create and maintain good relationship with the Mediterranean countries, because the country is really power in sources of raw material especially needed the natural gas and the oil of these countries. Italy could form any kind of relations with these countries easily, because it could play the role of the supporter of their independence. As it said in an interview of Minister Guidotti to the newspaper Akhbar El-Yom: "... Instead of a Mediterranean Pact we have to talk about a Mediterranean Community. ... And how we can realise this politics of collaboration? ... The instruments can be the followings: commercial and economic changes, support of Italian experts, technicians and qualified working forces to those countries, intellectual and cultural contacts, tourism, and so on."⁷ At that time the European Union neither existed, but if we make a comparison between the European Union's Mediterranean Policy and the words of the Italian politician, the concept is similar.

- There is an other important reason why Italy refused the participation in the Pact. Unfortunately both that time and even nowadays, conflicts existing in the area could only be resolved very hard. Consider First Arab Israeli War or, the conflict between England and Egypt for example.

The fact, that Sforza – the Foreign Minister of Italy at that period – did not mention in his Memoirs the Mediterranean Pact shows the disinterests of the country.

⁷ ASMAE Medio Oriente 1949. Busta 1. 1949. October 20.

So Italy preferred to support the economic co-operation not only with the Mediterranean countries. They wanted to reach this goal by bilateral agreements on the economic, the cultural and the social fields. In Europe, the country became one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the integration especially on the field of economy and politics. For example they proposed to France to create a customs union, but unfortunately was not possible to realise that kind of collaboration with the Mediterranean countries due to their bad economic situation.

In the framework of the co-operation with the Mediterranean countries important treaties that was ratified by Italy was the Treaty with Greece in November 1948 and with Turkey in March 1950, the two countries, that would formed together with Italy the axis of the Mediterranean Pact. Italy also signed a Treaty with Egypt in April of 1948. Than Italy signed a Treaty with Lebanon in February 1949.

During the first term of the discussions on the NATO, the Italian government did not have any confirmed policy towards it. The most important ambassadors – Alberto Tarchiani (Washington), Tommaso Gallarati Scotti (London), Pietro Quaroni (Paris) – were convinced that Italy should take a part in the NATO from the beginning. They persuaded the Foreign Minister, Carlo Sforza, and the Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, and when the Senate rejected the Motion of Nenni, leader of the Socialist Party, on neutralism on 4 of December 1948 there was not any other obstacles to join a military system. The Memorandum of Sforza arrived in Washington on 6 of January 1949 in which Italy asked information on the NATO. On 12 of January, Tarchiani presented the application of Italy for the membership in the organisation. After that, thanks to the successful Italian lobby and the mediation of France Italy got the invitation. France wanted to see Italy among the members of the NATO because hoped to find an ally to help the Mediterranean interests. France threatened the NATO to remain out of the organisation also. Finally Italy signed the Treaty as a foundation member on 4 of April 1949. There was an other important fact that could help the joining of Italy. When discussions were started on Brussels Pact, Italy hoped to find a good camp to help the revision of the Peace Treaty, mainly in three fields. The three fields are the military clauses, colonies and the question of Trieste. As soon as Italian Politicians recognised that this policy could only worsen their position, they declared that they would not use the Brussels Pact or the NATO for the revision, the opinion of the USA and Great Britain became more positive. The question of Trieste was really delicate. In the Tripartite Declaration of March 1948, just before the first democratic election in Italy the United States, Great Britain and France promised, that Italy would get the control on the A zone. At the same time Yugoslavia was excluded from the Cominform and the Western Allies could see the possibility to have the control on Yugoslavia, a strategically important country. That is why they did not want to rescue to realise the decision favourable for Italy. But when in 1954 become more and more clear that Tito did not want to introduce a democratic system in Yugoslavia, the question of the A Zone could be resolved. In 1949 when Italy too had difficulties to enter into the organisation we could not imagine that once Greece and Turkey would become a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. “While our thinking on Greece and Turkey has not fully crystallised we believe Italy fits naturally into Western European defence system, but are inclined to question practicability of

separate Mediterranean system. We likewise fail to see how separate Mediterranean system would in any way make Italian military clause problem any easier."⁸ That is why the idea of the Mediterranean Pact was mentioned several times before the participation of Greece and Turkey. Italy could get an important role in it again, but its interest was to support these two countries to enter the NATO. In a Mediterranean Pact it would be England that played the part of the main power and the NATO where several Mediterranean countries were members and among them Italy could have the leadership. Finally, Greece and Turkey got the Membership with the strong support of Italy in 1952. After that any Mediterranean Pact lost its probability because the countries in the Middle East were not able to find the solution for co-operation.

Bibliography

- Arato, Francesca, *I rapporti italo-greci*, in.: www.greekembassy.it
- Bagnato, Bruna, *Vincoli europei, echi mediterranei*, Firenze, Ponte alle Grazie, 1991.
- Broge, Alessandro, *L'Italia e l'egemonia Americana nel Mediterraneo*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1996.
- Cacioppo, Luigi, *La posizione dell'Italia nel Mediterraneo*, in.: *Rivista Marittima* 1963/12.
- Ferrante, Ezio, *Il Mediterraneo nella coscienza nazionale*, in.: *Rivista Marittima* 1987/6.
- Italia, Francia e Mediterraneo*, a cura di J. B. Duroselle ed E. Serra, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1990.
- Pastorelli, Pietro, *La politica estera italiana del dopoguerra*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1987.
- Ripandelli, Francesco, *Il trattato di amicizia turco-greco-jugoslavo del 1953*, in.: *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 1954/2.
- Rossi, Gianluigi, *Trieste e colonie alla vigilia delle elezioni italiane del 18 aprile 1948*, in.: *Rivista di studi politici internazionali* 1979/2.
- Sforza, Carlo, *5 anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*, Roma, Atlante, 1952.
- Smith, E. Timothy, *The United States, Italy and NATO, 1947-52*, London, Macmillan Press, 1981.
- Varsori, Antonio, *L'Italia nelle relazioni internazionali dal 1943 al 1992*, Roma-Bari, Editori Laterza, 1998.

FRUS, Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers
 ASMAE, Documenti Diplomatici dell'Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri

⁸ FRUS 1948. III., 840.20/5-648. The Secretary of State to the Embassy in France Washington, May 6, 1948-4 p.m.