

ITALIAN UNIFICATION 1850–1860

UNIFICATION OF ITALY – OVERVIEW: The events (revolutions) between 1848-1849 played an important role in Italy – still it looked like nothing really happened:

1. *No changes of the boundaries of the Italian States*
 2. *Austrian control (and military) re-established in the Italian States*
 3. *French garrison in Rome made the foreign influence even stronger than before 1848*
- ...but two important changes did take place:

1. *Piedmont-Sardinia had changed. This Italian State did now want to dominate the richer Northern regions of Italy. Note the new minister, Camillo di Cavour, who belonged to the new generation of conservatives (beside Napoleon III and Bismarck) who sought to harness industrial and commercial progress to maintain political authority of traditional governing classes*
2. *Napoleon III of France wanted a revision of the European balance of power. He based his foreign policy on some readjustments – especially a reduction of Austrian power in central and south Europe*

Piedmont-Sardinia in an alliance would act against Austria. They would not receive the results Cavour desired – a northern region under Piedmont-Sardinia – but they would experience a transform of the political balance in Italy. Austria did not have the power to protect the traditional conservative governments of central and southern Italy anymore. Piedmont-Sardinia would therefore take action in the Central Duchies (Tuscany, Modena, Parma) which would be annexed (included) by the country. The intention of Cavour was never to go further south but the actions of Giuseppe Garibaldi forced the Piedmontese minister to act and therefore the central parts as well as the south became part of the Piedmontese unification... just like the more radical Italian nationalists had outlined!

PIEDMONT-SARDINIA 1850-1860: The only real exception to the Austrian repression after 1848-49 was the nation that actually had waged an open war against Austria – Piedmont-Sardinia! This nation:

1. *Retained its constitution*
2. *Retained its integrity of its territory*
3. *Was not occupied by Austrian military troops*

Why did Austria let Piedmont-Sardinia keep this relative independence?

1. *Piedmont-Sardinias geographical position – close to France and Austria (a “buffer state” – between the two bigger nations). If Austria pressured Piedmont-Sardinia too much the nation might turn to France for help...*
2. *The strong monarchy of Piedmont-Sardinia under Victor Emmanuel II, with a king that was trained to be an autocrat, should be a guarantee against pressure from radical nationalists*
3. *Both Victor Emmanuel II’s mother and wife were members of the Austrian imperial family so Austria expected Piedmont-Sardinia to show some loyalty towards the Austrian Empire through this close relationship*

The Piedmontese constitution (“*Il Statuto*“) was based on certain autocracy. It included two parliamentary chambers:

Upper Chamber – directly appointed by the ruler (King Victor Emmanuel II)

Lower Chamber – elected by vote (the voters had to be literate and pay some tax which meant that only 2.25% of the population got to vote)

Neither one of the chambers had any real political power. It was in the rulers hand. He was in command of the Army and he appointed (and dismissed) his ministers at will.

The first administration of Victor Emmanuel II was a moderate conservative government under Massimo D’Azeglio. He (and the king) were concerned about the power and influence of the Catholic Church. In 1850 a batch of measures – the “**Siccardi Laws**” was produced against the

ITALIAN UNIFICATION 1850–1860

church in Piedmont-Sardinia:

- *The Church Courts were abolished*
- *The Church ecclesiastical (educational) privileges were abolished*
- *The number of holy days were limited*
- *The senior churchman Archbishop Fransoni was imprisoned when he ignored the new measures*

The weak coalition government under D'Azeglio was undermined by the Finance Minister Camillo di Cavour(!) and the leader of the middle-class party Urbano Rattazzi. In 1852 Cavour became the new Prime Minister. His aim was to create a political and economic stability in Piedmont-Sardinia that would allow it to dominate the northern part of Italy. His rule was typical for the **new conservative statesmen** – ignoring the constitutional principles leaning on the authority given to him by the ruler King Victor Emmanuel II. He

- *Censored the press (especially the Mazzinian press)*
- *Persecuted and arrested Mazzinian democrats*
- *Side-stepped the parliament when it did not serve his purpose*
- *manipulated election results (in 1857 when it looked like a strong right-wing majority could have taken over the rule of Piedmont-Sardinia)*
- *Took more than one position in the government. In 1855 he was Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Finance Minister*

In other ways he tried to use **more modern liberal methods**:

- **Administrative reforms** to increase the efficiency (and remove criticism...)
- **Reforms against the Church** – closed monasteries and reduced the amount of benefices, which added money to the State...
- **Economic reforms** – concluded free-trade treaties with Belgium, France and Great Britain This linked Piedmont-Sardinia to the most advanced economies of western Europe and gave the nation the opportunity to gain necessary raw material and machinery necessary for the development of the Piedmontese commercial and industrial prosperity
- **Economic reforms** – Cavour floated large internal and foreign loans (to pay the war indemnity to Austria + invest in industrial development)

Compared with the more developed Western European nations the industrialization of Piedmont-Sardinia was quite moderate but compared with the other Italian states it was now the most advanced and modern state. It was Italy's leading economy!

CAVOUR – EUROPEAN DIPLOMACY: Cavour's most important contribution to the unification was his ability to place the "*Italian question*" into the context of European diplomacy.

CRIMEAN WAR: The first real opportunity that appeared for Cavour was the Crimean War 1854. Piedmont-Sardinia concluded an agreement with the allies (Great Britain, France and the Ottoman Empire) by which 18 000 troops would be sent to fight in the Crimea. This would entitle Piedmont-Sardinia a place at the congress of Peace after the war. The Piedmontese military contribution was limited but in 1856 Cavour got to participate at the Peace Conference in Paris.

PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE 1856: Cavour's aims in Paris were:

1. *Territorial compensation for the war effort (possibly the Duchy of Parma)*
2. *A commitment from the powers on the subject of the Austrian presence in Italy*

In the context of 1856 Cavour failed to achieve a diplomatic initiative and he had not created any military solution to the problem of the Austrian presence in Italy. Part of the reason of this failure was Cavour's inexperience of great power diplomacy.

POSITIVE RESULTS OF THE CRIMEAN WAR: Still – Cavour and Piedmont-Sardinia gained some international recognition which gave her more confidence in dealing with the Austrian question in Italy. Another even more important result for Piedmont-Sardinia (and Prussia in the German Confederation) was the fact that Austria lost its only ally Russia after the Crimean war. Austria was never actively participating in the war but the country officially supported the enemies of Russia which definitely broke the previous diplomatic understanding between Austria and

ITALIAN UNIFICATION 1850–1860

Russia. Now Austria was isolated! One adjustment to this situation was the Austrian policy in her Italian states (Lombardy and Venetia) which became a bit more relaxed after 1856.

CRY OF GRIEF SPEECH: In January 1859 King Victor Emmanuel II held a speech where he declared that he could not stop his ears to the “*Cry of Grief*” (“*grido di dolore*“) that came from his Italian neighbors. This raised the tension between Piedmont-Sardinia and Austria!

PIEDMONT-SARDINIA 1859: After the Crimean War the relation between the nationalists and the Piedmontese government and king had become a bit better. The nationalists had formed the **National Society** in 1857 – an association that soon had over 8000 members and therefore came to play a certain role in pushing the question of unification to the contemporary Piedmontese agenda. Listening and cooperate with the nationalists too much would at the other hand ruin the good relation with France so it was a delicate political balance for Cavour to deal with. In 1858 the relation to France was nearly destroyed by the “*Orsini affair*“. Felice Orsini, a nationalist who had lived in Piedmont, tried to kill Napoleon III in January 1858. Napoleon III reacted by accusing the Piedmontese government not being able to restrain such fanatics and thereby giving them the opportunity to plan and carry out their deeds. King Victor Emmanuel calmed the French Emperor and made him convinced that Piedmont-Sardinia actually was a good guarantee against these more fanatic nationalists instead of the opposite. The relation of Piedmont-Sardinia and France improved over that year and in July 1858 Cavour met with Napoleon III in Plombières.

PACT OF PLOMBIÈRES: During this secret meeting they planned for a:

1. French military intervention resulting in the expulsion of Austria from Lombardy and Venetia
2. The enlargement of Piedmont-Sardinia
3. An Italy made up by four major blocs
4. France would receive Nice and Savoy as part of the payment for the military aid

The agreement was mostly dictated by Napoleon III but Cavour realized that Piedmont-Sardinia would not be able to unify the northern Italian states without French military help so he agreed to these ideas (like a true **opportunist**).

WAR OF 1859: It's important to first of all state the importance of the French forces in reaching some success in this war.

PIEDMONTESE WEAKNESS: The Piedmontese mobilization of their forces was “*half-hearted*“. The more conservative officers in the Piedmontese Army were very reluctant to arm large numbers of men (many radical nationalists) so the number of armed soldiers were 40% short of the figures agreed upon in Plombières. Victor Emmanuel II had assured Napoleon III that many Italian patriots would rally to the nationalist cause. The number 200 000 was mentioned – only 10% of that number showed up...

AUSTRIAN WEAKNESS: Fortunately for Piedmont-Sardinia and France the Austrian campaign was also poor:

1. **Poor command.** Some “*courtier soldiers*” led this campaign instead of more experienced generals
2. **Slow mobilization.** The Austrian mobilization was extremely slow which gave the French troops over 10 days to by train move their troops towards the Piedmontese border towards Austria
3. **Partial mobilization.** Austria had to leave many troops in other parts of the Empire (especially in Hungary) which led to a smaller force that actually was outnumbered by the Franco-Piedmontese force they faced

Two battles (Battle of Magenta June 4th and Battle of Solferino June 24th) led to an armistice in Villafranca July 11th 1859

VILLAGRANCA 1859: The rulers of France and Austria negotiated an agreement based on the following facts:

1. *The French military forces had been crucial for the limited success*

ITALIAN UNIFICATION 1850–1860

2. *The Piedmontese war effort had been limited*
3. *Piedmont-Sardinia with its limited economic resources would hardly be able to fulfill its promises pay the French campaign expenses*
4. *The Piedmontese army did not have plans or equipment for a prolonged siege warfare*
5. *Cavour's plans way exceeded the agreements about what would happen with the central Italian duchies after the war*

So France and Austria agreed on the following terms – **Villafranca agreement** (formalized in Zurich):

1. *Lombardy was transferred to France (who later transferred to Piedmont-Sardinia)*
2. *The rulers of Tuscany and Modena were to be restored*
3. *A principle of a confederacy under Papal leadership was reaffirmed*

Cavour was furious over this agreement and advised the king that Piedmont-Sardinia should continue the war alone. When Victor Emmanuel II rejected this Cavour resigned!

THE CENTRAL DUCHIES 1859: Cavour had before the Villafranca agreement together with the National Society made arrangements of the establishment of provisional administrations in the central Italian territories (in the name of Italy and King Victor Emmanuel II). According to the Pact of Plombières these areas were beyond Piedmontese control. So Cavour's resignation left the commissioners in Tuscany, Parma and Modena in a very awkward position. Now they could either step down or act on their own initiatives without the support of Piedmont-Sardinia... They decided to act!

1. *Luigi Farini made himself dictator over Parma, Modena and Romagna (and called the new area "Emilia")*
2. *Baron Ricasoli made himself dictator over Tuscany*
3. *Both Emilia and Tuscany declared that their intention was to become part of a strong Italian kingdom under King Victor Emmanuel II*
4. *Both Emilia and Tuscany reformed their currencies and custom duties into line with those of Piedmont-Sardinia*

This put Napoleon III in a difficult position since he had made an agreement with Austria in Zurich.

PLEBISCITES OF 1860: To be able to deal with the situation in the Central Duchies France and Piedmont-Sardinia concluded a new agreement in Turin March 1860:

1. *Emilia and Tuscany should hold plebiscites to decide their future allegiance to Piedmont-Sardinia*
2. *Savoy and Nice should hold plebiscites to decide their future allegiance to France*

The result was an agreement to be annexed by Piedmont-Sardinia respective France. Piedmont-Sardinia had its area and population doubled. Still – they lost Nice and Savoy and Austria was still in full control of Venetia. So we see a **partly unification of Northern Italy** under the reign of King Victor Emmanuel II of Piedmont-Sardinia!