

## Togliatti, Tito and the Shadow of Moscow 1944/45-1948: Post-War Territorial Disputes and the Communist World

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The relations between the Italian (PCI) and Yugoslav (KPJ) communist parties during the period consecutive to the Second World War and preceding the signing of the resolution of the Communist Information Bureau against Yugoslavia in June 1948 can be described as fluctuating, as a result of the international environment, as well as reflecting the breaches, rifts and different currents within the communist camp.

This article will analyse relations between Italian and Yugoslav communists in the border region that was to become the “Free Territory of Trieste” (FTT). Similarities and discrepancies on positions regarding international matters related to this very region will be in the focus. Furthermore, the Soviet influence over decisions taken in Rome and Belgrade during the period of analysis is portrayed. By doing so the article demonstrates that the communists, both in Italy and Yugoslavia, developed specific tactics and concepts in the disputed region, all the while carefully observing Moscow’s attitude and sometimes skilfully attempting to persuade the communist centre in Moscow of the validity of their respective arguments. By comparing Yugoslav and Italian initiatives through primary sources, the article will provide new insights on dynamics inside the European communist camp, thus going beyond the results of hitherto published studies.

The article is subdivided into two distinct phases. The first phase will highlight the relations between both PCI and KPJ during the period ranging from the last stages of the war up to the events of May 1945. This period is characterised by the strong influence of Yugoslav policies on the situation throughout the analysed region and the surfacing of problems between Italian and Yugoslav comrades. The second phase begins with the retreat of Yugoslav troops from Trieste in June 1945 and leads up to the rift between Josip Broz “Tito” and Joseph Stalin in June 1948. Here it will be possible to examine how the tactics and tendencies within the communist movements in both Italy and Yugoslavia evolved over time and how both parties tried to influence Moscow to their advantage. It will be shown that far from being a completely monolithic hierarchical movement, astonishing nuances began to emerge within the communist camp during the first post-war years already. The impact of those subtleties was felt across the Adriatic. For this purpose, archival sources from both Italian and Yugoslav communist archives will be considered, and the spectrum of interpretation of events will also be taken into account.<sup>1</sup>

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## A Long Struggle

To fully understand the question of Italian and Yugoslav antagonism over the question of Trieste and the Julian March region it is necessary to consider that these lands were contested between Italian and Slavonic nationalisms already in the Hapsburg monarchy and before the outbreak of the First World War. Yet, when Italy entered the war on the Entente's side in 1915 it had been granted vast parts of the Hapsburg coastline in a secret treaty. During the Paris peace conference the new Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (Kingdom SHS) that had emerged through the merger of former Southern-Slavonic Hapsburg lands with the Kingdom of Serbia, claimed parts of the lands granted to Italy in 1915. Italy's non-compromise policy at the peace conference soon isolated the country from the other Entente powers. Thus, Italy was not granted control over all lands it claimed, while the Kingdom SHS also remained dissatisfied by the incorporation into Italy of Slovene lands to the East of the Isonzo/Soča River, Istria and the city of Zara in Dalmatia.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently the interwar period saw the rise of a strong antagonism between Italy and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (as the Kingdom SHS was called after 1929). Benito Mussolini's foreign policy towards the Balkans concentrated on the encirclement of Yugoslavia through treaties with neighbouring countries and the annexation of further territories. Thus, Italy could reach the incorporation of the Free City of Fiume in 1924 and establish a virtual protectorate over Albania in the 1920s before annexing the country in 1939. Consequently, Yugoslavia was threatened by Italian expansionism during the whole interwar period, but could save itself from total domination by the Axis-powers after the rise of Nazi-Germany in the 1930s by joining the Axis' Tripartite Treaty in March 1941, albeit with very favourable conditions in questions of military support and independence. Yet, the army coup that followed this decision in Belgrade led to the declaration of war by Germany and Italy in April 1941. The question of Yugoslav-Italian relations after 1945 from a transnational as well as an international perspective has to take the war period into account. Mussolini's fascist regime took part in Germany's conquest of Yugoslavia and incorporated wide parts of the land under the Italian kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

During the Second World War already, the partisans of Tito pushed for the establishment of a new socialist Yugoslavia after the end of the conflict and for the expansion of the country in almost every direction to the disadvantage of its neighbours, especially Austria and Italy. The idea was to incorporate all "Slavonic" terri-

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2. A good overview on the Italian policy towards Yugoslavia after the First World War can be found in: M. BUCARELLI, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922-1939)*, Ed. B.A. Graphics, Bari, 2006.
  3. On the Italian occupation of Yugoslavia see H.J. BURGWIN, *L'impero sull'adriatico: Mussolini e la conquista della Jugoslavia 1941-1943*, LEG, Gorizia, 2006; D. CONTI, *L'occupazione italiana dei Balcani: Crimini di guerra e mito della "Brava gente" (1940-1943)*, Odradek, Roma, 2008; E. GOBETTI, *Alleati del nemico: L'occupazione italiana in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)*, Laterza, Roma, 2013; D. RODOGNO, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo: Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943)*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2003; K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Die italienische Besatzungspolitik in Jugoslawien 1941-1943*, PhD thesis, Vienna, 2011.

ories that had remained outside the country's borders after the First World War. This was also one of the leading drives behind the partisan conquests during the liberation of Yugoslavia from German occupation. In fact, it has to be kept in mind that while Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, was only liberated after the withdrawal of German and Croatian troops on 6 May, the “run for Trieste” enabled Slovenian partisans to reach the Italian city as early as 1 May 1945.

Moreover, it has to be considered that only after the Axis' attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the Yugoslav communist partisan movement gained momentum and finally also the upper hand in the civil war that was fought along ideological and national lines in Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> In December 1941, during a visit by British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, to Moscow, Soviet leader Stalin displayed his recognition of the Yugoslav struggle by declaring that Yugoslavia should be given parts of Italy after the end of the war.<sup>5</sup> Further, the struggle for contested lands in the border region between Italy and Yugoslavia continued with forced population shifts from 1943/45 to 1954, testifying to a brutal “Yugoslavisation” by the regime in Belgrade and the departure of most of the (autochthon) Italian community from Istria, Dalmatia and the Dalmatian islands. The figures known today show that some 250,000 persons left their homes after the establishment of Yugoslav rule.<sup>6</sup> Finally, when considering the resistance movement in Northern Italy – while the armed resistance itself will not be in the focus of this article – it has to be kept in mind that the Italian resistance was fractioned between its communist, monarchist, and liberal components, which also led to armed struggle among these groups in the analysed regions.<sup>7</sup>

### 1945: A New Adriatic Order?

While the Second World War was still raging, Yugoslav and Italian communists discussed the post-war order in their region. After the Italian capitulation in September 1943, the institution of a new fascist Republic in the North and a free Italian kingdom in the South of the country, tens of thousands of Italian soldiers, out of the almost 230,000 that had fought in Yugoslavia, sided with the partisans to fight against

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4. On the partisan war in Yugoslavia see K. SCHMIDER, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941-1944*, Mittler&Sohn, Hamburg, 2002; J. TOMASEVICH, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration*, University Press, Stanford, 2002.
  5. E. MARK, *Revolution by Degrees, Stalin's National-Front Strategy for Europe 1941-1947*, in: *Cold War International History Project*, Working Paper, February 2001, p.8.
  6. For further information on the “exodus” of the Italian community, see: R. PUPO, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio*, BUR, Milano, 2013<sup>3</sup>; G. SCOTTI, *Dossier foibe*, Manni, San Cesario di Lecce, 2005.
  7. For instance the massacre at Porzûs in Friuli region in February 1945 that saw communist partisans kill members of the ideologically opposing Osoppo brigades, has become part of the collective memory and was much debated due to the role of the PCI.

Germany in Yugoslavia until the end of the war.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the anti-fascist, communist Yugoslav and Italian movements in the border regions of Slovenia and Friuli had already cooperated in the summer of 1943 before the Armistice with Italy was signed.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, it can be asserted that the relationship between the Italian and the Yugoslav factions of the (communist) insurgent movement had already successfully matured during the height of the Second World War. Both the PCI and the KPJ's party leaderships were in close contact with Moscow on the one hand – the leader of the Italian communists, Palmiro Togliatti, remained exiled in the Soviet Union until March 1944 – and on the other hand, they also held high-ranking meetings and exchanges with each other in the months leading up to the end of the war. During that same period however, tensions arose on the question of the future border between Italy and Yugoslavia, especially concerning the cities that were predominantly inhabited by Italians, such as Trieste or Gorizia. In fact, in the autumn of 1943, a resolution emanating from the communist directorate of Yugoslavia declared the annexation of the Slovenian and Croatian littoral, Istria and the Dalmatian Islands. This announcement provoked a negative reaction by Togliatti, who reminded the factual head of the International Department of the CPSU's Central Committee, Georgi Dimitrov, in a message that these questions were only to be discussed after the fall of National Socialism and Fascism.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Dimitrov suggested in a message addressed to the Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in March 1944 that it was “politically wrong, considering the fight against a common enemy”, to debate the borders' question, “which should be discussed after the defeat of the enemy”.<sup>11</sup>

In April 1944 the PCI and the Communist Party of Slovenia (KPS) reached an important compromise on the question of how the resistance in the Eastern border regions of Italy would be coordinated. Moreover, it was established that the lands with a compact Slovenian population would become part of Yugoslavia; the question of the territories with mixed populations was postponed until the end of the war to

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8. On the involvement of Italian soldiers in the rows of Tito's partisans, see E. AGA ROSSI, M.T. GIUSTI, *Una guerra a parte, I militari italiani nei Balcani 1940-1945*, Mulino, Bologna, 2011, especially pp.171-228.
  9. AUSSME [Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito], H1, b. 52, Il prefetto di Udine Mosconi al Capo Gabinetto Ministero Guerra, 27.06.1943; Nuclei comunali per la lotta antiribelli, 24.07.1943.
  10. E. AGA-ROSSI, V. ZASLAVSKY, *Togliatti e Stalin, Il PCI e la politica estera staliniana negli archivi di Mosca*, Mulino, Bologna, 2007<sup>2</sup>, p.139; L. GIBIANSKY, *La questione di Trieste tra i comunisti Italiani e Jugoslavi*, in: E. AGA-ROSSI, G. QUAGLIARIELLO, *L'altra faccia della luna, i rapporti tra PCI, PCF e Unione Sovietica*, Mulino, Bologna, 1997, pp.173-208, here p.175; M. CLEMENTI, *L'alleanza Stalin, L'ombra sovietica sull'Italia di Togliatti e De Gasperi*, RCS, Milano, 2011, p.196.
  11. Dimitrov to Molotov, 17.03.1944, cited in: L. GIBIANSKY, op.cit., p.181; also, see M. CLEMENTI, op.cit., p.197.

facilitate the foremost task of fighting Fascism and National Socialism.<sup>12</sup> A second agreement, stipulated in mid-October 1944 between Togliatti and the Slovene leader Edvard Kardelj largely acknowledged the Yugoslav stance on the territorial question, all the while seeking a “national policy” that would satisfy the Italian population. At that moment Togliatti accepted the occupation of Trieste by Yugoslav forces to prevent the Western Allies of doing so, although this was not to be publicised, for fear of possible negative reactions among the Italian population. Thus, taking this gesture into account, Togliatti’s protest towards Dimitrov in 1943 can be understood as a reaction to possible negative effects on the communist movement in Italy, should the Yugoslav stance of annexation be widely accepted, while not denying the Yugoslav request altogether.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the Italian communist leader had to plan his steps carefully. He was not only torn between the Yugoslav cause, the adhesion of parts of the Northern Italian insurgents to Belgrade’s ambitions, the open demands of Slovenian communists for annexation (contrarily to the October agreement between Togliatti and Kardelj) and the participation of the PCI to the Italian government that did not accept to relinquish territory to its Eastern neighbour. In terms of ideology he faced the problem of serving the internationalist cause of the global communist movement led by the Soviet Union, that encouraged a national-front strategy, while Yugoslavia as an exception to this very doctrine was pursuing a clearly national(ist) agenda.<sup>14</sup>

The circumstances described so far paint a complex picture of interests that emerged during the months preceding the end of the war. The difficult relationship between Moscow, Rome and Belgrade, but also among the communist movements’ regional factions was – up to a great extent – the main focus of interaction and decision processes in the Italian-Yugoslav region. Regional (Italian and Yugoslav) factions enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, mainly because of the war still raging. The ambiguity of the PCI’s stance can be emphasised in light of some conflicts in the final stages of the war in 1945. The Italian “Committee for National Liberation” (CLN) in Northern Italy, an all-embracing group of the whole political spectrum fighting

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12. APCI [Archivio del Partito Comunista Italiano, Fondazione Gramsci], Fondo M [Mosca], Microfilm [hereafter: mf.]093, fasc.(c), doc.22, Accordo fra PCI e PCS, 04.04.1944; L. GIBIANSKY, op.cit., pp.184 f.; P. KARLSEN, *Frontiera rossa, Il PCI, il confine orientale e il contesto internazionale 1941-1955*, LEG, Gorizia, 2010, pp.49 f. On the question of what “Slovenian” and “mixed” territories meant and the discordance within the communist movement, see N. TROHA, *Chi avrà Trieste? Sloveni e italiani tra due Stati*, IRSMLFVG, Trieste, 2009, p.20.
  13. This point causes major friction in Italian historiography. While authors like Leonid Gibianskii, Elena Aga-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky or Patrick Karlsen (see publications cited above) confirm the line of argument followed in this article, others, like Roberto Gualtieri or Marco Galeazzi rather prefer an interpretation along the lines that although many among the Italian communists favoured the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia, this was not the case for their leader, Togliatti. See R. GUALTIERI, *Togliatti e la politica estera italiana. Dalla Resistenza al trattato di pace 1943-1947*, Riuniti, Roma, 1995, pp.82 f.; M. GALEAZZI, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo*, Carocci, Roma, 2005, p.59. Another interpretation is also given by considering Togliatti’s movements as preventive to “fix the limits of the occupied territories [...] thus, limiting the influence” of the Yugoslav communists in the Julian March. See P. KARLSEN, op.cit., p.66.
  14. On the national-fronts and Stalin's agenda, see E. MARK, op.cit.

Fascism and National Socialism – and at times a close ally to the Yugoslav partisans – was accused by the Slovenian communists of becoming increasingly nationalist and fascist, in any case “reactionary”. The Italian communists, although part of the government, would incorporate such stances into their own arguments.

More ambiguity can be found in different declarations by the Italian communists in February 1945. In an article dated 7 February, the party organ *l'Unità* commented on the relations with Yugoslavia after a successful defeat of Fascism and National Socialism. The article explained the “concern over declarations by media from the capital, dealing with the Eastern border” that portrayed the situation “as if Italy had won the war”. The newspaper stated that all Slovenian regions had to be incorporated into the Yugoslav state, while the fate of those cities with mixed populations or Italian population majorities “that did not want to leave Italy, despite the fascist experience” would be decided upon on the grounds of mutual treaties between Italy and Yugoslavia and keeping the “Yugoslav necessities” in mind. Finally the common struggle against Fascism was emphasised. So far, this was more or less the stance that had been agreed upon between Togliatti and Kardelj in October 1944. While the communist paper explained that Italy obviously had to pay a price for its aggression, the question of the Italian cities in the border region was not explicitly mentioned. Moreover the widespread demonstrations throughout major Italian cities in the liberated South, asking for an Italian Trieste in the first months of 1945, were declared “fascist” by the communist papers, because they were “inspired” by and a “continuation” of Mussolini’s policies.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as Patrick Karlsen affirms, “to demonstrate for an Italian Trieste was described as a *per se* nationalist gesture that was factually fascist in its intentions and outcome”.<sup>16</sup> Yet, this picture becomes even more interesting when considering Togliatti’s plea to Dimitrov in these same days of February 1945. In his message to Moscow, Togliatti explained that the Italian public was increasingly turning to the question of Trieste that was “exploited by our enemies” to further “isolate the communist party”. While referring to the problems the Italian communists were facing due to the possible future settlement of the borders with Yugoslavia, he suggested that although “the city’s population is indeed made up of Italians for the most part [...] it would accept the status of a free city, especially if that status were proposed by our party”.<sup>17</sup>

This statement marks an important step in the Italian communist leader’s attitude. For the first time he argued along the lines of a “free city”, thus reinterpreting the outcome of the war to the disadvantage of Yugoslavia and the agreements between the PCI and the KPJ. Knowing this, he also reflected, stating that “I do not know whether Yugoslavia would accept it” and strongly urged Moscow to provide him with advice “in order to orient our future endeavours as regards this issue, which may become one of the most crucial questions of Italian politics”.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Togliatti’s letter

15. *Per la nostra amicizia coi popoli della Jugoslavia*, in: *l'Unità*, 07.02.1945.

16. P.KARLSEN, op.cit., p.80.

17. Ercoli [Togliatti] to Dimitrov (encoded), 09.02.1945, in: I. BANAC (ed.), *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933-1949*, Yale University Press, New Haven/London, 2003, p.359.

18. Ibid.

showed his uncertainty on what to do considering the difficult situation in Italy but it also showed that he had at least partially abandoned the path to total acceptance of Yugoslav domination in the Julian March region, be it for tactical or national reasons. Moreover, he was obviously trying to circumvent Belgrade, of whom he could be sure to expect a negative reaction to any such proposition as to not directly annex Trieste. In short, it has to be stated that Moscow did not, however, send any clear information to Togliatti, who tried to get instructions again on several occasions. Togliatti depended entirely on the Kremlin's stance towards national and international problems while presumably, Moscow was waiting for the end of the war before giving any further instructions. Under these conditions the PCI did take a step forward in its ambitions, by launching the idea of an autonomous region, encompassing wide parts of the Julian March in the periodical *Rinascita* in April 1945.<sup>19</sup>

This being the situation during the last days of the war, the Yugoslav army launched its final offensive on Trieste in late April, occupying the city on 1 May. The fact that the Italian resistance inside the city had prepared for a massive upheaval against German troops, in the case of an Allied advance towards the city, is of importance indeed. This upheaval was triggered on 30 April and the anti-fascist groups inside Trieste started to attack German garrisons. Yet, the outcome of a possible liberation from within was not something the Yugoslav partisans would accept. The central committee of the Slovenian Communist Party declared that not only German, but also "all non-German units and the administrative apparatus of Trieste" had to be considered enemies. Moreover any faction had to be hindered from "declaring itself anti-German", because all "Italian elements, could only consider capitulating" to the Yugoslav liberation army. Thus, the Yugoslav (in this case Slovenian) partisans did not accept any rule over the city if it was not directly linked to them. Moreover, since the question of the Julian March had not thoroughly been solved between the Allies either, the VIII British army reached Trieste on 2 May, occupying parts of the port and town. They also invited the Yugoslavs to leave, which was categorically declined by the partisans.<sup>20</sup> Finally on 3 May, the occupying Yugoslav forces declared the annexation of Trieste to Yugoslavia. This in turn angered Togliatti, who, sending yet another message to Moscow, declared that the whole Yugoslav procedure was highly inappropriate and further complicated the PCI's position, handing the Anglo-Americans the advantage of popularity among the Italian population.

Togliatti's intervention proves to be validating evidence that the Italian communist leader was indeed seeking a new arrangement beyond the decisions taken in October 1944. Togliatti was trying to adjust the party's position, worrying that the affiliation with the Yugoslav communists would ultimately become a liability for the PCI in national politics. In fact, he quite clearly announced his new tactic in an article in *l'Unità* on 16 May. Starting with a statement on "the newspapers in the capital",

19. *Relazione sul problema della Venezia Giulia*, in: *Rinascita*, 4(1945).

20. For a chronology of events and the British, American and Yugoslav talks about the fate of Trieste during the last stages of the war, see M. CATTARUZZA, *L'Italia e il confine orientale*, Mulino, Bologna, 2007, pp.283-286; Idem., 1945: *alle origini della questione di Trieste*, in: *Ventesimo Secolo*, April(2005), pp.97-111.

Togliatti referred to “reactionary” circles’ attacks, who accused the PCI of “renouncing” to Trieste, barely “defending Italy” and “being traitors” of the national cause. Then, the communist leader explained that “we communists affirm the Italianità of Trieste; we do not want the city’s destiny to be compromised by unilateral actions”. This statement can be interpreted as directed at the Italian conservatives and Belgrade alike. Moreover, according to Togliatti, the PCI’s vision was “national and international”; “international because it wants to eliminate the motives of contrast between the peoples [...] and construct true peace”. More importantly, after clear words of friendship towards Yugoslavia, Togliatti did however point out that “those leaders [of Yugoslavia] are wrong who seem to be mistaking all exponents of the new Italian democracy for old imperialist and fascist Italy”.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Togliatti’s words marked his attempt to elaborate a strategy for the PCI that would on the one hand satisfy those (especially among the Italian communists) who saw the PCI’s attitude as overly favouring Belgrade. On the other hand, he also seems to have tried to reach out to his Yugoslav counterparts, and, to a certain extent, to reshuffle the situation created on Italy’s Eastern border.

Yet, amidst this insecure situation, where the Italian communist leader was trying to find a path that would satisfy the national and internationalist interests alike, Moscow finally answered his plea for directives at the end of May. Sure enough, it did not go the way Togliatti would have hoped for in that moment. As suggested by Dimitrov, Stalin came to the conclusion that Trieste ought to become a Yugoslav city and that the PCI should openly approve of this solution. Stalin’s argumentation that had to be used was that Trieste and its hinterland had to stay connected territorially with one another; that the port was vital to Yugoslavia and that Italy would benefit from a clean and undisputed border.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Togliatti was put into a very delicate situation by Moscow’s answer. Openly accepting the Yugoslav plea for the annexation of Trieste would have made a catastrophic impression on the Italian public. Hence, during meetings between members of the Italian left (Pietro Nenni for the socialists, Togliatti for the communists) with the Yugoslav representative in Rome on 31 May and 1 June respectively, the Italian politicians pleaded for a solution on a bilateral Yugoslav-Italian basis, facilitated by the possible – yet finally not obtained – nomination of Nenni to the presidency of Italy. This meant that Italian communists and socialists tried to foster an agreement with the regime in Belgrade, enabling them to take credit for the solution to a strained international situation. As far as the communists were concerned, after Stalin had rejected Togliatti’s proposition for a “free city” or the internationalisation of the Julian March, direct talks with the Yugoslav communists were the last straw.

While these inter-party problems intensified in May and June 1945, the dispute between the Western Allies and Belgrade was solved after 40 days of Yugoslav occupation of all regions to the East of the Isonzo/Soča river. The United States’ and

21. P. TOGLIATTI, *I comunisti e Trieste*, in: *l’Unità*, 16.05.1945.

22. E. AGA-ROSSI, V. ZASLAVSKY, op.cit., p.146; L. GIBIANSKY, op.cit., p.198; also see Dimitrov’s notes on 23 and 28 May 1945, in: I. BANAC, op.cit., p.371.

Britain's strong opposition, coupled with the fact that the Soviet Union did not want to risk a rupture with the West over the question of Trieste, led to the agreements of Belgrade and Duino between Yugoslavia and the Allies on 9 and 20 June 1945 respectively, effectively dividing the Italian territories of the Julian March into an Anglo-American Zone (A) including Trieste and Duino and a Yugoslav Zone (B) to its South, including Istria with the exception of Pola that remained under Western Allied administration until the signing of the Peace Treaty with Italy in February 1947.<sup>23</sup> This agreement also meant that the situation within the communist camp had dramatically changed. Now the Italian territory had been divided, and while Moscow was still backing the Yugoslavs, Stalin had chosen to adopt a “wait-and-see attitude” and proved that he could “go back on choices already made”.<sup>24</sup>

### Italian, Yugoslav or Free: the Fate of Trieste

After the Yugoslav retreat from Trieste the distribution of forces within the communist camp in the Julian March remained in limbo. Whereas the arrangements between the Allies and Yugoslavia somewhat favoured the PCI whose ambiguous position was partially alleviated – the KPJ pushed forward with its policy towards the disputed region. Some important steps were taken by Belgrade to further tighten its grip on the communist movement in the Julian March region. On behalf of the KPS, on 30 June 1945, the KPJ's central committee accepted the creation of an autonomous communist party for Trieste and the Julian March, under the authority of the central committee of the KPS.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, after the first disputes with the PCI, the leaderships in Ljubljana and Belgrade sought to resolve all problems inside the common communist camp by imposing their view and by trying to control the development of communism in the border region.

On 13 August 1945 the founding congress of the Communist Party of the Julian March (PCRГ/KPJK) was held in Trieste. The 496 delegates present elected 16 members to the Party Committee, of which 7 were Italians, 6 Slovenes and 3 Croats. The Slovene Boris Kraigher was elected secretary of the party.<sup>26</sup> The unification of

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23. On this phase of the conflict between the Allies and Tito see D. DE CASTRO, *La questione di Trieste: L'azione politica e diplomatica italiana dal 1943 al 1954*, vol.I, Lint, Trieste, 1981, pp. 210-220; A.G.M. DE ROBERTIS, *Le grandi potenze e il confine giuliano 1941-1947*, Caravelle, Bari, 1983, pp.217 f; B.C. NOVAK, *Trieste 1941-1954: La lotta politica, etnica e ideologica*, Mursia, Milano, 2013; M. BUCARELLI, *La “questione jugoslava” nella politica estera dell'Italia repubblicana (1945-1991)*, Aracne, Roma, 2008, pp.17-19.
24. S. PONS, *Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of the Cold War in Europe*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 2(2001), pp.3-27, here p.12.
25. Sjednica Politbiroa Centralnog Komiteta Komunističke Partije Jugoslavije, 30.06.1945, in: *Izvori za Istoriju Jugoslavije. Zapisnici sa sednica Politbiroa Centralnog Komiteta KPJ (11. jun 1945–7. jul 1948)*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, 1995, p.74.
26. AJ [Arhiv Jugoslavije], Arhiv Centralnog Komiteta Saveza Komunista Jugoslavije [hereafter: ACKSKJ], IX-18/II-1, Komunistička Partija Julijske Krajine.

all communist forces also reflected the retreat of the PCI from the region, as the Yugoslav communists took over the organisation, while the PCI's stance would leave it with the difficult task of rhetorically defending Trieste's "Italianità", all the while collaborating with the Yugoslavs.<sup>27</sup> Yet in the fall of 1945 some sections of the PCI in Istria refused to join the new party which they considered "nationalist", causing their forced dissolution.<sup>28</sup>

The stance taken by a part of the Italian communists in the Julian March definitely displayed validity. The PCRG/KPJK became an instrument of Yugoslav (Slovenian) irredentism. It openly supported the annexation of Trieste by Yugoslavia, doing so against the common agreement that this question would not be raised, awaiting the outcome of the peace conference instead. In a resolution from 24 September 1945, the PCRG/KPJK decided to ask the population of Trieste to openly adhere to the annexation of the city by Yugoslavia. The PCI leadership sent a letter to the comrades of the PCRG/KPJK on 30 September, asking them to recede from their position and to "await the decisions of the conference in London". Moreover Rome declared that if the PCRG/KPJK was to publish its resolution, the PCI would reserve itself the right to openly disapprove of this. Finally, on 7 October the party in Trieste openly adhered to the principle that Trieste should become part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The argumentation of this decision revolved around "ideological and practical" issues, such as the "Marxist-Leninist" development in Yugoslavia; the "prospective of the revolution in Europe and the world" by strengthening the areas "where revolutionary forces" had won the upper hand; the economic connection between Trieste and its Slovenian hinterland; the weakening of the "imperialistic" American and British influence and finally, the "solution to the problems of the [working] masses" of the region.<sup>29</sup>

Following these events, member of the PCI leadership Luigi Longo, described the party's reaction to the developments in the Julian March region in an article in *l'Unità*: on the one hand Longo attacked the Italian "reaction" that had used inflammatory "anti-Slavonic" words and had thus "forced" the communists in Trieste to ask for a Yugoslav annexation. On the other hand, the article also disapproved of the line followed in Trieste, because the workers of the city "also had to think of all Italian workers" and not just of themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Taking into account the broader picture drawn by the events of late summer and fall 1945, it can be asserted that the Yugoslav communists had taken steps to enforce their (national) vision of the future settlement of disputes in Trieste and the Julian March. The PCI, on the contrary, was rather arguing along internationalist and "class"

27. Togliatti especially favoured the retreat from the Zone B, knowing that this part of the region would most probably become a part of Yugoslavia. See P. KARLSEN op.cit., pp.96 f.

28. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 094, fasc.III/g/doc.22, Verbale dell'incontro di Pratolongo con Bussano e Mastromarino di Capodistria, 21.11.1945.

29. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 095, fasc.r/doc.9, Direzione del PCI alla direzione del PCRG, 30.09.1945; Direzione del PCI to direzione del PCRG: Appunti per una discussione sul problema di Trieste, 10.01.1946.

30. L. LONGO, *Per una miglior difesa dell'italianità di Trieste*, in: *l'Unità*, 30.10.1945.

lines. This all makes sense when considering that the Yugoslav organisations could count on the backing of a government in Belgrade that was pursuing its national interests with the support of Moscow.<sup>31</sup> The Italian communists were still in a fragile position whereby they had to back Yugoslav claims, according to the leading figure of Moscow but also had to work in a democratic, parliamentary system, where an overtly internationalist course could mean the loss of large portions of potential voters. Thus, as depicted in Longo's article, the optimum choice – defending Trieste's “Italianità”, while simultaneously backing Yugoslavia – was an attempt to satisfy the whole of the currents inside Italy as well as within the international communist movement too.

In continuation of its attempts to reach a useful agreement with its Yugoslav comrades, the PCI continued to seek dialogue with its counterparts in the Julian March and Belgrade throughout 1945 and the beginning of 1946.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile the Yugoslav propaganda accused Togliatti of working for the “Italian reaction” and thus publicised the discordance within the communist movement.<sup>33</sup> As the question of an “internationalisation” of Trieste became more relevant in international meetings, the PCRG/KPJK suggested that the communist forces: refuse an internationalisation; recognise that the inclusion of the Julian March into Yugoslavia was the only acceptable solution for the Slavonic majority of the population; neither accept the current situation nor the Anglo-American intervention, and reach an agreement along the lines discussed above between the PCI, the KPJ and the PCRG/KPJK; until the implementa-

31. In fact, the representatives from the Julian March complained at Politburo meetings in Belgrade about the behaviour exhibited by the Italian communists and their stance on the “free city”. See AJ, CKSKJ, IX-13/10, Kidrič to Kardelj; Izvori za Istoriju, 115 f.
32. In direct talks with the Yugoslav representative to Rome, Josip Smolaka, in November 1945, Togliatti and Smolaka agreed on the “free city” as suggested by Belgrade, under Yugoslav administration, with a customs union with Yugoslavia, while the solution would be bilateral. This was a wider concession to Yugoslavia, compared to the solution suggested by PCI representatives in Moscow in May, cited above. See AJ, ACKSKJ, IX-48/I-13, Smolaka to Tito, 12.11.1945.
33. The accusations were formulated by Yugoslav propagandist Stefan Mitrović in the party organ *Borba*. The Italian communists reacted by explaining that Mitrović's article showed that the KPJ did not understand the situation in Italy, which led to difficulties in cooperation between the Italian and Yugoslav communists (see AJ, ACKSKJ, IX-48/I-17). Later the same article appeared in the French party organ *Cahiers du Communisme*, which led to a much cited and debated letter from Togliatti to the PCF's leader Maurice Thorez, in which Togliatti defended the PCI and attacked Mitrović. In this letter, some historians saw a clear statement of Togliatti's defence of an Italian Trieste (e.g. Clementi, Galeazzi and Gualtieri). Rather, the letter should be interpreted in the light of Togliatti's defence of “Italianità” altogether, and also the frustration caused by the multiple breaches of accords by the communist leaders in Trieste (see APCI, Fondo M, mf. 267, Togliatti to Maurice [Thorez], 21.4.1946). Yet, Tito was firmly campaigning for annexation, without concern for the problems faced by the comrades in Rome. He stated on 2 February: “[For the question of the Julian March] not only ethnic, economic and strategic points of view should be taken into account, which would speak in Yugoslavia's favour, but also the correctness towards our country. [...] [Italy] was the aggressor and at war against the United Nations. [...] We have the support of the local population [...] it is in the interest of the future peace [...] and Yugoslavia has suffered tremendous losses [for which it shall be compensated]”. See *Borba*, 02.02.1946 and J. TITO, *Govori i članci*, vol.2, 8-VIII-1945–31-XII-1946, Naprijed, Zagreb, 1959, pp.168 f.

tion of such an agreement, the PCRG/KPJK would dwell on the position of annexation of Trieste and the Julian March to Yugoslavia. The trade unions were all to be organised under one common umbrella organisation and not inside Italian unions.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the communists in the Julian March were pushing for a clear pro-Yugoslav stance once again, while at the same time criticising the disputes created between the Italian and Julian party.

The PCI responded with a counter proposition. First, the Italian communists explained that the meetings between the two parties had revealed a deep discord on the question of Trieste. Second, the PCI would not “renounce the Italianità of Trieste” and raise the question of Trieste’s state affiliation, as this would cause major problems inside Italy and would be exploited by “reactionary forces”. Moreover the PCI supported the self-determination of all peoples and the “Italian national unity” was seen as a duty of “all democratic forces”. Taking these assertions into account, the PCI proposed a catalogue of measures: the unity of the Italian and Slavonic communists in the PCRG/KPJK should be granted; to achieve the latter, the PCRG/KPJK should refrain from disseminating Yugoslav annexation propaganda; the programme of the Julian party should instead propagate the achievements of Trieste’s population and fight “Italian chauvinism”; the Italian and Slavonic communists in the region should adhere – no matter what the solution to the question of Trieste – to the fight for self-government of the town, letting the people of Trieste decide their fate themselves; the PCRG/KPJK should secure an adequate representation of the two nationalities and shall be organically linked to the PCI, the KPS and the KPJ, to prevent divergence within the party.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously, the PCI was on the one hand trying to impose the acceptance of the “free city” theory, calling it “self-government”. Moreover, by demanding closer ties to the Italian and the Yugoslav parties, the PCI would ensure that Ljubljana and Belgrade loosen their grip on the Julian March’ organisation. Boris Kraigher, secretary of the PCRG/KPJK, formulated his answer to the Italian plea quite clearly: the party would not officially take any stance on the future of Trieste. The members of the party would only talk about territorial questions through non-party institutions and societies. Moreover, Kraigher declared that

“it is not the duty of a party member to declare his position on the [territorial question]. It is [however] the duty of those who do not embrace the Yugoslav solution, not to declare themselves favourable to any other position”.

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34. The internationalisation had already been examined by the Allies in 1945 following the partition of the Julian March between the Western Allies and Yugoslavia. In 1946, it became more and more obvious that this solution would become the one favoured at the peace conference with Italy. See R.H. RAINERO, G. MANZARI (eds), *L'Italia del dopoguerra: Il trattato di pace con l'Italia*, Stabilimento grafico militare, Gaeta, 1998; APCI, Fondo M, mf. 095, fasc.r/doc.10, Documento proposta dai delegati del PCRG, 17.01.1946.
35. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 095, fasc.r/doc.11, Posizione della segreteria del PCI sui rapporti col PCRG, 26.01.1946, also: AJ, ACKSKJ, IX-48/I-15.

The fact that the party was rather leaning to Belgrade than to Rome was explained by the revolution that had taken place in Yugoslavia and by the fact that the Italian communists were incorporated into a “bourgeois parliamentary system”.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it was obvious that the two parties would not easily come to an agreement. Moreover, Tito clearly supported the representatives of the PCRG/KPJK in their meetings with the Politburo in Belgrade. Additionally he refrained from giving in to Italian demands no matter how difficult the situation for the PCI. Again, this dispute demonstrated that the logic behind the two factions’ struggle was completely opposite. Kraigher was indeed quite right when he referred to the incorporation of the PCI into the “bourgeois” system and that this made the difference. Yugoslavia’s supporters were backing national ideas and expansionist aspirations for the regime in Belgrade, while – for lack of an alternative – the PCI argued along internationalist lines, since it had no direct power in the contested territory and thus had to search for a compromise. The situation within the party would in fact not change very much in the months to come. Only in December was it attempted to find common ground between the PCI and the PCRG/KPJK.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, Tito and Kardelj complained to the Soviet ambassador to Yugoslavia, Anatolij Lavrent’ev, in mid-April 1946 about the PCI and its policy regarding the question of Trieste. The PCI was accused of taking almost the same stance as the other Italian parties and the Italian communists were also denounced as being “social-democrats” in their attitude. Here, the Soviet documents show that Moscow was not satisfied with the Yugoslav policy, since Belgrade had publicised the discord within the communist movement in January and the Kremlin did understand that the PCI could not adhere to the Yugoslav cause without losing face in front of the Italian public. Togliatti, who was holding on to the “free city” proposition for Trieste, asked for a compromise when meeting the Soviet ambassador to Italy, Mikhail Kostylev, in May 1946. The PCI leader argued along the lines of a common Italian-Yugoslav agreement, as he had done several times before, and asked the Soviets – also on the eve of the next round of peace talks in Paris in June – to support his proposition. Kostylev responded negatively, concluding that leaving Trieste out of Yugoslavia was akin to “separating the head from the body”.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, just days after this exchange between Togliatti and Kostylev, a Yugoslav delegation headed by Tito visited Moscow. Stalin asked if in the case of the creation of a “free territory” – according to the Yugoslav stance on a special status within Yugoslavia – this would have to include the surroundings of Trieste. Tito answered that the suburbs were

36. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 095, fasc.t/doc.12, Boris Kraigher to segreteria del PCI, 06.02.1946.

37. The attacks on all who did not adhere to the Yugoslav annexation continued until December, when at last Luigi Longo was sent to Trieste to find an agreement with the PCRG/KPJK that included the necessity for a common policy and the inclusion of PCI members into communist organisations of the region, see a.o. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 271, Verbali Segreteria 1944-1948, pp.21 and 24; Situazione politica a Trieste e Udine, Allegato 2, Situazione a Trieste, 26.07.1946; APCI, Fondo M, mf. 096, fasc.t/doc.8, Riassunto di Pratomlongo su una riunione con Babic e Jaksetic, 19.08.1946; Situazione a Trieste, 02.12.1945. On Longo’s visit, see also the Yugoslav documentation in: AJ, ACKSKJ, IX-48/I-33.

38. E. AGA-ROSSI, V. ZASLAVSKY, op.cit., p.149.

Slovene and that thus, only the city could be granted special status, although he still argued for a complete inclusion of the area into Yugoslavia. Stalin did however notice that the Western Allies did not want to hand over Trieste. Moreover, the Yugoslav proposition foresaw a loss of territorial integrity between Italy and Trieste, a stance only abandoned in 1954.<sup>39</sup>

In the aftermath the Italian and Yugoslav communists tried to generate a favourable approach in Moscow before the next peace talks in June 1946. Evidently, the key in reaching those goals that the parties had set out for themselves was the leader of the communist world, Stalin. His position on the question of Trieste had up to that point in time been pro-Yugoslav. Yet, Stalin had already informed Tito in May that the Western Allies were not giving in on Trieste.<sup>40</sup> This was identical to Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov's experience in Paris in June. His interlocutions with the Western Allies proved difficult on the question of Trieste and he was not able to enforce the Soviet line. Thus, on 23 June Stalin telegraphed to Paris that

“we must not derail the [...] conference of ministers because of the issue of Trieste [...] If there is an agreement on other issues, including the one on Bulgaria, then you should introduce the Memel version.<sup>41</sup> If the Memel regime is not acceptable, then we could propose a modus vivendi analogous to Togliatti's proposal, i.e. internationalization of the port of Trieste and a condominium of Yugoslavia and Italy regarding the city of Trieste [...] Under any conditions the border between Yugoslavia and Italy must go to the west of the French line or at least according to the French line”.<sup>42</sup>

A compromise was reached on 3 July 1946, with the creation of a free territory that basically sanctioned the events of May and June 1945. Finally, the partition was formalised with the signing of the Peace Treaty with Italy on 10 February 1947, when most of the Eastern Adriatic territories were annexed to Yugoslavia, while a small strip of land, including Trieste, Capodistria/Koper and Cittanova/Novigrad formed the so-called Free Territory of Trieste (FTT), placed under the jurisdiction of the United Nations after the installation of a governor appointed by the international

39. Soviet and Yugoslav Records of the Tito-Stalin Conversation of 27-28 May 1946, in: *Cold War International History Project*, March 1998, p.119; P.E. TAVIANI, *I giorni di Trieste: Diario 1953-1954*, Mulino, Bologna, 1998, pp.126-128.

40. In May the members of the Allied Commission for the study of the frontier between Italy and Yugoslavia had made propositions on this matter. The Soviet line granted full control of all the Julian March to Yugoslavia; the American line gave Trieste, Gorizia and large strips of Istria to Italy; the British proposal foresaw similar borders as the American with minor advantages for Yugoslavia; finally, the French proposal gave Trieste and Gorizia to Italy, but most of Istria, with the exception of the North-Western tip would become Yugoslav. See G. VALDEVIT, *Il dilemma Trieste, Guerra e dopoguerra in uno scenario europeo*, LEG, Gorizia, 1999, pp.86 f.

41. The “Memel version” foresaw Yugoslav administration of the city under control of the Allies, similarly to the Memel regime after the First World War.

42. V.O. PECHATNOV, *The Allies are Pressing on you to Break your Will.... Foreign Policy Correspondence Between Stalin and Molotov And Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946*, in: *Cold War International History Project*, September 1999, pp.17 f.

body.<sup>43</sup> Since the governor would never be appointed to the FTT, the situation remained a *de facto* partition of the territory in an Anglo-American “Zone A”, consisting of Trieste and the coastal strip leading North to Duino, and a Yugoslav “Zone B” including the North-Western part of Istria and the cities of Capodistria/Koper, Buie/Buje, Umago/Umag and Cittanova/Novigrad.

Yet, before the conclusion of the peace talks with Italy and the signing of the peace treaty, the communist world experienced some movement on the Adriatic in late 1946. The division of the Eastern part of Italy resulted in the affirmation of Anglo-American administration in Trieste. This in turn was a solution that neither the PCI nor the KPJ found appropriate. The Italian communists were fighting for an “independent” Italy ever since the time of the war, and did not tolerate its inclination towards the West. Moreover, direct military rule by the Western Powers over Trieste was an utter debacle for the international communist movement. Thus, after the solution of 3 July, a phase of “maximum convergence of the different components of the international communist movement” concerned by the fate of Trieste was launched. This phase culminated in Togliatti's visit to Belgrade in November 1946, the goal being to find a compromise with Tito that would undermine the politics of the christian-democrat Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, and boost the PCI's reputation in the eyes of the Italian public, as well as find a solution that would force the Western Allies to retreat from Trieste altogether.<sup>44</sup>

At first, the two leaders exchanged their points of view through Soviet ambassador Lavrent'ev in October. Togliatti suggested incorporating Trieste into the Italian state, while the rest of the Julian March including Gorizia – a city that according to the conclusions of the peace conference was in any case going to be Italian – would be transferred to Yugoslavia. Tito's counter proposition foresaw autonomy for Trieste under an Italian-Yugoslav condominium, while Italy would be granted a predominant role.<sup>45</sup> During the actual meeting between 2 and 6 November, the two communist leaders agreed on a line that foresaw autonomy for Trieste under Italian guidance along with the shift of Gorizia to Yugoslavia. After this agreement Togliatti made sure his apparent success was duly publicised. On 7 November *l'Unità* explained in its editorial how Tito was ready to accept Italian sovereignty over Trieste, thanks to Togliatti's intervention.<sup>46</sup> In a letter to Molotov the same day, ambassador Kostylev announced the “hard blow” to the Italian political right and the “rehabilitation of the PCI”.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it is possible to witness how the communist parties concerned by the

43. On the clauses of the Italian Peace Treaty: B. CIALDEA, M. VISMARA (eds), *Documenti della pace italiana: Trattato di pace con l'Italia*, Ed. Politica Estera, Roma, 1947; A. VARSORI, *Il trattato di pace italiano. Le iniziative politiche e diplomatiche dell'Italia*, in: A. VARSORI (ed.), *La politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1943-1957)*, LED, Milano, 2006, pp.156-163.

44. After all, the communists had suffered a delicate defeat in the first post-war national elections of June 1946, obtaining just over half the votes of the christian-democrats and staying behind their allies, the socialists.

45. L. GIBIANSKIJ, *Mosca, il Pci e la questione di Trieste (1943-1948)*, in: F. GORI, S. PONS (eds), *Dagli archivi di Mosca. L'Urss, il Cominform e il Pci (1943-1951)*, Carocci, Roma, 1998, pp.122 f.

46. *Il Maresciallo Tito è disposto a lasciare Trieste all'Italia*, in: *l'Unità*, 07.11.1946.

47. Quoted by E. AGA-ROSSI, V. ZASLAVSKY, op.cit., p.153.

question of Trieste had in fact orchestrated an attack on the conservative parties in Italy. In doing so, they seemingly achieved an important goal by showing how co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia was indeed possible under communist guidance and that the Anglo-Americans ought to leave Trieste.

Although the international communist movement was cheering and from inside the “Marxist-Leninist” world, everything seemed to be working out quite suitably, the reaction to Togliatti, Tito and Stalin’s diplomatic move would prove them wrong. First, the PCI’s ally, the Socialist Party – in charge of the Foreign Ministry since October – disapproved the deal and did not want to give up Gorizia. Foreign minister Nenni would recount in his diary:

“[It was] an agitated day. It is Togliatti’s fault. After returning from Belgrade last night, he rushed to *l’Unità* to give an interview, announcing that Tito would renounce Trieste while asking for Gorizia. To be true, Tito is giving up on something he does not have and is asking for something that is already ours”.<sup>48</sup>

The national newspapers’ reactions were quite similar and demonstrated that Togliatti had completely miscalculated his moves and further discredited the communist party in the Italian public opinion.<sup>49</sup> Finally, while his party was still part of the Italian government, Togliatti had taken diplomatic action without the government’s consent and without even informing it prior to the publication of its outcome, shedding dubious light on his behaviour. In fact, the Italian Council of Ministers decided that there could be no further deliberation on the grounds of a cession of Gorizia. At least on the internal communist front, Belgrade acclaimed the success of the PCI and rebuffed the Italian government’s stance as unmasking the “fascist” ideology inherent to it. At the same time, the accord between Rome and Belgrade was a hard blow for the PCRG/KPJK that was still fighting for the inclusion of the Julian March into Yugoslavia as “7<sup>th</sup> Federative Republic”, leading – according to the observer of the PCI, Giordano Pratolongo – to a feeling of powerlessness, disorientation and even of treachery by Belgrade.<sup>50</sup> All in all the idea of the “free city” without Western control resulted in clamorous failure. Moreover, after years of support for the cause of a Yugoslav Trieste, Soviet diplomacy had given in to the possibility of creating a free territory. This in turn was a simplification of the situation for Togliatti, who was bound to the commitment within the communist movement, while he defended the ambiguous “Italianità” of Trieste and had sensed the possibility of a “free city” for quite some time. Nevertheless, the Italian communist leader was always adherent to a principle commitment to the decisions emanating from the Kremlin, while he did have some peculiar ideas on solving the problems with Italy’s Eastern neighbour. Hence, the PCI’s policies during this period had their specific nuances, far from being

48. P. NENNI, *Tempo di Guerra Fredda. Diari 1943-1956*, SugarCo, Milano, 1981, pp.295 f.

49. For the attacks and responses in the newspapers, see different articles in *l’Unità*, 08.11.1946-17.11.1946.

50. AJ, CKSKJ, IX-18/I-30, KPI i politička situacija u italiji, [late November 1946];APCI, Fondo M, mf. 096, Appunti di Pratolongo sulla situazione di Trieste, 21.11.1946.

but a mere product of Moscow's dictate.<sup>51</sup> The events and discussions described so far do show that even with restricted room for manoeuvre, a possibility to at least try and enforce a distinct policy on such a question as the territorial dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia, still existed nevertheless.

### Trieste, the Cominform and the Split

After this phase of transnational and international negotiations, the Peace Treaty with Italy was signed on 10 February 1947. This also led to a reorganisation and a reshuffling of the situation in the FTT. A new party was to be formed for the region, under the auspices of better cooperation between the Italian and Yugoslav communists. As previously stated above, at the end of the year 1946, representatives of the PCI had met with their Slovenian comrades to resolve the problems within the party of the Julian March and had agreed on an enhancement of the PCI's position. Yet, as early as January 1947, there was again "contrast with the comrades on several issues".<sup>52</sup> Thus a solution was sought out involving Belgrade, whose positioning on the matter had shifted towards a more pragmatic stance in the meantime also factoring in Tito's acceptance of Italian control over Trieste as a viable option before the signing of the Peace Treaty with Italy.

Once again Luigi Longo was to lead the discussions with the Eastern comrades. In early April 1947 he visited Belgrade to discuss the future order of the FTT. Longo and Milovan Djilas signed an agreement expressing the will to convene for a congress of the PCRG/KPJK as soon as possible; to rename the party and to form a programme in accordance with "the actual questions".<sup>53</sup> The information office opened by the PCI a year earlier, headed by Pratolongo, would be dissolved and incorporated into the new party while the organisations inside the territories belonging to Italy according to the peace treaty would be absorbed by the PCI.<sup>54</sup> Finally, the PCI was to campaign for an autonomous status for the Friuli region.

The man who was assigned to the task of enforcing the decisions taken in Belgrade in April was Vittorio Vidali, an Italian communist who had fought for the communist

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51. Here the author refers to Silvio Pons' argument, stating that seeing the Soviet-PCI relations as a "one-way command structure, in which the Soviet Union made all the decisions and the PCI implemented them", misses out on the "complexity of Soviet strategy" toward Europe. See S. PONS, *L'impossibile egemonia. L'Urss, il Pci e le origini della Guerra fredda (1943-1948)*, Carocci, Roma, 1999.
52. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 271, p.24, Situazione di Trieste, 23.01.1947.
53. On this meeting see AJ, ACKSKJ, IX-46/1-56; The corresponding Italian documentation is in APCI, Fondo M, Verbali Segreteria, mf. 268.
54. This in turn had already been discussed in a meeting of Slovenian representatives of the PCRG/KPJK and Italian communists in Gorizia in February and decided upon in March. See APCI, Fondo M, mf. 247/248, Costituzione Comitato nuovo Circondario Gorizia-Monfalcone, 16.02.1947; Promemoria su Gorizia, 04.03.1947; Direzione PCI al comitato circondariale del PCRG di Gorizia, Monfalcone e Gradisca, Risoluzione, 28.03.1947.

cause in South America during the fascist period and who was “coming back to his native town” after 24 years, to take part in the party's transformation in the Julian March.<sup>55</sup> After years of problems in Trieste and especially with the pro-Yugoslav leadership of the PCRG/KPJK, the PCI was sending a strongman to the town, whose credentials for the international communist movement were impeccable. It soon became apparent from inside the PCI that Vidali and the PCRG's old leaders would not easily get along. Indeed, the comrades of the PCRG/KPJK were trying to stall and not carry out the congress, waiting instead for the nomination of a governor to the FTT. Furthermore, the Yugoslav communists were trying everything in their power not to go ahead with the execution of the other points in the agreement. Yet the PCI strongly opposed this tactic and went ahead with planning a congress for July 1947. Vidali's point of view on what had to be done in the FTT becomes absolutely clear when analysing a letter sent to the PCI's leadership after the meeting in Belgrade. In his opinion, it was time to “leave aside the insecurities and implement the recent resolution”; to understand “that Italy is not the main enemy” and “bring to an end the lack of respect for promises and pacts”, while the “hostility towards the PCI” had “to end once and for all”.<sup>56</sup> Moreover his words marked the wish for a new beginning, and he was undeniably arguing for the party's complete reform. No wonder that relief was felt among Slovenian representatives, when Vidali's future in Trieste seemed unclear following the Belgrade meeting. Among the “old guard” of the PCRG/KPJK, a loss of power and control could be assumed once the man from Trieste put his plans into action.

While the Italian movement to reform the PCRG/KPJK was trying to gain momentum, the position of the PCI in Italy changed dramatically. After a governmental crisis in May, the left (communists and socialists led by Nenni) was excluded from government.<sup>57</sup> The international situation also changed considerably with the launch of the “Marshall Plan” in June and the escalation of the East-West conflict during that same period, which would lead to Moscow having a tighter grip on the communist parties in Western Europe in the medium term. The new situation would also be reflected in Togliatti's fierce speeches in front of the PCI's central committee in July.

Finally, at the end of August 1947, the inaugural congress of the new communist party of the Free Territory of Trieste (PCTLT/KPTO/KPSTT) was held under the auspices of a re-launch for the regional movement by the Italian communists.<sup>58</sup> The party leadership remained deeply fractioned after the congress however, as the Yugoslav wing continued to argue that it did not want to take orders from Rome, that it was still faithful to Belgrade, while at the same time mocking the Italians who had been “kicked out of government”.<sup>59</sup>

55. *Il Lavoratore*, 19.06.1947.

56. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 096, fasc.t/doc.20, Relazione di Pralongo sul rientro a Trieste di Vidali, 29.05.1947; Lettera di Vidali.

57. P. CRAVERI, *De Gasperi*, Mulino, Bologna, 2006, pp.267-302.

58. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 098, fasc.56/1, Congresso costitutivo del PCTLT, 31.08-02.09.1947.

59. P. KARLSEN, op.cit., p.193.

Indeed, the repercussions of the new political situation were felt by the PCI in connection with the creation of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) and its founding conference in Szklarska Poreba, Poland, in September 1947. The PCI (along with the French communists) took a severe beating by the Soviets and suffered an even worse defeat by the Yugoslavs, who profoundly criticised the Italian communists' approach towards internal and international matters and even the entire war period. Criticism by the Soviet Union led the PCI to engage in yet harsher words against the Marshall Plan, "American imperialism", to strongly adhere to "peace campaigns" and to demonstrate its ability to mobilise the masses by initiating strikes throughout the whole country.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile the situation of a fractioned party leadership in Trieste was not overcome. The Belgrade agreements had created a situation in which the Italian wing of the party had become far stronger than before and the Yugoslav wing had to accept the implementation of the Italian Peace Treaty, which made it far more difficult to openly adhere to a "Yugoslav" solution in territorial issues. Indeed, the answer to this situation was granted by the next conference held by the Cominform in June 1948 and the decision to condemn Yugoslav behaviour and its overly independent approach to the questions of a Balkan Federation, the intervention in Albania and the support of the communist movement in Greece.<sup>61</sup> This time around, it was Togliatti who could triumph over the "failures" of Yugoslav communism and, moreover, get revenge on the comrades who had so fiercely attacked the Italian communists just a few months earlier.

### Conclusion: The New Communist Order in the FTT

The repercussions of the split between Tito and Stalin were also deeply felt on the Adriatic. The new situation led to a much desired settlement of scores in the FTT. The PCI, faithful to the line of Moscow, attacked Tito's "adventurism" in foreign policy and naturally declined the invitation to the KPJ's fifth congress to be held in July 1948.<sup>62</sup> In Trieste and the Julian March region, the clashes between Comin-

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60. On Szklarska Poreba: G. PROCACCI (ed.), *The Cominform. Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 1994. For analyses on the attacks on the PCI and their effects: S. PONS, *A Challenge Let Drop: Soviet Foreign Policy, the Cominform and the Italian Communist Party, 1947-8*, in: F. GORI, S. PONS (eds), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-1953*, Macmillan, London, 1996, pp.247-263.
61. Also in this case, literature and interpretations available are immense. For further information see the volumes cited above and I. BANAC, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1988; P.J. MARKOVIĆ, *Beograd između istoka i zapada 1948-1965*, NIU, Beograd, 1996; M. ZUCCARI, *Il ditto sulla piaga. Togliatti e il Pci nella rottura fra Stalin e Tito 1944-1957*, Mursia, Milano, 2008.
62. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 199, p.12-II, Verbali Direzione, 08.-09.07.1948. See also the articles published in the party organ in the days after the rift, confirming the alignment to Moscow's stance in *l'Unità*, 29.06.1948-02.07.1948.

formist and anti-Cominformist forces were fierce. In Trieste the PCTLT organised a special congress, in which the Cominformist wing prevailed, prompting the party leader, Vidali, to a purge within the ranks of the party and to the “re-education” of its members.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, in the Zone B of the FTT, the Yugoslav view prevailed. While Vidali was securing the party's support in Trieste and tightening his grip on the comrades in the city, the pro-Cominformist forces on the other side of the Zone border faced denunciation and persecution by anti-Cominformists. Finally, by the end of July, many communist leaders of the Zone B were expelled to Italy.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the resolution of the Cominform led to a clear divide of the communist inclinations throughout the FTT. While the years after the end of the Second World War had been characterised by the attempt of both the Italian and the Yugoslav leaderships to enforce their point of view in the contested region – albeit under completely different circumstances –, the rift within the communist world led to the clarification of positions. For the Italian communists on the one hand, this was certainly a relief, after years of having to cope with national requirements and internationalist ideals. For the Yugoslav communists, on the other hand, the loss of support from Moscow implied that the strong and unequivocal official inclination of the FTT's communists towards Yugoslavia would end and be split between the Zones A and B of the Free Territory.

What was brought to light in this article is that the difference in the internal positions of the PCI and KPJ played a decisive role in how they were able to manage the issue of territorial disputes between Italy and Yugoslavia. The Yugoslavs, initially supported by Moscow and relying on a regime that controlled a country victorious during the war, could easily make demands of a purely national nature, without considering the difficulties of their brother party in Rome. While the historiography has been inclined to see Togliatti as either completely following the line of Moscow, or being an independent actor in the question of Trieste, the truth is more nuanced. The fact that, for the longest time, the communist leader was manoeuvring between Italian nationalism and irredentism and the line set out by Moscow, is proof of his difficult position that was articulated through the vague term of “Italianità” of Trieste. Yet, his tactic that evolved throughout the year 1945, and was apparent in the “free city” proposition, shows that he was not but a mere puppet with Moscow pulling the strings, although his room for manoeuvre was quite limited. This is also demonstrated through the tactic of trying to persuade Moscow of a certain idea first, before in turn trying to implement it in his policies. It can moreover be asserted that the conflict between Italian and Yugoslav communists in the first post-war years was an offspring of the beginning Cold War. Since the Allies could not resolve the question of Trieste and the free territory, national ambitions inside the communist camp surfaced and led to a clash on the question of the Adriatic city. This clash proves that Moscow was not the almighty ruler of the communist world, allowing some prospect of tactical ma-

63. APCI, Fondo M, mf. 098, fasc. II/B, Bozza Relazione Vidali sulla situazione politica ed organizzativa del PCTLT alla luce della Risoluzione dell'UI.

64. A chronology of the events can be found in: APCI, Fondo M, mf. 099, fasc. VI.

noeuving for other communist parties. Yet, the possibility of Moscow enforcing a final “diktat” whenever it felt this was necessary must also be considered as a fact.

Finally, when considering breaches, rifts and different currents within the communist camp during the Cold War period, it has to be kept in mind that only a fraction of these manifestations of discord – such as the “Hungarian Revolution” in 1956 or the “Prague Spring” in 1968 – surfaced in a dramatic way. Rather, as the example of Trieste has shown, a thorough analysis of interparty relations is needed to portray also those occurrences that shaped the communist world without being at the centre of attention.

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