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ANGELO VIVANTE

ADRIATIC
IRREDENTISM

FIRENZE 1912

EXTRACT

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The study of the Adriatic irredentism represents at the same time the study of the relations between Austria-Hungary and Italy, respectively between the Italian people and the various nations which people the eastern Alps and gravitate towards the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

30 years ago Ruggero Bonchi said: it would be ridiculous to assume that the Slovenes have no right to remain in the Julian Region and it would be senseless to demand of them, if they want to stay, that they should forget who they are.

I.

Trst, although it is her natural capital, was always separated, administratively speaking, from the geographical and historical Istria. For at least five centuries Istria lived separated from Trst. The history of the growth of Trst is the history of the struggle between Trst and Venice. The same as in the competition between Pisa and Genova the former succumbed, Trst also finally gained the upper hand over Venice. Yet at the same time it was separated from the political history of Italy. Venice, owing to its far-flung commerce, was creating great difficulties to Trst. As a consequence of the discovery of America commerce shifted from the Mediterranean to the oceans and Venice began to decline. The Habsburg Empire, however, grew. Trst became its »natural emporium« and in the reign of Maria Theresia a »free port«. This spelled a colossal development to the town. Trst became from a small fishing town a cosmopolitan emporium. Demographic indices confirm this development. Trst became the El Dorado to those out for success, people arrived there from West and East and brought great changes into the structure of the town. Moreover, this process included attempts at Germanization which, however, failed as there was no foundation for their succeeding in the cosmopolitan character of Trst. Trst was all up to 1848 a town devoid of any national and political consciousness.

Nor did Italy, at that time, claim Trst. Dall'Ongaro, for instance, issued at Udine on April 10, 1848, a proclamation to

the people of Trst: »Italy does not need you. Italy possesses two ports of her own in the Mediterranean and in the Adriatic which are not afraid of competition. May Trst be an Italian town and a free port at the same time.«

There can be no word of an actual unitarian or even an anti-state current, at that time. Valussi, in a rather realistic way quite lacking rhetoric, depicted the situation at Trst and in the coastal region during both stages of the revolutionnary movement in 1848, as follows: »Had the Italian fleet shown itself at the beginning of April in the Dalmatian and Istrian waters, it would have brought about a sudden change in the peoples living there. The same would Trst, which we consider the favourite of Austria, have been affected by the movement and prepared to proclame itself a free town in accordance with its particular interests. The people of Trst cherish sympathies towards Italy, they feel themselves Italians but their commercial interests lie to the north. The orientation of the merchants, however, is no more Austrian than it is German, Slovene or Italian.«

The same Valussi goes on: »Trst will always look north.«

Giornale di Trieste: »The national character of Trst will finally be determined only after the victory of the nation which surrounds Trst.«

Valussi describes the irredentist tendencies of 1848 as »boastful talk of newspapermen who hold up to derision our poor country as they speak of the incorporation of Trst, Istria and Dalmatia.«

Furthermore Valussi writes: »We must convince our brethren (at Trst and in Istria) that they must not separate their interests from those of their neighbours.« Herewith he called attention to the Slavs whom Valussi wanted to be on friendly terms with Italy by making neutral regions of Trst and Istria and thus creating the basis for the symbiosis of both nations.

In 1850 a special statute gave Trst autonomy. The Council elections, carried out on the basis of the new statute, showed that the year 1848 had left no traces in Trst: Trst was again deep in business, the national consciousness seemed to be even more uncertain and given to changes than prior to the revolution.

The national consciousness of the time is very well illustrated by the discussions, in April 1851, upon the language to be taught at Trst's secondary school. There was an Italian grammar-school at Trst in 1600, later on closed down by Joseph II. Then there was no secondary school at Trst, except for the Napoleon era, until 1842 when the Government transferred to Trst the German

grammar-school at Koper (Capodistria). In 1851 the »Consiglio decennale« discussed the question of the language, but the decision taken was an amphibious one: the Italian prevailed in the four lower classes and the German in the four upper classes.

II.

Two factors are absolutely tied up in the irredentist movement: the ethnical and the economic one. No sooner than the idea of the Julian irredentism began to spread it made itself felt on two sides: on this side and on the other side of the frontier between Austria-Hungary and Italy.

It is interesting to observe the change of opinion in the author of the »Manifesto« of the Adriatic irredentism, Pacifico Valussi, who was in 1848 an opponent of the annexation; in 1861 however, he called for the incorporation of the Julian Region to Italy on the basis of ethnical rights, geographical and military reasons and economic needs. The Slavs of the Julian Region who in 1849 had meant to him the second important nation of the place, whom the Italians should make friends with, were in 1861 degraded by him to a race of farmers, unable to become a nation and doomed to go under in the Italian sea. Valussi, of course, was compelled to adjust history to this new thesis of his.

The ideas of Valussi found no advocates among the people of Trst. The rest of the authors also did not agree in their schemes. The press of the time, too, displayed a lack of clear ideas.

There was more of the irredentist movement in the Kingdom of Italy, at that time. Yet inspite of it, the Adriatic irredentism remained the Cinderella of the Italian Government and the Italian public. There were considerable discrepancies between the Italian aspirations, ethnical criterions were contradicted by the geographical and military ones.

Camillo Cavour, way back in 1848 however, discerned by way of intuition the ethnical basis of the Croat movement (then led by Jelačić) and denounced the oppression of the Slav peoples by the Hungarian oligarchy. On October 20, 1848, he forecast in the Subalpine Chamber the victory of the Slavs east of Italy: »The Slav race, energetic, numerous, oppressed during many centuries, wants to achieve its independence.« Cavour bears the same thing in mind writing to Lorenzo Valerio: »We must avoid any expression telling that the Italian Government intend to occupy the Province of Venice, Trst, Istria and Dalmatia. These regions are peopled by south Slavs and it would be

improper to deprive this part of Europe of its natural outlet to the Mediterranean.«

Alfonso Lamarmora, the Italian Prime Minister from 1864 to 1866, in his turn, says: »I never thought of Trst. The interests of this pronounced commercial town are connected to Germany. Trst is surrounded by the Slovene and the German peoples who have nothing in common with the Italians, save commerce. If Trst belonged to Italy it would entail plenty of difficulties and dangers for our Government.«

The Adriatic emigration made attempts, both before and in the course of the war, to win the undecided Italian Government and submitted to them several memoranda, ethnical, geographical and economic studies advocating the irredentist thesis.

What was going on, meanwhile, in the Julian Region? Upon the official renunciation to Trst on the part of Lamarmora, inhabitants of Trst sent in a memorandum which was submitted by the lawyer Molinari, a member of the Turin Chamber and at the same time parliamentary representative of the Julian separatism. This protest scored a powerful echo throughout the Italian press. To neutralize the impression created by this memorandum, the people of Trst sent a delegation to the Emperor which conveyed to him the guaranty of their loyalty and promised that »the results of the elections to come would convince him of the fidelity Trst cherishes towards its Emperor.«

The »Sistierung« of September 20, 1865 (the suspension of the constitution), also represented a reason against the unitarian activities. All countries, except for the entirely German ones, considered the Sistierung as a triumph of the decentralizing federalism over the German centralism. They saw in it the coming autonomy. After the elections to the new Chamber of Trst the leader of the liberal party entered a protest against: »the accusations of separatism which show a great lack of understanding and a good deal of malice.«

Generally speaking, the press of the time in Trst displayed an uncommon degree of contradicting views.

Dualism is explained by Vivante: the German centralism is handing over to the Hungarians the powers over a section of the Slavs and concentrating its forces with the intention to maintain the political dominion over the rest of the Slav peoples and the remaining national minorities in Austria.

It can be safely said that during the decade following the year 1866, the separatist movement showed no signs of life. The sojourn of Victor Emmanuel in Vienna is a proof.

The year 1869 saw the foundation, at Trst, of the Ist workers union, the only one, at that time, to profess a social programme. This union was the first organized attempt to reconcile the proletarian classes with the nationalist idea. The words uttered in 1869 by Giuseppe Caprin in his address entitled: Society, the worker and his future, sound uncommon: »The worker is neither German, nor Italian or Slav, nor French, but the constructor of the temple of peace whose foundations were laid by the slaves, whose walls were erected by the servants and whose roof will be finished by the activity and the spirit of the free.«

Irredentism in the Kingdom and also in the Julian Region was considerably strengthened by the events in the East (about 1877). The first irredentist societies were founded. The irredentist literature, too, bore blooms. Yet the big hopes cherished by the Italian irredentists on account of the Berlin Congress were not fulfilled. The diplomatic conditions for their fulfilment did not exist: whereas in 1866 all Great Powers were convinced that the annexation by Italy of the Province of Venice lay in the interest of Europe, now any territorial change of the European states represented in Berlin, was ruled out. The decisions reached by the Berlin Congress authorizing Austria-Hungary to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised a strong wave of discontent in Italy. Garibaldi and Avezzano addressed an appeal to the people of Trst urging them to offer help to their brethren in Bosnia and Herzegovina in their struggle against the Austrians. As an answer to the proclamation of mobilisation in summer 1877 many a young men of Trst preferred to cross the frontier into the Kingdom.

The separatist activities at that time consisted in attacks and attempts. Petards and bombs were exploding.

The full swing of the separatist idea was held back by the heterogeneous ambient. A sole instance will do to confirm it. The proletariat and the middle class disagreed with the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas it was greeted with joy by the imperialists and merchants of Trst.

Irredentism in the Kingdom of Italy was at a low ebb, at that time (1882—87). Even the legendary death of Viljem Oberdank was unable to revive it. Mancini, the Foreign Secretary, declared only 3 months after the execution of Oberdank that: the Adriatic and the Trident irredentisms were in contradiction with the nationalist principle. »Irredentism is contrary to the International law, even if based upon the nationalist principle.« The entire debate in 1883 was dominated by Austrophil sentiments. The most radical views were professed, at that time, by

the young Sonnino. In 1880 he wrote in his »Rassegna settimanale«: »Trst is the most suitable port for the German commerce. Its population is mixed, the same as the entire population of our eastern frontier. To claim Trst would be tantamount to violating the nationalist principle.« Ruggero Bonchi and Grazia Dio Ascol also opposed the separatist thesis. The spirit of Crispi prevailed for nearly 10 years (1887—96). A strong hatred for all that was Romanic was the source of his philogerman views.

III.

The Italo-Slovene conflict is in the opinion of the author the sole real ethnical conflict in the Julian Region. A great many think and believe that in the Julian Region the Italians and the Slovenes represent two clearly defined notions, a sharp anti-thesis; that the Italians all come from Rome or at least from Venice and that the Slovenes are strangers who only yesterday arrived in this territory. A picture of this kind is utterly wrong. The Italians and the Slovenes in the Julian Region have been living together for centuries. The Slavs, according to history, started coming to Istria from the boundary region of the Carst, from Carniola and Dalmatia, beginning with the eighth century and continuing to arrive throughout the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, pressed by objective reasons. Here they accepted the German feudalism and, engaged in a struggle against the Romanic race they wrested from them the hold upon the agrarian regions. Herefrom the Slavs spread towards the Province of Venice in a way that forced Venice to establish a special institution (Capitanato) to ward them off. From what was said above we can see that the Slavs have been present in the Julian Region for about eleven centuries. We come across a demographic phenomenon of the mixing up of two races, one mastering economy and on a higher degree of civilisation and the other attached to the soil and flung all over the country. Until it began to awake the latter was partly assimilated by the former.

It can be easily ascertained that the physiognomy of this region in the centuries past, notably from the fifteenth century on, bore a more marked Slav character than is does today. The relationship between the Italians and the Slavs, i. e. between the town and the country, were much more favourable for the latter and the disproportions between the urban and the rural economy did not make themselves felt. Even much later the Italians were still strongly in favour of the Slavs. Cesare Cantù, for instance,

describes the mission of Trst as one of the »emporium« for the adjoining Slav countries. This economic conception indicates the political idea: the future Jugoslavia which will spring up, sooner or later, and gravitate towards Trst, her natural port.

But already in the 1848 elections the Slav idea dissappeared as a result of the economic and intelectual ascendancy of the Italians. The first germs of the coming Italo-Slovene conflict were observed at the same time. In 1849 the: »Società per l'alleanza italo-slava« was founded at Turin. Its aim was to foster brothership between Italians and Slavs, work for the independence and development of both nations. It was said, moreover: for fourteen centuries there have been no wars between our peoples. Dubrovnik is the noble expression of the Italo-Slav civilisation and the Adriatic offers all opportunities for the development of our commerce and industries.

Pacifico Valussi, too, advocated the symbiosis of the Italians and the Slavs.

Generally speaking, there was some degree of uncertainty and antagonism as to the attitude of the Italians towards the Slavs, the south Slavs: in the Julian Region the Italians hope to absorb the Slavs, at Turin they want the Slavs to be their allies in the struggle against the Austrian centralism. Nicolò Tommasseo and Pacifico Valussi, however, suggest a peaceful mixing up of the Italians and the Slavs on the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

In the era of Bach all these variegated ideas set. Yet from 1860 on they started to grow once more. The Slavs represented in the Julian Region the ethnical and political force belonging to the soil.

In the period from 1800 to 1850 Trst swallowed Slovenes by the thousands and Croats, Istrians and Dalmatians by the hundreds and assimilated them. The same happened in the remaining centres of the coastal region. This was the so-called Slav invasion, i. e. the gradual migration of the frontier Slavs from the agrarian to the agrarian and industrial regions. The migration is confirmed by statistical data. Parallel to this economic development ran the intelectual progress. Out of the assimilated mass at Trst, arose the Slovene middle class and took the lead of the Slovene movement. In Istria the situation was different. Here the small owners, as a result of financial difficulties, soon came under the domination of the Italian upper class which, of course, besides of the economic strenght held in their hands also the political power. The inevitable development followed: the Slav propogandists (priest, school-master, lawyer) became economic

rescuers wresting their people from the clutches of the Italian creditor. It is by no accident that the first Slav agrarian credit organization was founded more than 20 years ahead of the first Italian organization of the kind. Now the large properties, up to yesterday the exclusive monopoly of the Italians, began to come into the hands of the Slovene banks which distributed them among their fellow-countrymen. This was not as much a result of the propaganda as of the economy of the Slovenes.

The Austrian official censuses demanded the statement of the colloquial language to serve as basis for the determination of nationality. This provision was the source of great injustice to all non-German peoples of the state. It can be safely said that the official censuses constituted a weapon in the political struggles wielded and used by everyone without discrimination.

The schools, too, represent a successful factor stimulating assimilation. The Italian school strives to enter as a substitute for the natural assimilation and the Slovene school rises against it. The fiercest struggle takes place for the elementary school. Here the Italians succeeded in setting the largest limitations to the Slovene schools. They found support for their doings in an uncommon interpretation of a provision of the general school code of the state: the right to open a school arises as soon as the parents of at least 40 pupils demand it unless there is a similar school in the distance of 4 km. — Of course, assimilation does not depend solely upon the schools. It relies even more upon the topographic conditions and the social and economic structure. The same the Italian opposition against the Slovene school does not originate from practical reasons only, but also from sentimental and symbolic motives. Rather than have the Community open Slovene schools, Trieste forsook the university. In this struggle for assimilation two bodies opposed each other, the Italian »Lega Nazionale« and the Slovene »Society of St. Cyril and Method«, both of them provided with pretty large funds.

A third factor interfered with the struggle for the secondary school and the university, the »tertius gaudens«: the Austro-Hungarian, i. e. the dynastic, militarist bureaucracy whose policy was to lend the German idea the character of the counterbalance against the Slovenes where they had made too great a progress. The Slovenes in their turn, served as counterbalance in places where Germanization did not proceed satisfactorily, so as to leave the majority in Italian hands. In accordance with this principle Austria would not satisfy in the Julian Region either the Italians or the Slovenes.

But the struggle had not to be fought only for a particular state school, yet also for the location of the school. At Trst the Slavs were extremely exposed to assimilation, they wanted therefore to have their schools just at Trst, whereas the Italians would prefer to see them established in the countryside so as to be able to achieve better results in their drive for assimilation.

The greatest blame the Italian nationalism lays on the Austrian Government is not directed against the school system but against their having influenced the influx of the Slavs into the town. Austria employed a large portion of the Slav labour, originating from rich Slav manpower reserves, to fill the inferior civil and other public services.

We can therefore observe that the importation of Slavs represents a common demographic occurrence of nowadays. The ethnical conflict arose in a mixed region like the Julian Region out from the changeover of the agrarian class to the middle class. The new Slav middle class is economically better off and therefore resists assimilation. Of course the elements of this struggle are not merely economic ones. On the contrary, it can be observed that ideological factors prevail: the traditional antagonism between the town and the countryside, the disdain of the inhabitant of the town for the simple, ignorant man who speaks a crude, strange language.

The situation may be resumed like this: The staunch Italian behaviour, based upon the annexation ideal, stimulated by less ideal currents and the corresponding Slav inflexibility fed by more noble currents.

IV.

The contrast between the economic and the ethnical factor is the clue to the history of Trst and the whole of the Julian Region. Trst owes its growth entirely to its being a free port. Notably in the course of the second half of the 18th century Trst has risen from a small transit port into a large international market, »emporium« for the European and the Middle East traffic. During the occupation of Trst by Napoleon the growth was brought to a temporary stand, but afterwards the rise was even swifter. In 1855 the climax was reached. Henceforth symptoms of a longdrawn crisis begin to tell and Trst again becomes a transit port. Austria of the period of 1840—80 (very different from Austria in the reign of Maria Theresia) intended to make Venice and not Trst, the market for the Austrian rear and started to build the Venice—Verona—Milano railway line before the Ljubljana—Trst line was constructed. It was con-

tended that Venice and not Trst represented the natural outlet of Austria and Germany to the Adriatic. Karl Marx rose against this thesis in plead in favour of Trst as the natural port for Austria and Germany. In this period the attitude of Austria-Hungary towards the Adriatic was most unfortunate: the railway line between Trst and Vienna was built in 1857, whereas a railway connection linked Vienna to Prag as early as 1845 and with the North Sea in 1851.

And just at the same time, especially from 1859 to 1866, the separatist propaganda set in throughout the Julian Region. Valussi, Combi and Bonfiglio were in a very good position interpreting the economic facts and commercial statistics in accordance with their wishes.

The crisis of those years was overcome by the technical development which gave Trst the character of a transit traffic port. This transition once more welded the links between Trst and his hinterland. The free port converted Trst to a large store where the North and the East exchanged their products. Later on the traffic of Trst became exclusively »Austrian« and, in the second line, German. Prior to the uniting of Italy, Trst represented the main supplier of Italy, but was then gradually losing this function to the economic development of the new state. Today Trst is no longer an Italian market which would gain in importance by political annexation. Italy is getting by way of Trst the materials she does not have (timber from Carinthia and Carniola) and is sending through Trst her products (vegetables, rice, fruit). We can not say therefore that Trst is more of an Italian port than it is English, Egyptian, Turkish etc. The commercial relations with Turkey, Egypt and India are even better than those with Italy. Owing to the increase of the direct commerce, the part of Trst as an intermediary will be getting less and less important.

In spite of the neglect Trst increased its traffic in the years from 1905—09 more than did the rest of the European ports, among which Trst occupied the seventh place, behind Le Havre but in front of Bremen, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, Reka, Dunquerque and Venice. As for the traffic by sea, the export and import, Trst holds the tenth place marking an increase of 25.09%, surpassed only by Bordeaux (39.08%) and Genova (25.79%). And the new port of St. Andrea gives it still better chances of development.

The new railway line through Bohinj, finished in 1909, still did not avert all dangers threatening Trst and his connections with the rear. The waterways leading north constitute the dan-

ger. In the 20th century Trst is more afraid of the competition of Bremen and Hamburg which have good water links with the entire European continent, than it is afraid of the competition of Venice and Genova.

In the struggle against the canals the antagonism between the economic interests and the nationalist idea becomes once more clearly manifest. A policy intent to separate the Austrian industrial regions from the Adriatic would have greatly fostered separatism. Yet higher reasons of existence oppose it, generating the following paradox: just the greatest nationalists made objections to the canals, entering protests and stating the enormous damage these canals would entail to Trst. In order to make their nationalist ideas coincide with their business interests they invented a new argument: if Trst represents the most suitable port for Austria it will serve the same purpose also when incorporated to Italy. It will be in Italy's own interest to open the doors to Trst. Yet this is a mere commercial theory, very much different from the practical life. In practice the master of a port is, today more so than ever, the state which controls its hinterland. Artificial technical means have overcome nature. Even if Trst possessed the very best railway connections with the Austrian hinterland it would suffice for the state dominating the hinterland to alter the tariffs and start favouring its own ports and the state which did not obtain Trst would start an unequal struggle with Italy with the latter undoubtedly succumbing. The foreign hinterland would be compelled to use Trst as its port only in the case that the whole of the eastern Adriatic should be allotted to Italy. But here irredentism becomes utopian imperialism. Kandler wrote in 1848: »The growth of Trst is not a result of some particular territorial advantages but a result of the fact that Trst has always known how to create advantages from the circumstances.«

What should the Italian policy in the Adriatic be like?

Italy is now, economically speaking, far inferior to Austria-Hungary in the Adriatic. The Roman occupation of the eastern Adriatic coast has left no traces. Rome latinized only the shore, here and there, but never the rear. Venice dominated the Adriatic solely by strangulating the rest of the ports. With the development of the capitalist system some states are creating their spheres of influence on sea: the actual master of the traffic and of the sea as well, is only he who controls the hinterland. In the Adriatic such conditions do not exist for Italy. Even if Italy should annex the entire eastern coast of the Adriatic this would be of no use to Trst as the traffic of the

Austrian industrial regions could easily be diverted to the rivers, i. e. to the north. There would then be a relapse into the old struggle between Venice and Trst, both competing for traffic with Germany and Switzerland. As for the specific Italian hinterland, Venice would gain the upper hand over Trst owing to its more convenient links to Piedmont and Lombardia. The policy of the territorial conquests in the Adriatic region, advocated by the Italian neonationalism, therefore means an economic nonsense. Cesare Combi said: »He who holds a sea port of a considerable importance must have in his hands all the ways that lead to it.« Italy will never be able to achieve such a state of things unless she occupies the whole of Austria, part of Germany and Switzerland. The incorporation devoid of the economic basis is in contradiction with the elementary economic laws and necessarily becomes sterile also from the nationalist viewpoint.

When defining irredentism as an element of the national expansion we must not forget that all the successes of the Italians in the Julian Region must be ascribed to the growth of the port of Trst. Trst would have remained a town of 3.000 inh. had not traffic absorbed strangers by the tens of thousands, coming from all quarters, mostly from the surrounding Slovene villages. Of course Vivante does not mean to deny Italy the right to protect her interests on the eastern Adriatic coast. But it is highly improbable that just the incorporation of Trst would represent the ideal solution for the protection of these interests. Then, the eastern coast does not represent to Italy a »colony« whose conquest she would so greatly covet as to bring it about. Two negative elements should suffice: Italy is not in a position to conquer the economic hinterland and secondly, the capitalist potential of this coast is too big for her.

Be the role to be played by the Jugoslavs in the Balkans what it may, one thing is certain: the political separation of the Julian Region is an eventuality which they will have to fight with everything in their power. The Julian Region represents namely their shortest and most logical outlet into the world. Another thing is sure. The Julian Region needs its hinterland more badly than this hinterland needs the Julian Region. The interest to have the hinterland is strong enough to prevent incorporation.

The truth may be painful but is therefore no less accurate. That means that the Slav communities to come, if they want to be solid and fertile, must follow the great economic roads which unite the Slavs of the Centrale Europe with the Jugoslavs.

These roads lead from East to West, from the Danube basin to the Sava basin and therefrom to the eastern Adriatic coast which represents the natural port not only for the Jugoslavs but also for the Czechs. This national and economic drive constitutes the counterbalance to the German tendency and her impulse to unite in one economic structure the Adriatic and the North Sea.

In the framework of the world economy Trst will have the function of the port for the future Jugoslavia. No prohibiting orders of the Austrian governor, the trustee of the German centralism, will be able to suppress this spreading idea whose realization is desired also by the Italians of the Julian Region.

The final answer should be like this: Italy would serve the interests of the Julian Region most by declaring that she does not contemplate territorial conquests and the incorporation of the Adriatic coast.

