

# The Italian Unification

**TIMELINE** During the 18th century, intellectual changes began to dismantle traditional values and institutions. Liberal ideas from France and Britain spread rapidly, and from 1789 the French Revolution became the genesis of "*liberal Italians*". A series of political and military events resulted in a **unified kingdom of Italy in 1861**.

The settlements reached in 1815 at the Vienna Congress had restored Austrian domination over the Italian peninsula but had left Italy completely fragmented. The Congress had divided the territory among a number of European nations and the victors of the Napoleonic Wars. The Kingdom of Sardinia recovered Piedmont (Piemonte), Nice, and Savoy and acquired Genoa.

There were three major obstacles to unity at the time the congress took place, i.e. (a) the Austrian occupation of Lombardy and Venice in the north, (b) the principality under the sovereignty of the pope, i.e. the Papal States that controlled the center of the Italian peninsula; and (c) the existence of various states that had maintained independence, such as the Kingdom of Sardinia, also called Piedmont-Sardinia, which located at the French border had slowly expanded since the Middle Ages and was considered the most advanced state in Italy. The Kingdom of Sardinia consisted of the island of Sardinia and the region called Piedmont in northwestern Italy. The Kingdom of Sicily that occupied the island of Sicily and the entire southern half of the Italian peninsula. Other small states were the duchies of Toscana (Tuscany), Parma, and Modena. In each of these states, the monarchs (all relatives of the Habsburgs, the ruling family of Austria) exercised absolute powers of government.



**Giuseppe Mazzini**, an Italian patriot spearheaded a national revolutionary movement. Mazzini's ideology of an independent integrated republic spread quickly among large segments of the Italian people. Revolutionary cells formed throughout the Italian peninsula.

Massive reforms that took place during the 1840s in the Papal States, Lucca, Tuscany, and the Kingdom of Sardinia were intended to slow the revolutionary movements, instead these reforms (1846 and 1847) only intensified the resolve of the revolutionary cells culminating in the Revolutions of 1848, that spread to Germany, the Austrian Empire, France, and parts of northern Italy.

The first revolution on the Italian peninsula took place in the Kingdom of Sicily, which resulted in a constitution for the whole kingdom. An insurrection in 1848 caused pope Pius IX to flee Rome and a republic was proclaimed. King Charles Albert of Sardinia mobilized his army and marched to the assistance of Lombardy and joined in the war to drive the Austrians from Italian soil. While it initially looked as if the independence and unity of Italy was a realistic possibility, the Austrians defeated the Piedmontese and Charles Albert had to abdicate. His son, Victor Emmanuel II, succeeded him in 1849. A new revolutionary leader, Giuseppe Garibaldi, could not avoid Rome's destruction by the French in 1849. Only Sardinia held firm to their constitutional government

Count **Camillo di Cavour** became prime minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia in 1852. It was his leadership and accommodating policies that led to the unification of Italy in little more than a decade. Cavour was able to persuade Napoleon to a secretly planned war against Austria. By early 1859, Cavour had caused a crisis that provoked the Austrians to send an ultimatum demanding Piedmontese disarmament. As part of the "*plan*", Cavour rejected the ultimatum which led to the subsequent war with the Austrians. The French came to the aid of the Piedmontese and the Austrians were defeated in the two major battles of Magenta and Solferino. The Austrians were forced to surrender Lombardy, with the city of Milan, to Napoleon III. Finally, in 1859, Napoleon transferred Lombardy to the sovereignty of Victor Emmanuel II.



Following elections during 1859 and 1860, all northern states (of the Italian peninsula), except Venetia, which was still part of Austria, joined the Kingdom of Sardinia. Napoleon's growing concern with respect to the sudden (large) size of his neighbor was resolved in part by the cessation of the Sardinian provinces of Savoy, near the Alps, and Nice, on the Mediterranean coast to France in 1860. After 1860, the only French presence on the Italian peninsula was in the city of Rome, where French troops remained at the request of the pope.



**Giuseppe Garibaldi** Italian nationalist revolutionary hero and leader in the struggle for Italian unification and independence. Born in 1807 in Nice, France, he joined Mazzini's movement in 1833. In 1834 Garibaldi was ordered to seize a warship, but the plot was discovered by police and he was condemned to death. He escaped to South America, where he lived for 12 years. There he displayed unusual qualities of military leadership while participating in the revolt of the state of Rio Grande do Sul against Brazil, as well as later in a civil war in Uruguay. In 1848, Garibaldi traveled to the United States settled in Staten Island, New York, and later became a US citizen. During the same year he returned to Italy and participated (again) in the movement for Italian freedom and unification, which became widely known as the **Risorgimento** (Italian for "revival"). He organized a corps of volunteers, which served under the Piedmontese ruler Charles Albert, king of Sardinia. He unsuccessfully waged war against the Austrians in Lombardy and led his volunteers to Rome to support the

Roman Republic established by Mazzini and others in 1849. Garibaldi defended Rome, initially successfully, against French forces, but in the end was forced to "settle" with the French. He was allowed to depart from Rome with about 5000 of his followers. However, the line of retreat reached directly through Austrians controlled territory. Garibaldi's force was killed, captured, or dispersed during his attempt to retreat, and Garibaldi had to flee Italy to save his life. He returned to Italy in 1854 where he settled down on the island of Caprera northeast of Sardinia. By this time, Garibaldi had separated politically from Mazzini, and had formed an alliance with Victor Emmanuel II, the king of Sardinia, and his premier, Conte Camillo Benso di Cavour. Given Garibaldi's popularity and large following, thousands of Italians gave their allegiance to the Sardinian monarch.

Garibaldi's dream of a united Italy motivated his successful expedition against the Austrian forces in the Alps in 1859. In 1860 he conquered Sicily and set up a provisional insular government. Garibaldi then conquered Naples, which he then delivered to Victor Emmanuel in 1861 and returned to his home on Caprera. With the annexation of Umbria and Marches from the papal government, a united Italy was finally established in 1861 with Victor Emmanuel as its king. The Italian kingdom was missing Rome, which was still a papal possession, and Venice, which was controlled by the Austrians. Venice was added to Italy in 1866 after Prussia defeated Austria in the Seven Weeks' War, in which Italy sided with Prussia; Venice was its reward. Then, in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, Napoleon III withdrew his troops from Rome. With the city of Rome and the remaining Papal States left unprotected, Italian troops moved into Rome without opposition. **Rome voted for union with Italy in October 1870 and, in July 1871, Rome became the capital of a united Italy.**