



Alfredo Canavero

ALCIDE DE GASPERI

CHRISTIAN, DEMOCRAT, EUROPEAN





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Third edition

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Signorini



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ALCIDE DE GASPERI - CHRISTIAN, DEMOCRAT, EUROPEAN

Leggiamo

Foreword



FOREWORD

MANFRED WEBER MEP

*Chairman of the EPP Group
in the European Parliament*



LARA COMI MEP

*Vice-Chair of the EPP Group
in the European Parliament*

The passing of time is unable to erase from memory those people who profoundly made their mark in history and who continue to be a living point of reference for the definition of values and ideas that form the basis of civil life.

It is therefore an honour to be able to offer our contribution on the life and political commitment of Alcide De Gasperi.

The leader of Christian Democracy; President of the Council for eight years; leading proponent of the reconstruction and reconciliation of Italy after the trauma of the Second World War. Founder and Father of European Unity, the European project was designed as an instrument to ensure peace and development, even against the Communist threat, and to overcome the divisions that unfortunately marked European countries in that dramatic global conflict. A multifaceted personality, he was a statesman who laid the foundations for the birth and development of Italy and of the Europe where our fathers and grandfathers had lived.

For us, however, today's children of that generation, in what country and on what continent are we preparing to live? The question is a legitimate one. De Gasperi, like Schuman and Adenauer, have all been invoked in recent months when the European dream seems to be wavering, dangerously even. Brexit, the threat of terrorism, nationalist resurgence, the mistakes and egotism of certain Member States faced with immigration often bring to mind the potential conclusion of that major European project that started 60 years ago with the Treaty of Rome.

However, the European spirit embodied by De Gasperi endures and has been successively embraced by many political personalities. We, the children of a united Europe, must make our contribution. It is a no lesser figure than the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, who follows the example of the major statesmen of Italian Europeanism in the post-war period, with Alcide de Gasperi at the pinnacle.

The world is now the stage to face the challenges of the future. More security, free and equal competition on international markets, countering any form of violence and threat, development and innovation, activities for the protection of the environment: all actions that we will be able to establish only by consolidating the rationale for unity over divisions between states.

De Gasperi knew this well. He also was the son of a 'land in between,' born in then Austrian Trentino. He was a Member of the Imperial Parliament in Vienna representing the Italian minority, before becoming Secretary of the Italian People's Party under Luigi Sturzo. With an awareness of borders from his direct experience of the failure of the Italian Liberal State and the Weimar Republic, including even the pain of incarceration, it was very clear to him what the needs were for his people, for whom he worked diligently and achieved the success that history now recognises.

This is what De Gasperi's profound current relevance rests on. He conducted his political life with dedication, altruism and generosity of spirit. These values must be a source of inspiration for the representatives and politicians of our generation. His firm belief in an Italy anchored to the West and to Europe and faithful to his Christian and popular traditions, against extremism and in favour of choices based on the robustness of good sense are still values that guide the Group of European People's Party Group in the European Parliament. These are the goals we must work towards to reaffirm the peace, liberty and development our fathers bestowed on us.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'De Gasperi', is positioned in the top right corner of the page.

ALCIDE DE GASPERI - CHRISTIAN, DEMOCRAT, EUROPEAN

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Preface



PREFACE

LORENZO CESA MEP

*Head of the UDC/SVP Delegation
of the EPP Group in the European Parliament*



ELISABETTA GARDINI MEP

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Of the huge range of works on Alcide De Gasperi, the book by Alfredo Canavero, 'Alcide De Gasperi – Christian, Democrat, European,' occupies a prominent position in terms of both historic narrative and the representation of the man in the sum of his human, spiritual and political aspects.

Given the absence in the panorama of historic tomes of an exhaustive biography of the Trentino statesman, the Canavero volume on the one hand meets this function and on the other suggests a potential new area of scientific works based on the use of sources still available.

Beyond the works of major scientific value, which nevertheless tackle particular moments of De Gasperi's political activity or other memorials or hagiographies, Canavero's work tells the entire life of the man, from early infancy to his final breath, restoring a multicoloured picture of De Gasperi, rich with nuances and perspective.

The book can be divided into four parts: the education and political apprenticeship years; Parliamentary experience first in Vienna and then in the Italian Parliament; the fight against Fascism and totalitarianism and government activity and Europeanism. In each of the four sections, a decisive segment of his political and idealistic maturation is explored and analysed, before then passing without stopping onto the next one. The book on the whole describes the overall stature of the statesman, and interprets undoubtedly one of the most critical times in Italian history, the Second World War.

The foundation of all De Gasperi's political and governing activity, Canavero strongly underlines, is his profound spirituality and devotional nature, which form the inspiration for each of his decisions. It was not, as the author recalls, "a religiousness detached from real life, but instead the true motive and inspiration to act. De Gasperi the man of faith and De Gasperi the man of politics were one and the same." And this is the guiding thread that runs through the entire career of the Trentino politician; for example when as a young student in Vienna he provided his support for Italian immigrants in the multiethnic Habsburg empire, or his union mediation on behalf of the carpentry workers in Val Di Fiemme, and when he had to reaffirm the values of political democracy when faced with Fascism during the Fifth Congress of the People's Party held in Rome between 28 and 30 June 1925. On that particular occasion, Canavero again recalls, "he maintained that Christian belief before the state means innate rights of the person, family and society, and that the role of the people was to defend the state of law and democracy, in the name of the Christian right to human personal liberty."

The dignity of the person, the reaffirmation of liberty, the principle of political democracy, the secular and non-confessional ideal before party and then state, and the defence of social rights are all primary values that formed the connective tissue of De Gasperi's intellectual symbiosis with Bishop Endrici, values he would not be willing

to barter away, not even at the most difficult times of his life. They formed an idealistic asset that De Gasperi and Endrici had partly adopted from the Social Doctrine of the Church and from the *Rerum Novarum* [On Capital and Labour] and partly from the daily practice of service offered to the weaker classes. As an establishing element of the true believer, this conviction could not therefore be deployed for decisions of convenience or for solutions of compromise. On the contrary, it had to define the founding and non-negotiable plan for social reconstruction and the return to political democracy.

The setting in which Canavero places his book retraces this uninterrupted reiteration of the values and ideas that belonged to the deeper essence of the man and that De Gasperi had the merit to translate into concrete political practice. The changes he brought to Republican Italy were not in fact the fruit of improvised or random decisions but they find their genesis in the background of a political culture assimilated by De Gasperi over a long period and validated by the facts. A staunch supporter of the method of dialogue and equipped with a healthy pragmatism, he knew to measure his politics according to experience and in proportion to the contributions of his interlocutors, without preconceived prejudice and without expedient rhetoric.

It was not his style to impose or exert his point of view with the power of speech. Often he preferred the power of silence when making declamatory statements: "To fulfil what he considered his political mission, to put across his idea," Canavero tells us, "he was ready to suffer in silence as he did during the years of Fascism."

Moreover he also possessed the courage of making difficult and innovative decisions, such as opening up to Socialists during the Aventine secession situation and then during the crisis of centrism. The author underlines this point thus: "He rejected as absurd the idea of absolute incompatibility of parliamentary collaboration of populists with Socialists ... By collaborating with Socialists the populists would certainly not have renounced the 'purity of popular thought' ... but would instead have brought the contribution of Christian conscience to the fight against illegality, violence and dictatorship."

His relationship with the Communists should be regarded in the same vein. Though being through his political culture against any form of totalitarian ideology, which was Soviet Communism, he deemed it appropriate in the name of democracy and state security to collaborate with Togliatti both during the formation of the temporary governments immediately after the war and during the establishment phase. He in fact thought that Communism should be combated with the force of ideas and political proposals rather than by repression. From that arose the determination to judge impracticable the solution of many, within a part of the Vatican hierarchies, who wished to exclude Communists from the government and ban the party as a subversive and anti-constitutional force. To Monsignor Pietro Pavan, who voiced such a request of De Gasperi, as is well illustrated by Canavero, he replied: "How can one tackle Communism today in Italy? It would be a civil war, and perhaps all-out war."

The protection of the democratic state formed the paradigm of each of his decisions. The experience of the period after the First World War had taught him how political instability and poor social cohesion were at the origin of the vulnerability of democracy and how this had therefore been an easy target of Fascist violence. He was therefore prepared through time against all the threats that sooner or later would recur.

Although he formed, as the author tells us, a kind of innovation within the Italian political class, De Gasperi was an innovator through experience. He passed through all levels of the *cursus honorum*, from councillor in Trento to the office of Head of Government of the Republic, and therefore accrued long diplomatic, political and administrative experience. He knew how to serve the country both in terms of organisation and management of his party and through relationships with the other social and political forces in the constitutional sphere. This was borne out by his firmness in supporting the hexarchy in 1945 and immediately after the tripartite government, in spite of the contrary pressures from the Vatican. But even during the years of centrism, he thought it appropriate, in the name of democracy and a broader social base, not to renounce collaboration with the other parties in the

centre and launch a series of reforms that in some way met the requirements imposed by the country's social deterioration and by the demands of many exponents of Left Christian Democracy, starting with Dossetti. "Even if there were no Dossetti followers in the government," writes Canavero, "the programme incorporated a few of their ideas, such as achieving full employment, interventions in depressed areas and reform. Then there were reforms in the areas of tax, education, administration and law."

Among other things, De Gasperi had to tackle the criticisms coming from the opposition and from broad areas of the same majority of government regarding foreign policy, considered from time to time either too American or too soft against the Communist threat. Regarding questions concerning the Atlantic Treaty and NATO membership, for example, he had to sit at the table with dissenting voices from Dossetti's left that opted for the neutrality line, considered by De Gasperi to be an "impassable road," as both disarmed neutrality and "armed neutrality" would have exposed Italy or caused international isolation or "to be as in past centuries a battlefield for foreign armies."

Besides, there were no opposition or resistance even on the Europeanist policy front, especially from the Communist side, which, Canavero recalls, "in compliance with the orders of the USSR that believed the European initiatives were a way to isolate it," used any tool of propaganda or political pressure to slow down its development.

Yet Europeanism, as Canavero tells us, historically formed the perhaps most significant aspect of De Gasperi's politics. It was dictated by reasons of practical order as those relating, following the implementation of the Marshall Plan, "to the prospect of resolving Italy's economic problems at the European level" but it arose especially from idealistic motivations that were inspired by a profoundly Christian concept of life and from a high ethical-political dimension.

He was convinced, as were Schuman and Adenauer, that the common Christian heritage of Europe should be a common basis for a process of integration of European peoples as the sole resource against the return of nationalism. The existence of totalitarian dictatorships and the devastation caused by the Second World War ethically obliged the commitment, in the present and in the future, to the creation of a supranational body able to make the tragedies of the century disappear forever.

De Gasperi dedicated the latter years of his life to this goal, until the moment of his death, when on 9 August 1954 he was able to write to Fanfani, "The European Defence Community was the thorn in my side."

With its across-the-board revisiting of all the areas of Alcide De Gasperi's work and political activity, and given that many of these problems covered now seem to be resurfacing alarmingly, the new edition of the book by Alfredo Canavero, with the support of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, can offer new generations broad opportunities for reading and reflection.

ALCIDE DE GASPERI - CHRISTIAN, DEMOCRAT, EUROPEAN

Leggenda

Introduction



INTRODUCTION

ARMANDO TARULLO

Vice-President of the Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi



From its first edition in 2003, the Alfredo Canavero book, 'Alcide De Gasperi- Christian, Democrat, European,' reiterates and in some sense relaunches, with a more current voice than previously, the immediacy and modernity of the lessons of De Gasperi in all of their human, spiritual and political scope.

Canavero's book, which forms an important milestone in research on a scientific basis, may also function as a stimulus for readers of today to cover, via De Gasperi, a long period of Italian and international history that does not finish with the statesman's death, but that extends his reach into the contemporary world. Understanding De Gasperi, the author seems to suggest, means relearning the concept of the 'politician' across the various ideas, which are not those of opportunism or mere calculation, intended to exercise power.

Starting from the introduction, Alfredo Canavero offers a precise key to understanding De Gasperi's profound sense of democracy and vision of the State, underlining how his political decisions in his later years find their original inspiration in the nature of the man, who knew how to adapt assiduous reading of the sacred texts and daily practice of the Christian message into a kind of spontaneous vocation for public commitment or service. As this biography aptly reconstructs, from the outset, during his long political apprenticeship, first in Trento and then in Vienna, as a university student and as a Deputy in the Habsburg Assembly, in perfect harmony with the Christian renewal favoured by Bishop Endrici, in turn in line with the openings of the Rerum Novarum, the young De Gasperi knew to remain faithful to the moral requirements of his conscience that forced him to commit all of his human and intellectual resources to alleviating the living conditions of the most needy, mediating union conflicts to defend workers or robustly supporting the tenets of democracy. "His education," the author writes, is retained within the unfolding of his life, all intended to affirm, as he wrote in his spiritual testament, "an ideal of human bounty and Christian Democracy."

The faith placed in democracy and in civil liberties formed for him a guiding concept beyond any political contingency. This can be seen clearly in his rejection of nationalism, in his respect for

ethnic minorities, his intransigent fight against Fascism and any form of totalitarianism, his inability to resort to any sort of compromise in the years of the dictatorship, in spite of the restrictions and humiliations suffered publicly and privately, and especially when he was called to draft the outlines that would have formed the political skeleton of post-war Italy. In De Gasperi's Reconstructive Ideas of Christian Democracy, as the author highlights, not only did he indicate the principles and purposes of his party as a new entity compared to the old People's Party, but he proceeded at the same time to assign it a balancing function that it could have performed in relationships with the other parties in the future of the Republic. He was in fact firmly convinced that he should ensure the country had a solid representative system based on parties, acting as an irreplaceable link between civil society and the state and, as such, guarantors of democratic liberties and prerogatives.

"Political liberty," writes Canavero "was an essential premise for a new system based on representative democracy, and separation of state powers [...] across a dual chamber system and universal suffrage."

His high concept of democracy, joined with healthy pragmatism, focused him on moving within the political rationale without preconceived barriers or ideological red lines.

Canavero did not fail to highlight how the method of direct confrontation of the rationale of others, both within his party and with other political forces, formed for De Gasperi an unchallengeable principle of democracy. Nothing was further from his nature, his spirituality and his governing practices than a self-referential concept of power, even when he was in power via a legitimately obtained majority. And in fact, when in the elections on 18 April 1948, the Christian Democrats obtained an overall majority of Parliamentary seats, De Gasperi sought and obtained, for the composition of the new executive, the collaboration of the parties in the centre. This reaffirms once again the secular character of the majority party and especially it underlines the open and plural nature of the government's actions.

The same ideals, by which De Gasperi had guided the material and moral reconstruction of the country, were equally a source of inspiration of his Europeanist vocation. Canavero writes: "In his cultural baggage we find elements that give political and ideological substance behind this choice for becoming one of the most strenuous and consistent proponents of unification of the continent. Though his Catholic faith naturally predisposed him to ecumenism and universalism," his previous experiences, first in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire and then in Italy as an Anti-Fascist Deputy and careful observer of Vatican diplomacy in the thirties, "guaranteed him mental openness and sensitivity to rare international relations between the Italian political men of post-Fascism."

The book also highlights how the experience of the political outcomes of nationalistic doctrine

and totalitarian ideologies, but especially the catastrophic consequences of the two World Wars, profoundly marked the statesman, bringing him closer to personalities such as Schuman and Adenauer. The Founding Fathers, as they are commonly called, are all three frontiersmen and all equally motivated by deep moral and religious beliefs, and lived the drama of the World Wars in the first person, both of which were found to share an originating decisive factor of a mountainous mass of nationalism and egoism.

With the idea of Europe, De Gasperi, Schuman and Adenauer hoped to make such tragic eventualities disappear, by proposing a complete model of European political Federalist unification, to be intended not as an unachievable utopian design but as the only choice, almost a historic necessity, demanded of Europeans after the social-economic and, perhaps more so, the ethical-spiritual devastation produced by the war.

They knew that the presence of certain ideological spectres formed a risk to the world's future; they knew their enemies and they wanted to exorcise them to ensure a long period of peace and security for Europe.

With this prospect, and faced with the overwhelming spread at the time of post-modernist myths of the past (such as antipolitics, nationalistic resurgence, ethnic sectarianism, the construction of walls and barriers, isolationist desires), a rereading of De Gasperi via the Alfredo Canavero volume can be seen as useful and necessary as ever for current generations.

Testimony

Testimony



TESTIMONY

MARIA ROMANA DE GASPERI

Honorary President of the Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi



Once the political events from the past have lost their burning vitriol and become history, then the people who were there and taking part acquire the true dimension that time and history gives them. This is true for Alcide De Gasperi, who instead of disappearing into memory's shadows as the years progressed, seems to expand his limits beyond the confines of his own country. This forces us to continue to tell his political story not just via the facts that took place on a given date but have equal importance in our present. The man instead should be observed in his way of doing politics, in remaining faithful to the principles of liberty, solidarity, democracy and dedication to serving these ideals with a missionary spirit, to use them as an example and support for whoever wishes to follow the path.

His Christian interpretation of the State remains interesting, when he said of the years spent in the Vatican Library and how he would always turn the pages of the old tomes with great feeling, and of these Cicero's *De re publica*: I remember the veneration and respect with which I opened it because I knew it was the only politics that I would have been able to learn. Politics with grand scope, a long and historic perspective. This illustrates the principle that the old, ancient philosophy and politics recalled, placing the basis of his doctrine above the Republic. Among other things, he said (and this should be remembered because it became a spirit of my spirit, the blood of my blood, part of my directive and my political life): "There is no other thing in which human virtue gets closer to divinity than founding new states, new cities or supporting the ancients." By that, he meant to say there is no more serious role and no greater and higher responsibility than holding governing, political posts of state. I felt at that time and still feel today, via Christian interpretation, what those people from past times experienced: "Guiding a country creates an instant bond with God, our Father, and creates an immediate responsibility to the people; but to the people as a vehicle of the divine will that leads us."

And De Gasperi still asks, what value would it have been to have conquered all freedoms and renewed respect for what the state represents if it was not with good conscience? What sense would have been dedicating oneself to the good of others if the men of administration, bureaucracy, commerce and any other enterprise do not follow moral laws?

The value of a life is measured with more equilibrium and truth when it can be judged in perspective. And that is what happens today with the verdict on Alcide De Gasperi in publications in recent years, when even new generations understood that they held in their hands a legacy that can be used, even if it does not seem to be the easiest.

Governing is at times a source of suffering, my father thought, such as having to deny satisfaction to those who deserve it, having to abandon projects through limits of available funds, asking people to make sacrifices for the common good and having to be restricted. All of this required a strong personality together with mature political experience, without forgetting a spiritual training and living life according to one's faith. In brief, thoughts, written almost always in Latin, thrown down on any piece of paper that my father could find in front of him, we find his meditations on readings of St. Augustine, the letters of St. Paul or the Imitation of Christ. Of those written in Italian, I select two: "Thoughts on hegemony: the power to serve, to have the strength to realise, to impose order, to consolidate democracy." And then his political vocation put alongside spirituality with this text: "Forgive me Lord, but I carry with me Your prayer in my concerns. Infiltrate all of my activity, I pray to You, in my work and in all that I give."

Spirituality and politics lived on the same plane, one casting light on the other without confusion, without losing liberty in the sphere of action, but in agreement and in complete harmony. His Christianity did not prevent him from respecting political ideas and principles or beliefs other than his own when they were held by honest people in good faith. In this life, long in actions but not in years, De Gasperi knew he had to suffer injustices, economic difficulties and non-comprehension with courage, humility and equanimity. Even the final abandonment by those political movements he had carried in his government, after giving them greater weight than warranted they humiliated him, but he wanted to confront his predicted defeat through moral integrity and a sense of the State which had never left him.

I am also reading a few of the lines written by a lay friend who writes about De Gasperi after the last attempt to take back the government in July 1953. He says: "...I know the bitterness and relief of certain results and I know for sure the true comfort of the certainty of having fulfilled one's duty. You are in this condition, after so much effort, and you cannot escape the pathetic sight of the many who fear never seeing which way the wind is blowing, the solidarity, the esteem and the affection for honest people... nothing in life is worth more than the smile of genuine friends."

He has returned to the Father, as they say in Church, when someone has left this life and you want to remember in some way. And now, for those of who were not able to know De Gasperi and in order not to lose the example of his simultaneously Christian and political essence, I also convey a few lines

of one of the last letters sent by Ivan Matteo Lombardo, faithful collaborator, many times a minister in his government, interested especially in relationships with other countries in Europe and America.

“I wanted to say many things, but especially to express to you from the deepest part of my heart my feelings of devotion, recognition, filial affection, for a great Italian, never memorialised, never thanked. All you have done thus far for the defence of the supreme values of Christian civility, for safeguarding liberty, for the good of the country, giving it democracy, teaching Italians humility and a sense of dedication, marking these troubled times with your unforgettable gifts as a man and as a statesman, all of this you gave to history.”

Leggenda

Author's note



“To write about Alcide De Gasperi you need not only to study the political and social ideas that moved him and the actions he took, but also and especially his spirituality.”¹ The words that Don Franco Costa, a priest who knew De Gasperi well, wrote at the time of his death are still a valid historic account today. It is difficult to understand the man, beyond the mere description of facts and events of his life, if you do not take account of his Christian faith, nourished by continual reading of the sacred texts, the writings of the Church fathers and mystics. It is sufficient to recall the uninterrupted dialogue with his daughter, Sister Lucia, who gave him daily threads of meditation and a few moments of spiritual balm during the tormented political events of the fifties, to understand how much Christian religion mattered in the life of De Gasperi. From his daughter he gained his spiritual support of prayer, because he was given the strength to sustain the heavy burden of political life.

He prays to Christ - he wrote at the end of the government crisis in July 1951 - because he had mercy on me and made me feel, because without his presence I have no courage, I don't know how to bear the huge weight, that perhaps fearfully - but there was nothing else to do - I have on my shoulders².

He began his day by reading *The Imitazione di Cristo* [Imitation of Christ] or by meditating on a page of the sacred scriptures. He prayed often and faced events with the calm serenity of a person who accepts the unfathomable designs of providence and knows that the Lord never refuses his help to those who ask for it. He lived his faith as an intimate relationship with God, conversing in private with Him, without ever parading his religious practice. It was not however a religion isolated from ordinary life, but instead a motive and inspiration for action. De Gasperi the man of faith and De Gasperi the politician were one and the same.

De Gasperi was different from the other politicians of the post-war years. His political journey, on the other hand, was rather different from the path typical of exponents of the Italian Catholic world. More than half of his life was played out within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was

1. F. COSTA, *La spiritualità di De Gasperi*, in M.R. DE GASPERI, *Mio caro padre*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1979, p.153.

2. A. De Gasperi to L. De Gasperi, 3 August 1951, in L. DE GASPERI, *Appunti spirituali e lettere al padre* [Spiritual notes and letters to her father], ed. M.R. Catti De Gasperi, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1968, p.216.

trained spiritually and culturally in Habsburg Trentino and had his first political experiences there. He therefore did not live through the trauma of the Roman question, the disputes over 'Catholic deputies' or 'deputy Catholics,' the lack of experience of the political party and especially the tension between the Italian State and the Catholic Church. His origin and his training explain the rejection of all nationalism, attention to the problems of ethnic minorities and an interest in international problems.

Even within Christian Democracy his uniqueness was clear; it was what distinguished him from the more profound Christianity-inspired policies, as with Dossetti, La Pira or Lazzati. He never had his own tendency within the party, he did not have disciples (even if many, then no less than today, claimed to accredit themselves as such), he did not draft a systematic political doctrine to establish a brand of his own. His training was contained within the unfolding of his life, all intended to affirm, as he wrote in 1935 in his spiritual statement, "an ideal of human bounty and Christian Democracy."³

His own moral rigour kept him far from those in politics who sought only to satisfy personal ambitions and interests whether legitimate or otherwise. Opportunism or compromising one's conscience were unknown to him. To fulfil what he considered his political mission, to bear witness to his ideas, he was ready to suffer in silence, as he did during the years of Fascism, or to take on heavy responsibilities alone, suffering all the consequences, as in the dramatic decisions taken after the Second World War. Little understood by his contemporaries, but also later in large part by journalism and historical works about him, he was truly a man alone, according to the happy definition of his daughter Maria Romana, one of his most thorough biographers.

His political solitude, if you can call it that, does not mean that he did not have friends. With his discerning sense of humour, which appeared especially in conversations with his loved ones, he loved human relationships. He believed in friendship, a friendship made out of substantial respect and attention for others, even if his 'mountain-dweller' nature hid external expressions, making him appear closed and timid.

Gradually achieving all of the milestones of his political career, starting from the Municipal Council in Trento before reaching the Parliaments in Vienna and then Rome. He had Party and Government roles, from minister to President of the Council. This gradual *cursus honorum* helped him always

3. From the statement written by De Gasperi on 4 September 1935, in A. DE GASPERI, *Lettere dalla prigione* [Letters from prison]. 1927-1928, Mondadori, Milan, 1955, p.9.

to be close to the needs of the people, always to deal with reality with lucid pessimism, fleeing from bombastic but sterile rhetorical declamations, never losing sight of the ultimate aim of his action.

He believed in political democracy. He considered it a phase of evolution of society designed by God, who sought political liberty. The memory of how Liberal Democracy was devastated by the assaults of Fascism induced him increasingly to adopt very hard positions against the forces of the Right and Left, which could tear apart the young and fragile Italian democracy in the period after the war. His anti-Communism arose from this point; he deemed it fully justified by the climate of the Cold War by certain statements and actions of the senior representatives and militants of the Italian Communist Party. During the Korean War, in a situation that seemed to offer a real threat of 'waged war,' he promoted the introduction of forms of protected democracy, but without paying attention to anyone, in Italy or overseas, who suggested outlawing the Communist Party.

He in fact believed that Communism was to be tackled not only by repressive laws, but by achieving greater social justice and fairer distribution of wealth. But to distribute wealth it was first of all necessary to create it. Hence the reconstruction based on the economic policy of Einaudi and Pella, before then passing onto the 'third social stage,' to a season of courageous reforms, which contrasted him to the background of Confindustria and its President Angelo Costa.

In spite of this, he was accused of being a servant of Confindustria, and at other times of the United States or, more often, the Vatican. He was certainly faithful to the Church and respectful of the party. He could however distinguish, although without full separation, the political from the religious sphere. While public opinion considered him the primary and most notable representative of the Catholic world in Italian political life, he often had to overcome obstacles and difficulties, in solitary silence, in dealings with the Holy See. His greatest merit was that of bringing the Italian Catholic world to full acceptance of democracy, helping to overcome those historic obstacles that Italian unification had started.

His constant quest for collaboration with secular parties, even when this was not strictly necessary in parliamentary terms, was due to his desire to underline the secular and non-confessional nature of the Italian State, to escape the risks of unwelcome clericalisation found in certain sectors of the Catholic world. The principles of Catholic faith and the teachings of the Church inspired his thinking and provided guidance for action, but in material decisions he was guided only by his conscience and not by the orders of the hierarchy, perhaps ready to resign and to bring his political career to an end, but not to take responsibility for decisions that he believed were negative. He was however, on certain particular occasions, to ask for help of the ecclesiastic authority, the Bishop of Trento first or later the Pope himself, to overcome difficult times in the life of the party.

His origin and his training made him particularly attentive to efforts for the construction of a united Europe. He understood that in this way the open wounds of the last war between countries of the old continent could be healed. He also understood that, inclusively, Italy had everything to gain, especially in economic terms from the process of integration. Animated by a patriotic but not nationalist spirit, he was convinced that common Christian roots would have helped unity and that for this it was worth accepting a degree of limitation of national sovereignty.

De Gasperi was a man of action. He did not write theoretical works or doctrinal texts, but newspaper articles, discussions for potential opportunities and letters. And everything that he wrote, said or did had a unique and precise basis: his religion, his Christian faith, from which he drew, time after time, inspiration for material action. In this sense, as Jean-Dominique Durand wrote, “His politics was inspired politics.”⁴

4. J.-D. DURAND, Alcide De Gasperi ovvero la politica ispirata [Alcide De Gasperi, or inspired politics], in *Contemporary History*, 1984, no.4, p.591.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'De Gasperi', is positioned in the top right corner of the page.

Leggiamo

1. The Education of a Leader



1. AT SCHOOL IN THE TRENINO IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

Alcide De Gasperi was born in Pieve Tesino on 3 April 1881. In 1880 his father, Amedeo, who was chief of the local police station, had married Maria Morandini, with whom he had three more children: Luigi Mario, born in 1883, Marcellina, born in 1886 and Augusto, born in 1893⁵. When Alcide was three, his father was transferred to Civezzano, where his first-born son received the rudiments of his religious and secular education from Father Vittorio Merler. Following the family's move to Trento, Alcide was enrolled, at the age of 10, in the Bishop's College, where he achieved excellent results in lower secondary school, and then moved on, in the 1896/97 academic year, to upper secondary school, the 'Imperial Regio Ginnasio Superiore'. Having retired in the meantime, Amedeo was finding it difficult to provide for his family, and his children were able to continue their schooling only through exemptions from school fees and government educational grants. Alcide was an attentive and diligent student with a flair for the humanities (especially Italian, German and philosophy) rather than the sciences. Bearing witness to some difficulties in this area, there still remain, in addition to his school reports, the shirt cuffs, crammed with algebraic and mathematical formulae, that he wore on the day of his school-leaving examination, which he nevertheless passed brilliantly in the summer of 1900.

In the years in which Alcide was at school, the Catholic and the Socialist movements had made great strides in the Trentino and had now come to the fore alongside the older liberalism, which was in crisis. The three political forces had different answers to social issues and in particular to the national question. There was great rivalry between them, as well as the very lively and fierce debate typical of the time.

A clergy more sensitive than in the past to social and economic problems, a clergy trained in the school of Leo XIII, the 'workers' Pope' and author of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the foundation of the Catholic Church's social doctrine, was gaining influence in Catholic circles in the Trentino. The most important members of this young clergy included Father Celestino Endrici (1886-1940), who had studied in Rome and taught moral theology at the Trento seminary and was destined to become, in 1904 at the age of only 38, Bishop of Trento, and Father Guido de Gentili, an excellent organiser and editor of *La Voce Cattolica* [The Catholic Voice], which became a daily paper in January 1897. Under the impetus of priests such as these it was possible to develop a movement of lay believers ready to fight both Socialism and liberal-leaning and Masonic anti-clericalism to defend Catholic social doctrine. Emanuele Lanzerotti, pioneer of the Trentino's electrification, and Luigi Carbonari,

5. De Gasperi Archives (ADG), Austria I, Personal papers, 1.



organiser and leader of rural leagues and cooperative societies, were among the most active laypeople who contributed to the region's 'Catholic re-awakening'.

Thus, with the support and coordination of the Diocesan Committee for Catholic Action, set up officially in November 1898, the Trentino's Catholic organisations were set up or consolidated in the last years of the 19th century: economic organisations such as the Federation of Cooperative Consortia, the Catholic Bank of the Trentino and the Trentino Industrial and Agricultural Association, cultural organisations such as the Trentino Catholic University Association (AUCT) and reading circles, social organisations such as the many workers' and rural societies which were supported from 1896 by the two-monthly and then weekly *Fede e Lavoro* [Faith and Work], and political organisations.

It was in this climate that Alcide De Gasperi took his first limited steps into politics. In 1896 he attended the International Anti-Masonic Congress in Trento and thereafter he attended the Catholic congresses in Cles (1898) and Pergine (1899), where the AUCT was set up as a response to the extreme secularism of the existing Society of Trentino Students with Father Celestino Endrici as its ecclesiastical consultant.

2. UNIVERSITY IN VIENNA

The nineteen-year-old Alcide went to Vienna in 1900 to attend university. He enrolled with the Faculty of Philology, probably with a view to embarking on a career as a teacher of literary subjects in his Trentino homeland. Attending an Austrian rather than an Italian university was not an ideological but a practical choice; he needed a recognised qualification (Italian qualifications were not recognised) to carry on a profession in the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Habsburgs. De Gasperi's family were in no position, moreover, to put their son through an Italian university as that would have meant, among other things, that he would not have received a government study grant.

De Gasperi did not find his initial stay in the Empire's capital easy. So as not to burden the family's already precarious finances, he was forced to live as frugally as possible. He took digs in the Student Halls and often went to the Church of the Minorites for a bowl of the soup charitably offered by the monks. His finances improved, however, when he started offering coaching to a few lycée students. That meant that he could move to a furnished room and eat somewhat better.

The problems of day-to-day life strengthened his Christian faith. Attending mass and the daily rosary consoled him in bad times. His was an instinctive faith, passed on almost unwittingly by his mother, and

strengthened by his contact with the priests who had taught him: Father Vittorio Merler, mentioned above, who was a member of a cooperative in Civezzano and leader of the local Catholic Agricultural Workers' Society, who had started his education, and Father Giuseppe Segata, teacher of German at the Bishop's College, with whom he remained in contact until his death. It was a living and practical faith, paying scant attention to theological or speculative developments, but focusing on the practical implications of social commitment which had begun to fascinate him. In the Vienna of Karl Lueger, the Christian-Social mayor, De Gasperi frequented the Catholic student associations of the various nationalities and came into contact with exponents of Austrian social Catholicism, such as Franz Hemala, promoter and organiser of the Catholic trade union movement and the right-hand man of Leopold Kunschak, and Friedrich Funder, editor of the *Reichpost*, the daily paper of political and social Catholicism in Austria, who invited him to contribute to this prestigious and crusading paper.

De Gasperi joined the Italian Catholic Academic Association, one of the many student associations in Vienna, and did what he could to maintain contacts between Italian students and workers who had emigrated to the Empire's capital. He gave them lectures on various subjects twice a month, although they were often slightly too theoretical for their uneducated audience. On behalf of the Federation of Catholic Workers' Societies, he visited the Trentino emigrants of the Vorarlberg to talk about *Rerum Novarum*, clashing with Socialists and Anarchists and, as De Gasperi himself wrote, 'meeting with applause and whistles, smiles of compassion, many knocks and three weeks of bronchitis'.⁶

Most of the time which De Gasperi spent in Vienna was obviously taken up with university lectures and study. One of the teachers who had the greatest influence on him was undoubtedly Ernst Commer (1847-1928), a lecturer in theology with neo-Scholastic leanings. Together with his brother Luigi Mario, who had become a priest in 1905 (and died the year after at the age of only 23), Alcide contributed to the Italian translation of the *Essence of the Church*, a work which had a degree of influence on him as it gave him a notion of the church as a hierarchically ordered society and a perfect institution needing no reform and requiring concord and unity between believers and their pastors.

Commer took to his young pupil from the Trentino and offered to accompany him on the trip which he made to Rome in 1902 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Leo XIII's papacy. This was an extremely important experience for De Gasperi, both because of his fascination with the legacy of classical Rome and primitive Christianity, and because of the meetings that he had with figures from the Catholic world. Together with Commer, he was received by Leo XIII and the papacy's high priests

6. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, Mondadori, Milan, 1964, p. 22, 1.

and he also spoke on a number of occasions to Romolo Murri, at that time the leading exponent of the Italian Christian Democrat movement, and met Antonio Fogazzaro. He was also keen to attend a university lecture by Antonio Labriola, the Socialist thinker who had attracted the attention of other young Catholics. De Gasperi appreciated Murri's battle for Christian Democrat ideals and his social reformism, but could not accept his religious reformism. The publication of the encyclical *Pascendi* which condemned modernism offered an opportunity to distance himself from Murri.

From Rome, De Gasperi wrote three letters to 'Dear Father Beppe' Segata⁷, a kind of diary of his initial impressions. These show a man who appreciated the legacy of Christianity in the past, but who was rooted in the present, and attentive to the Catholic cultural and social re-awakening brought about by Leo XIII's papacy. Like many young people in the Italian Catholic movement of the time, he was steadfast in his devotion to the Pope, but had little interest in the Roman question, which he felt to be a thing of the past. His visit to Rome and the meetings that he had confirmed this view and convinced him that his task was to dedicate himself to Catholic social action, disseminating the Christian Democrat ideal in the Trentino.

7. ADG, Austria V, Private correspondence, 1. Lengthy extracts from the letters can be found in ZAMBARBIERI, A., *'Appunti sulla formazione spirituale del giovane De Gasperi', De Gasperi e il Trentino tra la fine dell'800 e il primo dopoguerra*, A. Canavero and A. Moioli (ed.), Reverdito, Trento, 1985, pp. 379-418.

3. THE 'NATIONAL QUESTION'

Every year De Gasperi returned to Trento for the summer holidays, renewing his links with local Catholic circles. His considerable talents were soon noticed and at the 4th Congress of the AUCT (Mezzocorona, 17 September 1901), he was elected as its secretary. On that occasion he gave a speech on 'Christian resurgence in the cultural field', in which he invited his colleagues to study, both because of the intrinsic value of study and as a contribution to the Christian revival needed after a century of decadence. It was up to Catholics to renew culture by 'moves towards the conquest of modern life' which would help the Church to resolve the social question⁸.

In the following year he became President of the association and summarised its programme in three words: 'Catholics, Italians, democrats', going on to say: 'First Catholics and then Italians, and Italians only from the point at which Catholicism ends'. His intention here was to stress his opposition to the sacrifice of all other ideals to the 'religion of the fatherland', i.e. making the nation into a god. 'We kneel', he concluded, 'only before a supreme independent being, unchanged by time and by human ideas, and in whose service we manage our families, our fatherland and our nation'⁹.

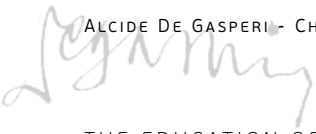
In his speeches he tried to give a positive image of an agricultural Trentino, where Catholicism had become the spokesman for the people's interests and for social renewal, fighting atheist and irreligious Socialism and the secularism of the Liberal middle classes. He spread the ideals of Christian Democracy in a simple way which could be understood by all:

'The Party is called Christian Democrat and the two main currents on which it is founded and organised take up the ideas of democracy: a Party which proposes that the people are organised in such a way that they can help themselves through their own efforts and resources. Christian because the religion of Jesus Christ is the basis for every law, guides the movement as a whole and is the foundation of all civil, economic and political well-being'¹⁰.

8. *Il Congresso dell'Associazione universitaria cattolica Trentina di Mezzocorona*, *La voce cattolica*, 19-20 September 1901.

9. DE GASPERI, A., *I cattolici trentini sotto l'Austria. Antologia degli scritti dal 1902 al 1905, con i discorsi al Parlamento austriaco*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome, 1964, Vol. I, p. 26.

10. ADG, Austria II, Notebooks from the university period, Statements to members of the Trento Catholic University Association (AUCT), undated.

THE EDUCATION OF A LEADER

He favoured a strong workers' organisation, regardless of nationality. This led to major disputes with the Socialists, for obvious reasons of rivalry, and with the Liberals, for both economic and national reasons.

It was De Gasperi's approach to the national question that aroused the most controversy. He was accused of being a supporter of Austria as he had said that being Catholic took precedence over being Italian. The controversy did not end with the lively press debate of those years, but was then taken up by political opponents, journalists and scholars. The Fascists, after the First World War, and the Communists, after the Second World War, depicted him as 'pro-Austrian' and anti-national, to discredit him in the eyes of public opinion. Others, in contrast, supported the image of De Gasperi as a nationalist and irredentist.

Although De Gasperi undoubtedly cannot be seen as an 'irredentist' along the lines of Cesare Battisti, he cannot be seen as 'pro-Austrian' either. He considered himself Italian and wished to defend and strengthen the national conscience of the Trentino people, but not to make it into an absolute, as that would have meant rejecting the rights of the other ethnic groups. From that point of view, joining the Italian national State or continuing to belong to the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire was a matter of relative indifference to him, although, ultimately, the Kingdom of Italy, because of its secular leanings, did not seem to provide the guarantees of protection of the free practice of religious life that the Empire in contrast provided. What was ultimately important was defending the nationality of the Trentino, its fundamental features, its traditions, its language, and in particular the religion of its priests, which had been threatened by attempts to introduce Protestantism by the pan-Germanists of the *Tiroler Volksbund*. De Gasperi therefore opposed the irredentism of the Liberals and Socialists with his 'positive national conscience', i.e. the defence of the rights of Italian nationality within the structures of the Habsburg's multinational State.

The experience that he gained in later years in the Austrian Parliament fleshed out and refined his notion of nationality which was germinating at this time. There is no doubt, however, that his clear-cut opposition to the aggressive nationalism of the 1930s had its roots in the lively discussions of the 'national question' in the Trentino of the early 1900s.

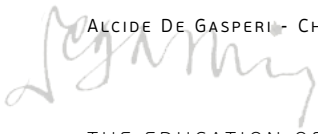
4. THE ITALIAN UNIVERSITY

One of the most important aspects of the national question in the Italian territories of the Empire was the call for the establishment of an Italian university. This was not a new problem, and the Austrian government had tried to find a solution by establishing two Italian language chairs in 1899 at the Faculty of Law of the University of Innsbruck. This solution was not, however, welcomed by German-speaking students, who wanted the University of Innsbruck to retain its German character, or by Italian-speaking students, who wanted a real national university in Trieste. During 1903 there were clashes between German and Italian students and the Austrian government decided to intervene. Fearing, however, that the university could become a focus for irredentism, it decided that the Italian university should be in Rovereto rather than Trieste, on the fringes of the Empire and far from other university centres. This solution was scornfully rejected by the Italians and by the municipality of Rovereto itself. 'Trieste or nothing' was the cry of the Socialist and Liberal students, while the Catholics wanted the the university to be in Trento. After further extremely lively debates, an Italian law faculty was finally established at Wilten, close to Innsbruck.

When the faculty was inaugurated on 3 November 1904 there were serious clashes between the many Italian-speaking students who had assembled in Innsbruck, including De Gasperi and Battisti, and the German-speaking students. The police intervened and many Italians were arrested. The Austrian students mockingly wrote 'Italian Law Faculty' on the jail door. It was only through the good offices of Enrico Conci, a member of the Vienna Parliament from the Trentino, that De Gasperi and his friends were released after nineteen days in jail, but the Italian Law Faculty was abolished.

The Italian university experience convinced De Gasperi that a great deal of caution was needed in dealings with the Austrian authorities and that every concession, however small, should be treated as a starting rather than a finishing point. The intransigent policy followed by the 'irredentists' had never achieved anything. In the peaceful reign of Franz Josef, the tactic of 'all or nothing' had led to nothing. It was better therefore to accept something so that the fight could be continued. In practice, as De Gasperi told Riva on 27 August 1905, it was better to put forward the Trento solution again and then to 'start down the path to the final goal, Trieste'¹¹.

11. 'Il comizio di Riva', *La voce cattolica*, 28 August 1905.



THE EDUCATION OF A LEADER

This episode clearly shows one of Alcide De Gasperi's main traits, his willingness to mediate and to find a temporary compromise with an eye to future advantages. What was important was the substance, the heart of the matter, and not the form. Many years later, speaking to the CD Provincial Congress in Trento in 1947, he said in this respect:

'Another lesson that I learned when I was young is this: do not lose your head over the form that matters take, outward appearances and questions of structure. You need to look further and see what is essential and then focus on those essential matters; to be able to pinpoint the simple question from a mass of ideas and discussions and to see it as the father of a family would see it when doing his accounts, to seek out the truth [...]. This tendency to simplify, to look at what is concrete, is a trait of the Alpine people. When problems are tackled through sonorous sentences or beautifully crafted words, I have a desire to grab my interlocutors by the belly and say: let's get down to the nitty-gritty, what do you really want?'¹²

12. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi politici*, T. Bozza (ed.), Cinque Lune, Rome, 1969², p. 136.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read "De Gasperi", is located in the top right corner of the page.

Leggenda

2. Journalist and Deputy



1. CELESTINO ENDRICI, A SOCIAL BISHOP

In July 1905, with a delay of one year caused by the Italian university events, De Gasperi graduated in philology with a dissertation on 'The lucky beggars of Carlo Gozzi and their German portrayals'. On returning to Trento, he became editor of *La Voce Cattolica* on 1 September, succeeding Father Gentili. It had been the new bishop, Celestino Endrici, who had wanted him at the helm of the newspaper; not, as has been written, to move away from Gentili's pro-Austrian leanings¹³, but to give the Catholic daily a more secular outlook. For the same reason the paper was renamed *Il Trentino* in the following year (just as *Fede e Lavoro* became *La Squilla* [The Bell]), leading to bewilderment among some older priests and disputes with the Austrians who accused the Trentino Catholics of irredentism. The new editor's employment contract had been drawn up on 4 October 1904, on the understanding that it would come into force one month after De Gasperi had graduated.

This was one of the first acts of Celestino Endrici, elevated to the throne of San Vigilio on 15 March 1904, who had known and appreciated the young Alcide for some time. Both sensitive to Christian Democrat ideals, they shared the idea of setting up a Catholic political Party which was democratic and non-denominational and which went beyond all the ideological nuances of the various Catholic movements in the name of social action. They were able to discuss these and other questions at length. De Gasperi had the feeling that he had met the best possible bishop. 'I am completely convinced' - he wrote to his brother Luigi Mario in early 1905 - 'from our close contact in recent days, that Endrici is the man of the moment, more than anyone thinks'¹⁴.

Endrici, from a well-off family, had studied in Rome between 1885 and 1891 and had specialised in theology. These were the years in which the Church's social doctrine was being drawn up and summarised in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which the young priest enthusiastically welcomed. Returning to Trento, he had promoted various economic and social initiatives by the Trentino Catholic movement, taking up the cause of urban and rural workers. The last bishop of Trento to be appointed by the Emperor, young and energetic, Endrici was not just particularly sensitive to social questions, but was well aware that it was important for Catholics to play their part in political life through their own Party with its own manifesto.

As soon as he was appointed bishop, Endrici speeded up the establishment of a political organisation for the Trentino's Catholics. The *Unione Politica Popolare del Trentino* [UPPT - People's Political Union of the Trentino] was thus set up on 19 October 1904 and its leaders included De Gasperi,

13. Cf. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi e il suo tempo. Trento, Vienna, Rome, Mondadori, Milan, 1964*, p. 56.

14. A. De Gasperi to L. M. De Gasperi, 28 January 1905, in ADG, Austria V, De Gasperi's private correspondence (1899-1916), 1.

Conci, Gentili and Lanzerotti, along with other members of the Diocesan Committee and the main Catholic organisations. The UPPT, also known as the *Partito Popolare Trentino* [People's Party of the Trentino] was intended to enable the Catholics in the Trentino to play a larger part in elections, while keeping religious questions separate from political questions and without directly compromising ecclesiastical power. More than ten years in advance of their fellow Catholics, the Trentino Catholics were therefore trying out the 'Party' form. While the Italian Catholics, still bogged down in the 'Roman question', had to make do with a few 'Catholic MPs' and had to call on Rome, in each case, for the suspension of the *Non Expedit*, the prohibition on participation in political elections, the Catholics of the Trentino were preparing to take to the field with the entire force of their organisation behind them.

2. INITIAL ELECTION SUCCESSES

In his usual polemic vein, but with a sense of irony and humour, De Gasperi soon committed the paper to the campaign for electoral reform, supporting direct and equal universal male suffrage. The reform was opposed not just by the Liberals, afraid of losing their hegemony, but by some Catholics who considered that the new system would favour the Socialists. De Gasperi was aware of the threat, but was convinced that this was a hurdle that could be overcome by better organisation and political education.

'The People's Party' - De Gasperi wrote in *Il Trentino* - 'should be a general league for political education and should be extended to all our municipalities so that every electoral district has a core of trained members who would, at election time as well, be the living organ in contact with the central direction'¹⁵.

As a result of the Party's sound organisation and the rallying work of the clergy, led by Bishop Endrici, the 1907 elections for the Vienna Parliament, the first by universal male suffrage, went very well for the People's Party. They received 70% of the votes cast and gained seven of the nine Trentino seats. This was a personal success for De Gasperi, who had ably led the electoral campaign in the columns of *Il Trentino* and organised a busy round of meetings. He attributed the success to the adoption of a practical and detailed political manifesto which drew on Catholic experience in the social and economic field for the region's development. Taking the same approach, the election for the Tyrol

15. *Adunanza generale dell'Unione politica popolare, Il Trentino*, 7 February 1907.

Diet was successfully contested in the following year, with all 12 UPPT candidates being elected in the rural constituencies.

The electoral victories of 1907 and 1908 were also a result of the 'secularisation' of the Catholic movement which Endrici had set in motion. Giving their political organisation a more secular and non-denominational image had helped the Catholics to gain greater support. The separation of the political and religious spheres was never taken to an extreme, however, especially as the UPPT's successes had much to do with the involvement and work of the bishop and the local clergy.

The Trentino Catholics had therefore gained the supremacy that they already held in the social and economic sphere in the region in the political sphere as well. Even in the city of Trento, where Liberals and Socialists had always had the upper hand, the Catholics were starting to achieve good results. In the course of the by-elections which were held in late 1909, De Gasperi, together with two other People's Party candidates, was elected to the municipal council. Here he stood out through his solid, but always constructive, opposition, tabling alternative proposals and plans to those of the Liberal majority. The work of De Gasperi and his two colleagues in the municipal council, reported in detail in *Il Trentino*, increased support for the People's Party, helping them to gain a further four councillors in the by-elections of 1910 and eight in the general municipal elections of 1911. Although far from being in a majority, the People's Party had nevertheless managed to put down solid roots in the city of Trento. Much of the credit for this went to De Gasperi, who had consolidated his standing as a leader unwilling to give up his principles, but able and pragmatic in his tactical choices.

3. TRADE UNION WORK AND CONTROVERSY WITH THE SOCIALISTS

The campaigning work which De Gasperi had undertaken during his time at university among Italian workers who had emigrated to Austria has already been mentioned. This continued after his appointment as editor of *Il Trentino*. After a campaigning trip to the Vorarlberg in 1903, he made another in 1906, going as far as to set up a 'textile workers' group. In the Val di Fiemme he then set up the professional union of sawyers, a group oppressed by very long working hours and underpaid by the main concerns with woodworking monopolies such as the Feltrinelli family.

De Gasperi always kept a fond memory of this union work and in particular of the fight for the sawyers, which he recalled in some of his speeches after the Second World War. This work often brought him into conflict with the Socialists, however, who feared competition from Catholic union organisations. He was accused of wanting to divide the workers' front and of trying to bring Socialism down. In reality, this action did not just take a negative and anti-Socialist stance, but was positive action in the name of Christian Democrat ideals, to show that the Catholics were men of progress and just as interested in improving the lot of the working classes as the Socialists.

In February 1909, Benito Mussolini arrived in Trento, as he had been appointed secretary of the local Chamber of Labour. Mussolini immediately began a bitter anti-clerical campaign, not without its trivial side, from the columns of the Socialist paper *L'Avvenire del Lavoratore* [The future of the worker]. On 7 March he clashed with De Gasperi in a debate at Untermais close to Merano. Faced with Mussolini's insulting accusations against the Catholics and the Church, De Gasperi retorted that, instead of fighting, the Socialists and Catholics would do better to join forces to defend workers' rights. Then, on the pretext of a preceding engagement, he left. De Gasperi felt that public life should not be 'a round of insults and beatings', whereas Mussolini had brought a worrying note of violence into the debate in the Trentino, which De Gasperi could not ignore.

'He threatens to use his fists against me,' he wrote in *Il Trentino*, replying to Mussolini's usual insults against the Catholics ('vile hirelings, vulgar perpetrators of the black stain of clerical journalism, hacks with no ideas and no courage'), 'while I shall use the law against him. He considers his system to be ideal; to me, it harks back to the time of the barbarians or, if you want, those enlightened by his paper. He can go and try out some of his brutal notions in Romagna. Here, we call them bragging. The Trentino is not a place where the d'Artagnans of this

world will prosper, and I am not a man who will lose his head over loutish words'¹⁶.

Some months after, partly as a result of pressure from the Trentino Catholics, Mussolini was expelled from the Empire's territories.

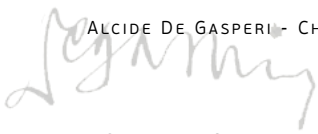
In those years, De Gasperi was active on a number of fronts: municipal councillor, editor of *Il Trentino*, active union organiser, member of the Diocesan Committee and the leadership of the UPPT and, from November 1907, Vice-President of the Industrial Bank and member of the Supervisory Board of the Trentino Union of Electrical Enterprises. He was becoming well known throughout the region, and a further step in his career was looming: standing for parliament in Vienna.

4. THE PARLIAMENT IN VIENNA

The opportunity arose in 1911 when, following the parliamentary obstructionism of the Slavic Union and the Socialists, the *Reichsrat* was dissolved. De Gasperi, who had just turned thirty, stood as a candidate and directed the election campaign from inside. He had a UPPT propaganda pamphlet published, entitled *Un partito che lavora!* [A Party which works!], describing all the political and administrative work of the People's Party members and did not hold back as far as meetings were concerned. He stressed the close link between Italian nationality and the Catholic religion, between Latin civilisation and Christianity, as well as the democratic and popular nature of the UPPT, taking up the old but still effective slogan: 'Catholics, Italians, democrats'. As a result of the usual rallying of the clergy, vigorously led by Bishop Endrici, the People's Party, although obtaining fewer votes, held on to the seven of the nine Trentino seats that it had won in 1907, and in Trento a Catholic candidate forced the Socialist Cesare Battisti to contest the election. Victorious with 75% of votes in the Fiemme-Fassa constituency, De Gasperi started a new stage of his life representing the Trentino's Catholics in the Parliament in Vienna.

At this time the spelling of his surname was changed from the original 'Degasperì' to 'De Gasperi'. This was probably an error on the part of a clerk who changed the first syllable for a noble prefix. Cesare Battisti poked fun at the vanity of 'Von Gasperi', who initially protested, but had in the end to give in to accepted usage.

16. [DE GASPERI, A.], *I violenti*, *Il Trentino*, 3 June 1909.



De Gasperi's parliamentary work in Vienna has been analysed in depth to find evidence of his irredentism or, in contrast, his support for Austria. In reality, both of these stances were alien to him. As already mentioned, De Gasperi's fundamental concern was to safeguard the Italian nationality and the Catholic religion of the Trentino people. His term 'positive national conscience', heavily criticised by the irredentists, could have no other meaning. As long as the Trentino was under the Austrian Empire, its national characteristics had to be defended, its autonomy strengthened and its economic and social conditions improved, but within the existing institutions. It was important to counter the forced Germanisation being led by the Tiroler Volksbund, which wanted to eradicate the Trentino's Latin and Catholic roots.

As a parliamentarian, De Gasperi tried to gain acceptance for specific legal provisions in favour of the Trentino. Rather than making bombastic speeches and resounding statements in the Chamber, he preferred humbler work in the committees which led to tangible results. He was a member of the Industry Committee and the Press Committee and was part of the Delegations, the body which brought together various members of the parliaments in Vienna and Budapest and had legislative powers over some common issues (financial, military and foreign policy matters). He spoke on a number of occasions in favour of establishing an Italian university, protested against the activities of the Tiroler Volksbund and its attempted Germanisation and complained about the Austrian government's lack of interest in the Trentino's economic problems and its failure to grant autonomy. On 8 October 1912, speaking at the Delegations, after listing a number of pointlessly oppressive actions against the Trentino people by Vienna and Innsbruck under the pretext of irredentism, De Gasperi concluded: 'Rather than tormenting the people of the Trentino with these measures, the Government would do better to satisfy their economic, national and cultural needs'¹⁷.

Although defending the Italian nature of the Trentino people, De Gasperi managed to steer a delicate course between national belonging and the existing institutions, in the hope that the Trentino people could become a bridge between Latin and German ethnic groups, thereby ensuring peace and promoting reconciliation among different races. The 1914 war, which broke out a few weeks after De Gasperi had been elected to the Tyrol Diet in Innsbruck with a gratifying majority, brought new problems with it. Events were precipitated by the assassination in Sarajevo.

17. Cf. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi e il suo tempo*, op. cit., p. 76.

5. THE GREAT WAR

When war broke out, *Il Trentino* flirted for a short time with the notion of Italy siding with the central empires to defeat 'Slavism'. It then came out in favour of neutrality on the part of the government in Rome. In contrast to Battisti and the Liberals, for whom nothing was more important than the end of Austrian domination, De Gasperi rightly considered that a war between Italy and Austria would have serious repercussions for the Trentino people and did whatever he could to ward off such an event.

In the period of Italian neutrality, De Gasperi visited Rome on three occasions and had talks with the Austrian ambassador, Karl Macchio, with Pope Benedict XV and, in secret, with the Italian Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, on 16 March 1915. These talks have been interpreted in different and in some cases conflicting ways. For his hagiographers, De Gasperi visited Rome to stress the Italian nature of his homeland and to ask for support from Italy. For his opponents, he visited Rome to confirm the Trentino's loyalty to Franz Josef. It is likely that De Gasperi, hoping that Austria would cede the Trentino to Italy without a war in return for its neutrality, was seeking guarantees of the continuation of the autonomy that his region had enjoyed under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This would seem to be borne out by Sonnino's diary entry on his meeting with De Gasperi¹⁸.

On 24 May 1915, Italy declared war on Austro-Hungary. Two days before, *Il Trentino*, to avoid any problems with censorship, had ceased publication, leaving space for the official paper *Il risveglio austriaco* [The Austrian Awakening]. Nurturing major doubts about the loyalty of their Trentino subjects, the Austrian authorities deported whole villages, scattering their inhabitants throughout the Empire. Eighty thousand people, around one third of the region's inhabitants, had to abandon their land and their possessions. Later, even Bishop Endrici was interned at Heiligenkreuz close to Vienna. As De Gasperi wrote bitterly, the Trentino had become little more than a graveyard:

'With municipalities dissolved, associations searched, parliamentarians interned or fled, the Trentino had disappeared and there was a sign on that graveyard reading: major war zone'¹⁹.

To avoid being sent into confinement (not even parliamentarians could stay in the 'major war zone' without special authorisation), De Gasperi went to Vienna. In Vienna he organised an aid committee for refugees. Moved by a sense of human and Christian charity, De Gasperi worked to help deportees,

18. SONNINO, S., *Diario, 1914-1916*, Vol. II, P. Pastorelli (ed.), Laterza, Bari, 1972, pp. 107-108.

19. Quoted by CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, Mondadori, Milan, 1964, p. 60.

visiting them in their camps and making as much use as possible of his prerogatives as a parliamentarian to alleviate their tragic situation.

When the old Emperor Franz Josef died in 1916, his successor Karl decided to recall the Austrian parliament, which had been dissolved since 1914. Unlike other national groups, the Italian People's Party did not call for federalism or independence, but merely called for the suspension of the arbitrary restrictions on personal freedom and the return of deportees to their homes. Without departing from his usual moderate style, on 12 July 1917 De Gasperi described in parliament the terrible living conditions of the internees who were being treated 'not as citizens, but as administrative objects whose treatment depends on who is doing the judging and their personal opinion'²⁰. Avoiding tackling the question from a political point of view, but only in humanitarian terms, De Gasperi obtained approval for a law on aid for internees. His ongoing, methodical and calm commitment brought them more advantages than the nationalistic declarations and inflammatory irredentist rhetoric of others. The situation also led him to call on the Empire's Italians to refrain from 'nationalist' disputes which could worsen the lives of the internees.

De Gasperi's prudent conduct changed only when the war seemed to be reaching an end. On 11 October 1918 he spoke in Parliament, saying 'when the peace is concluded, the Tridentine people expect recognition of the principle of nationality and its practical application to those Italians currently living in Austria'²¹. Slightly over a week later, on 25 October, Enrico Conci, in the name of *Fascio Nazionale Italiano* (the body which brought together the People's and Liberal Party MPs of Italian nationality in the Vienna parliament), of which De Gasperi was secretary, declared that the Italian territories which had until then been subject to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy should be considered to be part of Italy. De Gasperi's political experience within the Austro-Hungarian Empire had come to an end.

20. Quoted in VALORI, G., *De Gasperi al Parlamento austriaco*, Parenti, Florence, 1953, p. 161.

21. Chamber of Deputies, XXII session, 91st sitting, 11 October 1918, p. 4626, quoted in VALORI, G., *De Gasperi al Parlamento austriaco*, op. cit., p. 153.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'De Gasperi', is located in the top right corner of the page.

Leggiamo

3. From Austria to Italy



1. LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AND CLASHES

Alcide De Gasperi did not see Italian troops enter Trento on 3 November 1918. He had gone to Berne a few days earlier on an official mission together with other parliamentary colleagues, including Enrico Conci, to seek food aid for the Empire's Italian peoples. The real reason for the visit was different, however: to deliver a memorandum setting out the requests of the Italian people of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the Italian ambassador in Switzerland with a view to the armistice talks. Receiving news in Berne that the 'the tricolour was flying in Trento and Trieste'²², he decided to travel with his colleagues to Rome, which he reached on 6 November after a triumphal journey. The crowd that met him at railway stations saw the now former members of the Austrian parliament as a symbol of the reunification of the 'irredentist lands' with the motherland.

In Rome, De Gasperi was able to speak to many politicians and in particular Prime Minister Orlando and Foreign Minister Sonnino, whom he had already secretly met in March 1915. He asked all of them to ensure that the Trentino kept the autonomy that it had enjoyed under Austria. These requests aroused suspicion among the Italian ruling class, which had always considered the unitary state which had arisen out of the Risorgimento and political and administrative centralisation to be one and the same, that De Gasperi had little patriotic spirit and only conditional support for Italy. The atmosphere of suspicion that this created did little to promote the integration of the 'new provinces'. An approximate knowledge of geography, which led the people of the Trentino to be confused with the German-speaking people of the Alto Adige, worsened the situation. Quite a few officials travelled to Trento (and to Trieste) with a 'colonising' spirit and felt that any protest against the inefficiency of the Italian government was shaped by nostalgia for Austria.

The Catholics were in particular suspected of being lukewarm supporters of unification with Italy. During the war, the Socialist and Liberal irredentists who had taken refuge in Italy had portrayed a pro-Austrian Trentino under the sway of the clergy who were loyal to the Emperor. In reality, although quite a few priests had sentimental links with the dynasty, most of the clergy supported De Gasperi's idea of the positive national conscience. Many priests had also been interned with members of their parishes and others had been imprisoned as they were suspected of a lack of loyalty to the institutions. Even Bishop Endrici, as mentioned above, had been interned in Heiligenkreuz because of his patriotic sentiments.

The military governorate which held power provisionally in the region while awaiting formal unification with Italy had asked many of those who had left to work with it and was being influenced

22. CONCI, E., 'Ricordi di un viaggio attraverso la Svizzera', *Rivista d'Italia*, 1922, f. ix, p. 47.



FROM AUSTRIA TO ITALY

by them. The Catholics were afraid that they, exploiting the positions of power in which they found themselves, would take their revenge on the real or alleged 'Austrophiles', rekindling old anti-clerical passions. Bishop Endrici complained of this in a letter to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Gasparri:

'There is no doubt that, overall, the government is moving in the direction of Liberalism, and the radical elements of the Trentino, who had left and have now come back to the country with the royal army, are continuing to exert an unfavourable influence on the government, while the Catholics are not being given their freedom and are not being listened to'²³.

To rebalance matters, De Gasperi and Conci successfully asked Prime Minister Orlando and the Supreme Command to establish a Council which could give opinions and make proposals to the Governorate with members from all the Trentino parties in proportion to their actual numbers.

Relations between the Governorate, in which there were many Liberals and Socialists led by Cesare Battisti, and the Council, in which the Catholics were in a majority (chaired by Conci with De Gasperi as its secretary), were difficult from the start. There were daily clashes. De Gasperi was able to put his paper, which had reappeared on 23 November 1918 under the new name *Il nuovo Trentino* [The New Trentino], to good use in these disputes. To try to bring the military administration to an end as soon as possible, De Gasperi called for political and administrative elections to be held and claimed the Trentino's traditional autonomy. The first steps of the Italian bureaucracy, he wrote, were not such as to encourage us to leave our administration completely in its hands, giving up whatever we can do for ourselves. We join the Italian State with joy, but we walk in with our heads held high²⁴.

The Governorate replied calling the Council a 'political offshoot' of the clerical Party and roundly criticising the Catholic paper, causing further clashes. Any call for autonomy and any protest against the decisions taken by the Italian government were interpreted as a sign of nostalgia for Austria. In reality, there were real grounds for protest against the Italian administration: no overall plan for the reconstruction of the areas devastated by the war had been drawn up, the exchange rate between the imperial crown and the lira had been set at 40% of its value, those Trentino men who,

23. C. Endrici to P. Gasparri, Trento, 8 March 1919, Archivio della Curia Arcivescovile, Trento, *Acta Episcopalia Endrici Coelest.*, 1918-1919, No 274.

24. 'Il primo congresso dei Sindaci del Trentino', *Il nuovo Trentino*, 15 March 1919.

following compulsory conscription, had served in the Austro-Hungarian army (especially men who had fought in Russia, in case they had been infected by 'Bolshevik ideas') had been interned for a number of months in camps throughout Italy, and the military leadership had acted in such a way as to ferment discontent. Lastly, a bureaucracy which was often obtuse and highly inefficient made it difficult to resolve even the simplest of issues.

'How could we not react', De Gasperi asked in October 1919, 'and not protest when our call for local autonomy was opposed by a centralising and levelling bureaucracy, mild in some cases, but embittered in others as a result of the collaboration of those Trentino people who, either through misplaced patriotic idealism, or through an ambition for control and a wish for reprisals, were collaborating with this system of government which, despite the good will of some and the courtesy of many, was often a colonial system and almost always anti-democratic?'²⁵.

Not even when Nitti replaced Orlando at the head of the government and established a Civil Commissariat in place of the military Governorate did the clashes come to an end. De Gasperi complained that the government had not listened to the representatives of the Trentino before deciding on the organisation of the 'new provinces'.

'We can say in all truth', he wrote to Giuseppe Micheli, one of the leaders of the Italian People's Party most sensitive to the Trentino question, 'that the administration is being changed, especially from the point of view of local authorities, without an elected representative of the new citizens of Italy having any say. This right of co-determination, no more than natural, has even been accepted by the French in Alsace-Lorraine'²⁶.

A further reason for conflict lay in the person appointed by the Italian government as Civil Commissioner: Luigi Credaro. A radical and a university professor of pedagogy, he had been the author with Edoardo Daneo of a schools law unfavourable to the Italian Catholics and was suspected of being a Mason. De Gasperi involved the Italian People's Party in the matter and travelled to Rome to talk to Nitti. To restore calm, the Prime Minister issued a circular (26 July 1919) in which he confirmed the government's wish to safeguard the special circumstances

25. Italian People's Party, inaugural meeting of the Trento section, Trento, 12 October 1919, no publication details, p. 10.

26. A. De Gasperi to G. Micheli, [Rome, 6 July 1919], ADG, Trentino I, *Trentino, Autonomia delle Nuove Province*, 1.

and traditional autonomy of the 'new provinces', avoiding the errors made in the 1859 and 1866 annexations and 'doggedly assimilating invasions of bureaucracy'²⁷. Shortly after, the Prime Minister reiterated these notions in Parliament.

2. THE TRENINO PEOPLE'S PARTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTONOMY

For De Gasperi who had led the battle for the Trentino's autonomy, this was a good result, which had also been achieved through close contact with the Italian People's Party of Father Sturzo, who had supported the Trentino Catholics' calls in Rome. De Gasperi had not been involved in the foundation of the Italian People's Party (PPI) as he was immersed 'in our far-reaching problems of local reconstruction'²⁸. He nevertheless attended the PPI Congress in June 1919 and Sturzo, making an evident concession to the patriotic sentiments of the time, wanted him in the Presidency. Although cordial, relations between the Trentino Catholics and the PPI were not very close during this period. When the Trentino People's Party was formally founded and joined the PPI (12 October 1919), it did so more as a federated group than a regional section. In the first years after the war, the attention of the press and Trentino politicians focused more on local issues than on Italian events and their main concern, as has been seen, was to regain their traditional prerogatives of autonomy.

Much of the credit for the foundation of the Trentino People's Party went, once again, to the industrious work of De Gasperi, who had called on the support of the local clergy. He had in fact sent a circular to all 'shepherds of souls' urging them to promote sections in every municipality. 183 sections were set up in a very short period of time, with a total of 13 340 members²⁹. As with the UPPT, the relationship between the Party and the ecclesiastical authority was therefore very close. At the top was the Diocesan Committee for Catholic Action, which had been set up in 1898 and controlled all the Catholic organisations, including the Party, which, in turn, represented the demands of Catholic organisations and unions in the political arena. This did not mean, however, that their roles were merged, as the Party had to have a life of its own,

27. The letter of 26 July 1919 can be found in SALATA, F., *Per le nuove provincie e per l'Italia*, Stabilimento poligrafico per l'amministrazione della guerra, Rome, 1922, p. 286.

28. [De Gasperi, A.], *'Vita breve ma intensa'*, *Il nuovo Trentino*, 20 January 1923.

29. *L'assemblea costitutiva del Partito Popolare*, *Il nuovo Trentino*, 14 October 1919.

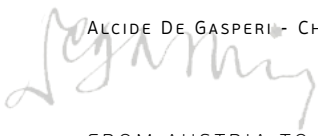
albeit a life inspired by Christian ideology as interpreted by the Diocesan Committee under the guidance of the Bishop. It was the Diocesan Committee, moreover, which helped to finance the Party's regional leadership and underwrote any losses it might make. When Celestino Endrici died in 1940, De Gasperi remembered him, stressing that his main merit lay in his defence and respect of 'the political freedom of believers, distinguishing in political life between roles and responsibilities,' but 'taking care, however, through the Catholic organisation itself [i.e. the Diocesan Committee], that the notions underpinning Christianity and social justice were always taken into account and put into practice'³⁰.

De Gasperi was appointed regional secretary of the Party on 31 October 1919 and was tasked with asking Nitti for the full re-establishment of the Trentino's autonomous bodies and for political elections in the region as soon as possible. While he once again received the Prime Minister's assurances as to the first point, domestic and international issues prevented elections from being held. The government wanted first to work out how the region, including the German-speaking people of the Alto Adige, could be administered. In particular, however, nothing could happen before the peace treaty with Austria was ratified by Italy, France and the United Kingdom. The 'liberated lands' could not be formally annexed until these ratifications had taken place and it was not therefore possible to hold elections at the same time as the Italian elections on 16 November 1919, as De Gasperi and his Trentino colleagues had wished.

While awaiting these ratifications, there were arguments as to how the region was to be politically and administratively organised once it was unified with Italy. The Liberals supported a single Tridentine province, thereby placing the German-speakers of the Alto Adige in a minority, while the People's Party and the Socialists supported two separate provinces, Trento and Bolzano. After long and difficult talks between the Trentino parties, led by De Gasperi, and the Italian government, agreement was reached on 8 June 1920: the prior municipal and provincial autonomy would be retained, no final organisation would be imposed on the region before the election of local councillors, the Government Commissioner would be replaced by a collegiate body in which the various Trentino parties would be represented and the problem of the Alto Adige's German-speakers would be tackled in such a way as to foster their integration³¹. Just when everything

30. DE GASPERI, A., 'Celestino Endrici, Arcivescovo di Trento', *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 October 1940.

31. On the talks held in Rome from 2 to 7 June 1920 between representatives of the Trento parties, led by De Gasperi, and Credaro and Italian government officials, see CANAVERO, A., 'De Gasperi e l'Italia nel primo dopoguerra (1919-1921)', *De Gasperi e il Trentino*, op. cit., pp. 735-740.



seemed to be resolved, the Nitti government fell on the following day, leaving the door open for Giovanni Giolitti.

As soon as he had taken office, the Piedmontese politician wanted to meet Conci and De Gasperi (6 July 1920) to confirm that the new government wanted to respect the Trentino's autonomy and to table the law ratifying the peace treaty with Austria as soon as possible³². Through the PPI's MPs, who were provided with all the necessary information and assistance by De Gasperi, the law annexing the Trentino and the Alto Adige was approved in September 1920 with a wording which safeguarded their old autonomy. At the 2nd Congress of the Trentino People's Party, in the following October, De Gasperi was able to stress with some satisfaction that the idea of autonomy had made progress and had also won out in Rome:

'Our call for autonomous regional representation and the establishment of a Diet for the Trentino fuelled the scornful wrath of the hyper-patriots in Trento itself, who taxed us with pro-Austrian legitimism; now all the Trentino parties accept it. In Rome we were met with ignorance and dislike: how many lectures, how many discussions and how much energy did it take before the idea was entertained. Now the Trentino has full citizenship under the law on annexation'³³.

32. Cf. *'Annessione vicina', Il nuovo Trentino*, 9 July 1920.

33. Secretary's report, *Il popolo trentino*, 21 October 1920.

3. THE POLITICAL ELECTIONS

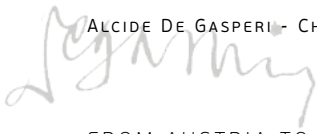
De Gasperi was now able to devote himself to preparing for the political elections, which were scheduled for 15 May 1921. He based his election campaign on issues of local interest: autonomy, economic reconstruction and schools. This last was an issue of particular concern to the Trentino Catholics, who felt that some prerogatives would be lost in the transition to the Kingdom of Italy, such as the compulsory teaching of religion in primary and lower secondary schools as part of the school timetable, and the prohibition on mixed classes.

Sturzo, bearing witness to the special relations with the Trentino people, gave them complete freedom of choice as regards candidates, requiring only formal ratification by the leadership of the PPI³⁴. He then came to Trento to inaugurate the election campaign and in particular to explain the PPI's national manifesto. When Sturzo asked De Gasperi on which issues the Trentino People's Party was intending to focus, he received the following reply: 'our main issues will be preserving and developing local autonomy, through the reconstruction of the Diets and the renewal of the municipalities, maintaining religious education and the social legislation in force, remedying the damage wrought by the war, and strong action by the Italian government as regards the financial liquidation of Austria, to protect our interests. For the development of the general manifesto, we shall call on our friends in the leadership and in the group, and in particular on your words of wisdom'³⁵.

De Gasperi did not hesitate to call on the authority of Bishop Endrici to resolve some questions that had arisen in the Party, and in particular the dispute with Rodolfo Grandi, who had been a parliamentarian in Vienna in 1911. Grandi felt that De Gasperi was imposing a personal policy and increasingly forcing his will on the Party and threatened not to stand for re-election. De Gasperi, aware of the damage that would be done to the People's Party list if Grandi, extremely popular in the Val di Non, did not stand, asked the bishop to intervene and persuade Grandi to stand. This mixing of the political and religious spheres was no new thing in the Trentino. As in the past, the People's Party was to be guided by the ecclesiastical authority, especially now that Italian electoral law did not allow, as had been the tradition in the Trentino, priests to be elected to political office.

34. Telegram from L. Sturzo to A. De Gasperi, [Rome], 31 December 1920, ADG, Italian People's Party, 1, People's Party in Trentino.

35. *Ibid.*, letter from A. De Gasperi to L. Sturzo, Rome, 18 January 1921.



FROM AUSTRIA TO ITALY

As a result of the popularity achieved by defending autonomy, the usual rallying of the clergy and a very sound organisation, the PPI obtained an absolute majority of votes in the Trentino and five out of the seven seats. However, not everything had gone as the People's Party had hoped. The Ladin valleys, which were part of the Trento and not the Bolzano constituency, had voted solidly for a German list, to the detriment of the PPI, while the Socialists had won out in the cities of Trento and Rovereto, confirming the Catholics' traditional 'urban' weakness. De Gasperi nevertheless had major personal success and came top among those elected. After representing the people of the Trentino in Vienna, he now had the task of representing them in Rome.

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Leggenda

4. The Years of the People's Party



1. MEMBER FOR THE TRENINO IN THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT

Following his election, De Gasperi, who had been a member of the National Council and the leadership of the PPI since April 1920, was appointed Chairman of the parliamentary group. While this undoubtedly recognised his political talents, the fact that he was from the 'liberated lands' helped his career in Sturzo's Party. The Party was able to use De Gasperi's Trentino roots to reject the accusations of a lack of patriotic spirit that were often levelled against the Catholics as a result of their neutral stance in 1914.

Until the end of the year, De Gasperi continued to some extent to keep his distance from Italian events, as can be seen from his speeches in the Chamber, which focused almost exclusively on the problems of the Trentino and the 'new provinces'. In his maiden speech on 24 June 1921, for instance, he explained what the people of the Trentino understood by autonomy. They wanted provincial representation with the powers of the former Austrian Diets, and therefore not just regulatory and administrative powers, but also legislative powers in various sectors such as agriculture, schools, public and hydraulic works and small-scale industry. This autonomy had to be granted, in De Gasperi's view, not just to ensure a peaceful transition from Austrian to Italian legislation, but also to 'include the political movement of this foreign population as cells serving and not in opposition to the state organisation'³⁶. De Gasperi had a keen memory of Austria's policy of oppression and wanted to avoid any similar behaviour by Italy against German-speaking citizens from preventing the two nationalities from living together peacefully.

This is one of De Gasperi's most characteristic speeches and one of the most useful in shedding light on his mentality. He did not call for autonomy for theoretical reasons, but because of his experience from the recent past, which had demonstrated its advantages. Examples from daily life showed that Austrian administrative organisation had been more efficient and less costly than its Italian counterpart. De Gasperi pointed out, among other things, the unjustified increase in staff numbers at Trento railway station and compared postal charges with the past, concluding: 'I wonder whether we should study and see whether we can manage to save all the twine, envelopes and sealing wax that the Italian administration is wasting'³⁷.

The parliamentary report shows that these words were met with 'laughter'. De Gasperi's pragmatic and down-to-earth oratory was unlikely to inflame the hearts of a parliament which loved its speeches in

36. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, Vol. I, Colombo, Rome, 1973, p. 5, sitting of 24 June 1921.

37. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 10.

the Chamber, its well-turned phrases and its rhetoric, and had considered an orator lacking frills such as Giolitti to be just about passable. His speech in contrast demonstrated a desire for tangible results, the notion that good politics were down to good administration, meeting citizens' needs, achieving objectives of value for all, and trying to win over those starting from different ideological approaches.

Following Giolitti's fall on the day after the elections, his successor Bonomi offered De Gasperi a post in the new government. De Gasperi was nevertheless persuaded to turn him down³⁸, on the advice, it would seem, of Monsignor Gentili, who felt that government work would distract him from resolving the many problems raised by the Trentino's annexation to Italy³⁹. In the following months, De Gasperi, negotiating with the new Prime Minister, managed to get a decree enacted which accepted almost all the demands for autonomy that had previously been put forward. Municipal elections were also held in the Trentino between 8 and 22 January 1922, in which the People's Party was very successful.

2. NO AGREEMENT WITH THE SOCIALISTS AND THE ADVENT OF FASCISM

With the successful resolution of the Trentino question, De Gasperi could now devote himself entirely to national politics. He had risen up the ranks of the PPI. In August 1921, together with Sturzo, Jacini and Ruffo della Scaletta, he travelled to Germany to meet the leaders of the *Zentrum* and explore the possibility of agreements between European parties drawing their inspiration from Christianity. This trip to Germany also gave him a chance for a close look at the cooperation between the *Zentrum* and the Socialists to see whether this could be appropriate for Italy. At the third Congress of the PPI (Venice, 20-23 October 1921), where he stressed the importance of the union movement, he therefore took a positive stance on the possibility of cooperation with the Socialists and helped to gain approval for a policy line which did not rule out, in specific circumstances, closer ties with the wing of the Party led by Turati.

In Italy, meanwhile, the democratic crisis was playing out: the State had become powerless, and increasingly weak governments were unable to do anything to tackle the rising tide of Fascist violence. In these politically tormented months, De Gasperi's marriage to Francesca Romani, sister of Pietro, his friend and colleague in parliament, offered him a ray of light and calm. They were married on 14

38. The absence of De Gasperi from the new ministry, *Il nuovo Trentino*, 5 July 1921.

39. [Mattei, G.], *Alcide De Gasperi all'alba del XX secolo*, Dematté (ed.), Trento, 1962, p. 270.

June 1922 at Borgo Valsugana and took a few days off⁴⁰.

The political situation was worsening, and not a day passed without Fascist violence, not just against the Socialists but also against the People's Party and their economic and social organisations. The Facta government, increasingly weak and discredited, was powerless to react. Could the Fascist threat be tackled by parliamentary cooperation between the People's Party and the more moderate wing of the Socialists? De Gasperi's view was that nothing should be ruled out in principle and that there were points of contact in relation to the protection of workers; it was merely necessary to assess, in a particular situation, whether or not cooperation was advisable:

'Leaving aside the major and fundamental ideals and principles', he wrote in June 1922, 'from which the various parties' manifestos draw their inspiration, everything in politics is relative, and it would be absurd to rule out cooperation with such and such a Party, when that cooperation could in some way serve the supreme interests of the country which are the direct purpose of politics'⁴¹.

Mutual distrust, ideological prejudices and a tide of rebuffs, opposition from the Vatican, the hostility of major political groups, especially Giolitti's supporters, and differences between the various wings of Socialism nevertheless prevented any agreement between the People's Party and the Socialists when the first Facta government reached crisis point in July 1922. Any thought of cooperation, moreover, led the PPI senators to state that they were absolutely against agreements with the Socialists. This was one of the first rifts in the Party to be made public and had very serious consequences in terms of internal discipline.

40. Cf. letters from De Gasperi to Francesca Romani during their engagement and early years of marriage in DE GASPERI, A., *Cara Francesca: Lettere*, M. R. De Gasperi (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia, 1999.

41. [DE GASPERI, A.], 'Per il paese', *Il nuovo Trentino*, 23 June 1922.

THE YEARS OF THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

The weakness of the State, the King's indecision, the government's powerlessness and the divisions among the parties were helping the Fascists to gain power: this was the beginning of the end for Italy's civil and political liberties. Mussolini's first government was still, as we know, a coalition government which included two ministers and four under-secretaries from the People's Party. The decision to participate was taken by the leadership of the parliamentary group, chaired by De Gasperi, even though the PPI secretary, Father Sturzo, was not in favour. This does not mean that De Gasperi looked favourably on Fascism: he wrongly thought that Mussolini, from whom he had received assurances, would restore order and put an end to crime, without attacking the freedoms enshrined by statute. De Gasperi's error, shared, moreover, by many politicians of the time, was to believe that Fascism could be 'regularised', brought within the bounds of constitutional legality, just as Giolitti had brought Socialism within the bounds of the Liberal State at the turn of the century.

De Gasperi soon became aware of his error of judgment. In his speech of 17 November declaring loyalty to the Mussolini government, De Gasperi felt the need to defend the importance of parliament, which the Prime Minister had threatened to turn into a 'camp for a handful of soldiers'. He then faced the bitter disappointment of seeing the Trentino's autonomy removed by one of the new government's first measures which extended Italian municipal and provincial law to the 'new provinces'⁴².

At the 4th PPI Congress held in Turin in April 1923, at which Sturzo had wanted the Party to 'break away' from any collaborationism, De Gasperi explained that it had been decided to take part in the government solely because of the ongoing emergency and the resolve to avoid anything worse and restore calm in the country, in return for specific guarantees by Mussolini to nip any illegality in the bud. This was therefore temporary collaboration, not to be seen as 'collaborationism', i.e. as a wholesale alliance with the Fascists. Rather, it was a temporary agreement to allow for the State's administrative and financial reorganisation.

At the end of the Congress, De Gasperi presented an agenda which, although approved, was voted against by both the right and left wing of the Party, for opposite reasons. It approved People's Party participation in the government 'as the Fascist revolution is constitutional' and to ensure peace in the country based on freedom and justice⁴³. It also invited the parliamentary group to defend the proportional electoral system. Mussolini, irritated by the way the Congress had gone and dissatisfied by what already seemed to him to be conditional collaboration, put an end to People's Party participation in the government.

42. [DE GASPERI, A.], '*La sistemazione delle nuove province*', *Il nuovo Trentino*, 6 January 1923.

43. The text of the agenda in ADG, Italian People's Party, 1c, Italian People's Party from the Venice Congress to the Turin Congress.

3. THE FASCIST ELECTORAL LAW

The death of Benedict XV, the Pope who had officially repealed the *Non Expedit* so that the PPI could take part in the elections in 1919, was a sad blow for Sturzo's Party. From February 1922, the papal throne was occupied by the conservative and Socialist-hating Pius XI, an opponent of any Catholic autonomy in political life. The new Pope was convinced that the problems of the Church in Italy could be more readily resolved through direct negotiations with Mussolini, who was now showing formal deference to the Vatican and had thrown out his old anti-clerical baggage. From that point of view, the People's Party was an obstacle and had to be removed. It was also in the interests of the Fascists to get rid of the PPI as it was the only real alternative political force. Following an offensive against Sturzo led in some style by the Fascist and nationalist press, with the support of some defectors from the PPI, the Vatican was forced to ask the Sicilian priest to resign as secretary of the Party (10 July 1923) and from its leadership, and then to go into exile (October 1924) in London. Deprived of the federating force of Sturzo, the only person able to guide and steer the PPI in a rift-free way, it began to break up. That was exactly what Mussolini was relying on, well aware of the differences of opinion within the Party.

The first major rift centred on the electoral law. To increase its own power, the Fascist government had tabled a draft electoral reform, drawn up by Giacomo Acerbo, under which the Party with a relative majority (a minimum of 25% of votes was subsequently laid down) would obtain two thirds of seats. In a meeting with Mussolini and Acerbo (18 May 1923), De Gasperi proposed in turn that to win three fifths of seats, a Party would have to gain at least 40% of votes⁴⁴. The proposal was rejected by Mussolini and was also harshly criticised by Giuseppe Donati, editor of *Il Popolo*. The People's Party leaders then decided to reaffirm their faith in the proportional system and to consider the government plan to be unacceptable.

The Fascists took various steps to persuade the People's Party MPs to vote for the law. On the eve of the debate in Parliament, they unleashed an offensive against Sturzo which led, as mentioned above, to his resignation as secretary of the PPI. On 30 June a group of 'national Catholics' published a letter of unconditional support for the government. Mussolini then threatened to approve laws against religious congregations and Catholic schools and made it known that, were the People's Party to fail to approve the law, he would have all the parishes of Rome occupied by military squads.

44. Minutes of the meeting in ADG, Fascism VII, Various, 1.

In these circumstances, when the time came to vote on the referral for examination of the articles of the law, on 15 July 1923, the Party fell apart: nine PPI MPs, led by Cavazzoni, decided to vote for the law even though the parliamentary group had decided to abstain. They were expelled from the PPI, but the Party had started to unravel.

This was still not enough for Mussolini. 'Today's enemy', *Il Popolo d'Italia* wrote, 'is not red subversion, but Sturzo's People's Party'⁴⁵. Fascist violence and arbitrary government measures against the People's Party intensified. The list of attacks on persons and property grew longer every day. On 24 August 1923, Father Giovanni Minzoni, chaplain of Argenta who had received the military silver medal, was killed; his only wrong had been to oppose the Fascist violence.

4. MATTEOTTI'S MURDER AND THE AVENTINE SECESSION

The elections of 6 April 1924, held using the new majority system, were dominated by Fascist violence which Giacomo Matteotti then denounced in Parliament, at the price of his life. Fascism triumphed and any opposition was drastically reduced. The PPI, profoundly divided, attacked by the clerical and Fascist press and abandoned by the Vatican, fell from 107 to 39 seats. It was nevertheless the main opposition group with 9% of votes. De Gasperi was elected and shortly after, on 20 May 1924, when Sturzo had intervened to overcome the resistance of Endrici and the Trentino Catholics who did not want him to stop working for them, he was appointed secretary of the PPI⁴⁶.

Following Matteotti's death, De Gasperi agreed with the decision by almost all the opposition groups (Socialists, Republicans and Constitutional Democrats, but not the Communists and some notable Liberals) to boycott parliamentary work. This is what is known as the Aventine secession, during which De Gasperi worked actively with Turati and Amendola on the Opposition Committee.

The seriousness of the situation called for courageous decisions. On 1 July 1924, Filippo Turati gave an interview to *Il Popolo* in which he proposed that the People's Party should join forces while staying loyal to its beliefs. De Gasperi gave a more or less positive answer, speaking on 16 July 1924 to the

45. 'All'organo del prete cagojardo', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 30 August 1923.

46. Cf. Spataro, G., *De Gasperi e il Partito Popolare Italiano*, Cinque Lune, Rome, 1975, pp. 66-69.

Congress of Provincial Secretaries of the PPI. He stressed the failure of those who had moved away from the People's Party and had become supporters of Fascism under the illusion that they could regularise and shape it. 'The policy of the supporters', he said, 'has failed in terms of social reform, has failed in terms of moral values, and has failed in particular in terms of its goals of constitutional regularisation'⁴⁷. Faced with the ongoing Fascist unlawfulness, which was not being combated but promoted by the government, all the opposition parties had to join forces to defend themselves. In his view, the argument that parliamentary cooperation between the People's Party and the Socialists was absolutely incompatible was absurd, but he was aware that a line had to be drawn within these parties between the more moderate and the more extreme wings. Cooperating with the Socialists would certainly not mean that the People's Party had renounced the 'purity of its thinking' and 'the autonomy of its action', but would allow the Christian conscience to make its contribution to the fight against illegality, violence and dictatorship. 'The moral problem', said De Gasperi, 'is not the future, what is possible, or potential collaboration with the Socialists; the problem is the current *de facto* collaboration with the Fascists'⁴⁸.

There were harsh reactions to De Gasperi's speech in the Fascist camp, as well as bewilderment among Catholics. The Provincial PPI Committee in Brescia approved an agenda stressing the inadvisability of an agreement 'with political forces in radical moral, religious and social opposition' which could cause 'serious confusion among the masses'⁴⁹. De Gasperi replied immediately, writing to tell Deputy Secretary Spataro that *Il Popolo* should not have spoken about the agenda of the Brescia People's Party and that he did not intend 'to let them off the hook'⁵⁰. While most of the Provincial Committees approved De Gasperi's approach, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, an unofficial mouthpiece for the Vatican's thinking, intervened, stating that collaboration between the Socialists and the People's Party 'would not be appropriate, advisable or lawful in the present circumstances, as matters stand, for either side'⁵¹. Shortly after, on 12 August, a group of former People's Party members including Cavazzoni, Mattei Gentili, Grosoli and Martire founded the National Centre, a pro-Fascist Catholic group, which amounted to very little. In the following September, at the instigation of Pius XI, the Vatican ordered the clergy to remain strictly neutral in political matters, and also ruled out any collaboration with or support for

47. Statements made by De Gasperi about the Party's actions in *Corriere della Sera*, 17 July 1924.

48. *Ibid.*

49. 'I Popolari bresciani e il discorso De Gasperi', *Corriere della Sera*, 20 July 1924.

50. A. De Gasperi to G. Spataro, Montecatini, 20 July 1924, ADG, Italian People's Party, 2b, For the history of the Italian People's Party.

51. 'La parte dei cattolici nelle presenti lotte dei partiti politici in Italia', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 16 August 1924, p. 306.

the Party's journals. The instruction was general in nature, but it was clear to all what it meant: the Vatican was abandoning the PPI to its fate.

With Mussolini's speech of 3 January 1925, the Fascists openly embarked on the road towards dictatorship. The opposition parties tried to call on the King to persuade him to dissolve Parliament and not to abandon the high road of respect for the Statute. Vittorio Emanuele III received De Gasperi on 11 June 1925 and, after listening to him, merely told him that he would pass on his opinions to the Prime Minister!

Considering the PPI to be its main enemy, the Fascists organised retaliatory expeditions to those municipalities in which the Party had received most votes in the last elections. Pro-PPI cooperatives and PPI offices were destroyed, and activists were beaten up, cudgelled and in some cases killed. Any protest or attempt to make the real situation known was then prevented by confiscation of the Party's journals. A poisonous and shameful campaign was conducted against De Gasperi, portraying him as pro-Austrian and even an agent of the Habsburg monarchy. These slanderous insinuations, taken up after the Second World War by the far-right MSI Party and the Communists, were demolished in a pamphlet by Igino Giordani⁵².

The PPI were nevertheless keen to hold their own Congress, the fifth, which took place in Rome from 28 to 30 June 1925 and was the last Congress held by an opposition Party during the regime. De Gasperi gave a speech which represented the swansong of democratic Catholicism in politics. He argued that, in Christian thinking, the natural rights of the person, the family and society came before the State. Fascism, refuting this notion, was trying to remove the rule of law and reintroduce the 'old police State' in a different guise, extinguishing any voice opposing the new regime that was being installed. The task of the People's Party was to defend the rule of law and democracy, in the name of the Christian right to freedom of a human being.

As time passed, the opposition parties began to ask whether it was still advisable to boycott Parliament's sittings. Despite Sturzo's advice and Turati's attempts to put an end to the Aventine secession, Amendola's opposing opinion held sway. De Gasperi, for his part, was particularly concerned to save the Aventine 'as a single anti-Fascist front'. He felt that there could be no return to Parliament without bringing up the moral question raised by Matteotti's murder. Returning would

52. GIORDANI, I., *La verità storica e una campagna di denigrazione*, PPI Press Office, Arti grafiche Tridentum, Trento, 1925.

not calm matters down, but would in contrast worsen the situation⁵³. The opposition therefore stayed on the Aventine, in the vain hope of elections in the short term in which the 'moral question' could be a focus.

5. THE END OF FREEDOM

The Fascists had no intention of abiding by the Constitution, however, and, on the contrary, firmly in power, eliminated the statutory freedoms one after the other, turning a blind eye to the growing political violence against its last remaining opponents. The Fascist union monopoly was in practice established by the Palazzo Vidoni Pact between Confindustria and the Fascist guilds (2 October 1925), prefiguring the dissolution of the other union organisations. *Il Popolo* was seized almost every day and its editor Donati subjected to a massive campaign of intimidation which forced him into exile abroad. In early November, even *Il Popolo* was forced to stop publication. Other People's Party periodicals, victims of Fascist violence which destroyed their offices and presses, met the same fate.

On 28 November, at a meeting of the National Council, De Gasperi painted a disconsolate picture of the situation: 'We have no journals. No debate is possible. All we can see is our failure to bring down the Fascist regime'. He continued with a harsh self-critique of past behaviour:

'We remember when our views on collaboration were changing: I recall and confess my weakness at the decisive moment of the battle for electoral reform. It was wrong for us to give in at that time. We returned to Parliament with good ideas, seeking a way of living together, a way of inclusion. Then came Matteotti's murder. We were wrong to believe in the King, the Senate and the Liberal forces'.

Faced with the new Fascist laws removing all the statutory rights, what were the People's Party MPs to do? De Gasperi was in favour of resigning 'as a consistent act, the closure of a cycle', but had to bear in mind that the majority of the group was against such an approach. He then called on the National Council to reaffirm, over and above parliamentary events, the People's Party's moral role⁵⁴. This took place at the meeting of 14 December when an agenda was approved which, after noting that political action by the parties was in practice impossible, called on the Italian People's Party to devote 'the

53. ADG, Fascism, 5, Aventino, 3, Meeting of the PPI parliamentary group on 9 June 1925.

54. ADG, Italian People's Party, 2a, Italian People's Party in 1925, 3, Notes for the minutes of the meeting of the National Council on 28 November 1925.

majority of its work to all those cultural initiatives, to study and thought, able to foster the ideals of Christian Democracy among members', thus saving the Party's spirit and tradition for a time when the political fight was again possible in Italy⁵⁵.

Following the approval of this agenda, De Gasperi resigned as secretary of the PPI, 'as a majority' (as he wrote to Sturzo a few days later) 'is forming in the group and sees a change of personnel as a way of easing the [Fascist] pressure, which has become unbearable. They are talking to me kindly about Cadorna after Caporetto'⁵⁶. De Gasperi viewed his resignation as 'a final service to the Party', made 'with a lump in my throat', but was convinced that his resignation would not put a stop to the campaign against the People's Party. His faith, however, did not desert him:

'We are more than ever convinced of our ideas and also of having done what needed to be done, but our misfortune has been too great and too undeserved'⁵⁷.

On 18 January 1926, to avoid reprisals against the paper and against the region's Catholic economic organisations, he also resigned as editor of *Il nuovo Trentino*, which was forced to cease publication in the following October.

'I hope to God', he wrote to Sturzo, 'that my sacrifice helps to save the fruits of so many years of work! You can imagine that the pill was very bitter. Leaving like this, after twenty years, is not at all agreeable and I am not without concerns for my future. My friends in Trento cannot offer me a job in our banks or associated concerns, with the result that I shall have to earn my daily bread in some private office. I am learning English. If there is no other solution, we shall cross the seas'⁵⁸.

Two days earlier, the People's Party MPs who, in the absence of De Gasperi, had tried to return to Parliament, were attacked and manhandled by the Fascist majority. De Gasperi felt that this attempted return was a 'blunder' which had not ended up as a 'genuine moral defeat' precisely because of the Fascist reaction. The matter 'would perhaps help to cure those infected by an

55. The text of the agenda in SPATARO, G., *De Gasperi e il Partito Popolare Italiano*, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

56. A. De Gasperi to L. Sturzo, Rome, 29 December 1925, *Carteggio L. STURZO-A. DE GASPERI (1920-1953)*, G. Antonazzi (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia, 1999, p. 100.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

58. A. De Gasperi to L. Sturzo, 30 January [1926], *Carteggio L. STURZO-A. DE GASPERI (1920-1953)*, op. cit., p. 102.

unhealthy dynamism which is now becoming little more than grovelling'⁵⁹.

In the first half of 1926 he continued to work behind the scenes with what was left of the Party. Then, worried about his financial situation and the safety of his family (his marriage to Francesca had meanwhile produced two children, Maria Romana and Lucia), De Gasperi moved to Borgo Valsugana in the Trentino. Through the good offices of Sturzo, he was able to write a few articles under a pseudonym for foreign newspapers, earning something to support his family. He hated the fact that he could not take part in politics but did not lose hope, even though he was disappointed to see so many compromises and betrayals by old fighting companions:

'Your disgust is my disgust,' he wrote to Sturzo in August, 'but underneath all that the People's Party idea lives on strong and pure. So much so that if circumstances improve, we shall be back on our feet again. Let us not despair, because the workings of Providence cannot be seen'⁶⁰.

His desire to return to Rome and to take up the fight again in some way was not to come to fruition. On 9 November 1926, together with all the other anti-Fascist MPs, he was stripped of parliamentary office. On the same day, the Prefect of Rome ordered the dissolution of the PPI, guilty of carrying on 'activities contrary to the national order of the State.'

59. *Ibid.*

60. A. De Gasperi to L. Sturzo, [August 1926], *Carteggio L. STURZO-A. DE GASPERI (1920-1953)*, op. cit., p. 111.

De Gasperi

5. During Fascism



1. VIOLENCE, ARREST AND PRISON

De Gasperi's forced withdrawal from political life did not bring his tribulations to an end. The attempted assassinations of Mussolini on 11 September 1926 (Gino Lucetti) and 31 October 1926 (Anteo Zamboni) were not just a pretext for new restrictive measures which led, as mentioned above, to the sacking of the 'Aventine' MPs and the dissolution of the parties. The news of the attempted assassinations also led to an increase in Fascist violence. The offices of Catholic organisations in Trento were invaded and many Fascists thought that the time had come to teach De Gasperi, under police surveillance since March, a lesson.

On the pretext of protecting him from an attack by the Fascists who, he was told, were intending to come to seize him in Borgo Valsugana, on 5 November De Gasperi and his brother Augusto were persuaded by a Carabinieri lieutenant and two police officers to get into a car which would take them in safety to Padua or Vicenza. In practice, they were handed over to a group of Fascists, continually threatened with death, and taken to the Fascist federation in Vicenza. The two brothers were then subjected to a political 'trial' before local Fascist supporters. Alcide De Gasperi replied with courage and dignity, stood firmly by his views and continued to reject the Fascist notion of the State. As there were some moderate Fascists present, the two managed to get away with no physical harm. Luciano Marzotto, a Fascist MP who was present, rescued them from those who would have liked to take matters further, put them up in his house in Valdagno and accompanied them the following day to the station at Verona, where they were able to take the train for Milan⁶¹.

The following day the Fascist papers gave their own account of the event, writing that De Gasperi had accepted the merits of Mussolini and Fascism. De Gasperi wrote a letter refuting this to various papers which obviously went unpublished. In return, Starace sent him a telegram promising him 'a good slapping.'

After the Vicenza episode, De Gasperi was forced to hide, living under a false name in Milan and then in Rome. On 11 March 1927, he was arrested in Florence while he and his wife were trying to get to Trieste by train. Charged with 'attempted illegal expatriation' he was taken to the Regina Coeli prison in Rome. De Gasperi asked Filippo Meda to defend him at the trial, which took place on 28 May 1927 at the Criminal Court in Rome. Meda willingly accepted and courageously and ably defended his old Party colleague, showing the trumped-up nature of the charge. The Court nevertheless swallowed the Public Prosecutor's version of events wholesale and sentenced De Gasperi to four years in prison and a fine of 20 000 lire.

61. De Gasperi's written account of what happened in ADG, *Fascism*, 10 and in ROSSINI, G., *De Gasperi e il Fascismo*, Cinque Lune, Rome, 1974, pp. 133-154.

Meda immediately appealed against the sentence. He felt, however, that he was duty-bound to tell De Gasperi that a different defence counsel, not as embroiled in politics as Meda had been, might well offer a better chance of acquittal at appeal⁶². When Meda had already drawn up the defence statement, Francesca De Gasperi decided on 13 July, on the advice of the Jesuit Father Enrico Rosa, to engage the lawyer Bonavanti in his defence. Meda, even though he had himself suggested a different defence counsel, took it very badly, feeling that the episode could be interpreted as 'a political desertion and the abandonment of a friend in his time of need'⁶³.

Nor did the change of lawyer bring success. De Gasperi was also found guilty at appeal (22 July 1927), but the sentence was reduced to two years of prison and a fine of 16 666 lire; the sentence was upheld by the Court of Cassation on 22 June 1928 even though Meda had again presented a brilliant defence. In the meantime, De Gasperi had been transferred on 2 July 1927, for serious health reasons, to the Polyclinic and then to the Ciancarelli Clinic, where he remained under arrest until the end of July 1928 when, having served half his sentence, he was pardoned through the good offices of Monsignor Endrici.

As he wrote straight away to his wife, the sentence was 'such a blow, my dear Francesca, that I cannot write to you in a reassuring and contemptuous tone like someone who has confronted the wrath of the powerful or clashed with the law'⁶⁴. With no news at all, thoughts about his wife and children abandoned to their fate and of his old father weighed heavily on De Gasperi. In a letter to his wife Francesca after his sentence at appeal, he wondered whether he was right to have acted as he had, sacrificing his family to political life, or whether he could have acted differently.

'I do not think so', he considered. 'There can be no doubt that I did my duty to the end, to the last trench, but it was my conscience that made me do it, my beliefs, my dignity, my self-esteem, my loyalty to my flag and my life'⁶⁵.

For him, politics were a mission that he could not betray. There was still a doubt in his mind, however, as to whether he could in some cases have defended his ideas less doggedly, without exposing himself so much and without putting his family in danger.

62. ADG, Fascism, 11, De Gasperi's trial 1927-1928, 6, F. Meda to A. De Gasperi, 30 May 1927.

63. *Ibid.*, F. Meda to A. De Gasperi, [Milan], 15 June 1927.

64. DE GASPERI, A., *Lettere dalla prigionia. 1927-1928*, Mondadori, Milan, 1955, p. 37, letter of 31 May 1927.

65. DE GASPERI, A., *Lettere dalla prigionia*, op. cit., p. 73, letter of 6 August 1927.

'I would have done so', he wrote, 'if those who call themselves Catholics like me and often with more right to represent such thinking, had not cared so much about success and had not, in so doing, given the impression that the Church cared nothing for losers: a charge against which I have rebelled all my life'⁶⁶.

De Gasperi was closely monitored in the clinic and found this burdensome. He found solace in prayer, and in meditation on the scriptures and the writings of Saint Augustine. He read a great deal, studied and wrote. His humanity, which allowed him to see beyond people's jobs, meant that he was able to make friends with the police officers responsible for his surveillance, giving them lessons and writing or correcting letters to family and girlfriends. In return, they turned a blind eye to his correspondence and allowed him down into the Clinic garden from time to time. His letters from this period are shot through with a dry sense of humour, the humour of someone able to look in calm detachment at the sadnesses of life because they are supported by a deep faith which enables them to overcome the most testing of times.

'If by accepting my punishment graciously and manfully', he wrote to his friend Giovanni Ciccolini, 'I can set a good example, if by bearing the burden which weighs on so many who are less able to draw on their moral strength, I can also bring our ideas to a wider audience, is it not true that this humble but steadfast service will also be a useful service?'⁶⁷.

Finally, as mentioned above, he was pardoned at end of July 1928, but was not allowed to leave Rome as it was feared that he might become embroiled in some activity opposing the regime in Trento.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107, letter of 7 January 1928.

2. THE LATERAN PACTS

De Gasperi was advised to write a letter to Mussolini asking his permission to rejoin his family for a while in Borgo Valsugana until he could find a job and settle in Rome. The letter was to be forwarded by Father Tacchi Venturi, who refused to do so, however, because it did not contain any thanks for his release and the customary tributes to the Fascist leader⁶⁸. These would have been servile and hypocritical words that he could not write even in a moment of extreme need. A similar request, sent to the Director-General of Public Security, was accepted, however, and De Gasperi was able to take refuge in Sella di Valsugana until mid-September. Returning to Rome, he successfully asked if his surveillance could be less evident so that it would be easier for him to look for a job.

This was a very sad period for De Gasperi, who found solace only in study and prayer. Without a job, isolated because many acquaintances were afraid to get too close to him in case they encountered problems with the regime, far from his family, who were able to rejoin him in Rome only in January 1929, he kept himself from his earnings from translations and the help of some old friends, in particular Bishop Endrici and Father Giulio Delugan. However testing his circumstances, he did not lose hope:

‘Nothing is lost as long as I can say that I belong to this Church and the Communion of the Saints,’ he wrote to Endrici, describing his ascent of the dome of St Peter’s; ‘up there I gathered together all my efforts, all the exertions of a life which (in good faith at least) I believed to be a mission and threw up their spiritual substance like smoke from an offering to the glory of God’⁶⁹.

His loneliness was a great sadness, but he was even more saddened by the enthusiasm with which some Catholic circles met the conclusion of the Lateran Pacts on 11 February 1929.

68. Letter of 27 July 1928, in ROSSINI, G., *De Gasperi e il Fascismo*, op. cit., pp. 268-269.

69. A. De Gasperi to C. Endrici, Rome, 24 November 1928, *De Gasperi scrive. Corrispondenza con capi di stato, cardinali, uomini politici, giornalisti, diplomatici*, M. R. De Gasperi (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia, 1974, vol. I, p. 41.

His opinion on the agreement between the Church and the Fascists was complex and not entirely negative, unlike many of the Catholic anti-Fascists who had emigrated. For De Gasperi, the Treaty, which established the Vatican City as a State and put an end to the 'Roman question', was certainly a success for the Fascist regime but also a liberation for the Holy See, which achieved full freedom of legal and diplomatic action, and a boon for Italy. In a jocular tone, but hitting the nail on the head, De Gasperi wrote at the time to his friend Father Simone Weber that even Sturzo, if he had been Pope, would have signed the Treaty⁷⁰. What concerned him was the Concordat, or rather, the policy of Concordat. He feared that people could confuse Catholicism and Fascism, with extremely dangerous consequences. De Gasperi felt that the Holy See was well aware of the risks of the Concordat, which had been signed so as not make the resolution of the Roman question seem too 'meagre', 'in terms of temporal traditions and past undertakings, whether formal or from the point of view of the conscience of Catholics in Italy and abroad'. As a result the Holy See had wanted the Concordat alongside the Treaty, 'which shows that, in return, the Church in Italy has achieved an extraordinary position and is an example to all the States of the world'⁷¹.

He still had major concerns about the future of the Church in Italy, however. Referring to the doors of the papal nobility's palaces, which had been closed on 20 September 1870 as a sign of mourning and protest at the 'occupation' of Rome by the 'Piedmontese' and the end of the Pope's temporal power, and which were to be re-opened that evening, he commented:

'There is no doubt that this evening at Palazzo Colonna, when the famous doors are re-opened, some will believe that the doors to times in which the sceptre and the pastoral were so interwoven will be re-opening. The reality of the 20th century will soon make itself felt, however, and the masses will reappear behind the scenes. Let us hope that the men of the Church never lose sight of them, because they are the reality of today and tomorrow'⁷².

De Gasperi was even more saddened by the speech made on 10 March by the President of Catholic Action, Luigi Colombo, in which he called on Catholics to vote for the government in the elections for the new Chamber of Deputies which was to ratify the Lateran Pacts, thereby recognising that Fascism had tackled and resolved the Roman question. He felt this to

70. DE GASPERI, A., *Lettere sul Concordato*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1970, pp. 62-63, A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, Rome, 12 [February 1929].

71. *Ibid.*, p. 78, A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, 26 February 1929.

72. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66, A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, Rome 12 [February 1929].

be a 'document of foolishness and infantile optimism that cannot but alarm'⁷³. An optimism that was certainly not borne out by later events, when Mussolini, on 13 May, gave Parliament a very reductive view of the Pacts. Many Catholics who had been enthusiastic about Fascism were astounded.

'Having read it so often on the street corners, the Church leaders really believed that the ruling classes had switched overnight to a spiritual acceptance of Catholicism. They are bitterly disappointed. The Duce's speech has caused a terrible reaction in them, just like unrequited love'⁷⁴.

The wave of enthusiasm over, De Gasperi was left to meditate sadly on the fact that churchmen and laymen had praised and trusted in a old opponent of the clergy, a former Socialist, with no religious beliefs, after brutally setting aside those who had sought to impose a policy genuinely inspired by Christian principles.

3. THE VATICAN LIBRARY

Through the good offices of Celestino Endrici, Bishop of Trento, and Giovanni Mercati, Prefect of the Vatican Library, De Gasperi was finally able to take up a respectable post as a cataloguer in the Vatican Library on 3 April 1929. This outcome had been no easy task, bearing in mind the continuing blind indifference of those who feared 'compromising themselves' with the regime's authorities. It was partly as a result of the direct involvement of Pius XI that this outcome was ultimately achieved.

His employment in the Vatican Library, achieved after so many tribulations, was seen by De Gasperi as a sign of divine goodness: 'How can I not recognise His infinite goodness?' he wrote to Father Giulio Delugan. 'He wanted me to be humbled to atone for my vainglorious past, but then, when I recognised my inadequacy and impotence, he held out his hand and raised me up'⁷⁵. His faith emerged fortified. He began to read the scriptures more and more, finding solace in them in the face of the sadness of the times and people's weaknesses. Many old friends, as time had passed, had become resigned to Fascism, and, hoping for a quiet

73. *Ibid.*, p. 83, A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, 15 March 1929.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106, A. De Gasperi to G. Delugan, undated [but between 13 and 25 May 1929].

75. A. De Gasperi to G. Delugan, January 1930, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 64-65.

life, had softened their opposition. De Gasperi was particularly disturbed by the incongruous pro-Fascist comments of some of the Church hierarchy: 'Teaching people to kneel, fair enough, but in a clerical education people also need to be taught to stand up'⁷⁶. As his daughter Maria Romana wrote, De Gasperi 'looked every day in the scriptures for the words of God through which he could, in his own mind, counterbalance the too often inappropriate words of some of the Church hierarchy'⁷⁷.

From 1929 to 1943 De Gasperi therefore divided his time between the rooms of the Vatican Library, where he catalogued books from 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on an initial salary of 1 000 lire a month, and study. At the time of his imprisonment he had already started to publish various writings under various pseudonyms (Mario Zanatta, Jaspar, G. Fortis, Rerum Scriptor, Carlo Bianchi) which looked in detail at social Catholicism and its protagonists: La Tour du Pin, De Mun, Vogelsang, Hitzte, Toniolo. He reflected on the political experience of the *Zentrum* in Germany and on the current crisis in social Catholicism. In 1931, drawing on his knowledge of Christian Social circles in Germany as well, he completed *I tempi e gli uomini che prepararono la 'Rerum Novarum'* [The times and the men who paved the way for 'Rerum Novarum'], in which he took the view that Catholic corporatism was very different from Fascist corporatism. In 1932, he published a long critical review of the *Storia d'Europa* [History of Europe] by Benedetto Croce, in which he disputed the argument that the Catholic Church was the enemy of freedom.

As he wrote to Father Simone Weber, 'I have tried to take the bull by the horns and to show that the Catholics were in favour of political freedom throughout the history of the 19th century. It seems that we have now reached the point among Catholics where such arguments cannot be advanced even historically and the article is filed or put in the wastepaper bin, even though it does no more than state facts'⁷⁸.

Against his expectations, however, the article was published, first in Germany in *Hochland*, and then in Italy in *Studium*.

In 1931 there was a serious clash between the Church and the Fascists in relation to the educational work of Italian Catholic Action. The Fascists, who wanted a monopoly over education, wound up the

76. *Ibid.*, p. 82, A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, 30 March 1930.

77. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 149.

78. A. De Gasperi to S. Weber, Rome, 22 May 1932, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 85, .

youth groups. Pius XI protested through the encyclical *Non abbiamo bisogno* and said that making people swear an oath of allegiance to the regime in order to obtain or stay in a job was unlawful. After months of tension, the conflict was resolved in September by an agreement under which anyone who had been a member of a Party opposing the regime could not be an official of Catholic Action. In the midst of the crisis, Mussolini had sought to have De Gasperi removed from his employment in the Vatican. Pope Pius XI refused to do this with dignity and firmness: 'The Holy Father does not regret and will not regret giving a little of the bread that you have taken away from him to an honest man and an honest father of a family'⁷⁹.

4. L'ILLUSTRAZIONE VATICANA AND THE EUROPE OF THE 1930s

Between 1933 and 1938, signing himself Spectator, De Gasperi wrote the 'international fortnights', 'an anthology of the major strategy lines that have shaped the political and social action of nations' for *L'Illustrazione Vaticana*, edited by Giuseppe Dalla Torre⁸⁰. These articles have been examined on a number of occasions, in recent times as well, to discover whether De Gasperi had any sympathy for Fascism or ceded any ground to Nazism. This kind of investigation has to be carried out very carefully: account has in practice to be taken of the journal in which he was writing, the audience for which the articles were intended, the 'unofficial' nature of the journal and the necessary caution that had to be exercised in those years. Taking all this into account, however, De Gasperi's writings, although he obviously could not take a stance of total opposition, show his hostility towards extreme nationalism, racism, the armaments policy and any kind of totalitarianism.

De Gasperi followed events in Germany and Austria closely, not just because these were circles with which he was familiar, but also because he was aware that peace in Europe depended on the way in which German policy evolved. He was particularly keen to see how Catholics and the Church fared under Hitler, and his concerns about what was happening week after week shine through in his articles. He followed the tribulations of the Austrian Christian Social movement and the assassination of Dollfuss with great interest and concern. 'Christian politicians',

79. Cf. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi e il suo tempo*, op. cit., p. 179.

80. DE GASPERI, A., *Scritti di politica internazionale. 1933-1938*, i, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1981, p. 14 (1 January 1933).

he noted, perhaps with a nod to his own biography, 'who want to abide by their conscience and adhere to moral law must be prepared for success or for immolation'⁸¹.

In discussing the totalitarianism of the 1930s, it was obviously much easier for him to condemn the Soviet Union and Marxism than Germany and Nazism. Both ideologies, he always stressed, were alien to the principles of Catholicism and were therefore to be rejected. De Gasperi was much more cautious about Fascism, perhaps in the hope, in what have rightly come to be known as the 'consensus years', that the Catholics could obtain a better margin for manoeuvre and influence the regime. For De Gasperi, the greatest threat was that the totalitarian notions of Nazism would take hold in Italy as well.

'There is no compromise with totalitarianism', he wrote at the end of 1934. 'Either it is made clear from the outset that it is a purely political term, which has nothing to do with the religious and ecclesiastical sphere, thereby paving the way for separation or Concordat; or it is allowed to act wherever it wants, following its principles through, and then the Church's autonomy is doomed to disappear'⁸².

In his writings, he refers wherever possible to the Church's social doctrine, using it to reject totalitarian theories of the State's absolute sovereignty. He did not miss an opportunity to showcase the work of the Catholics and the hierarchy and to stress the social benefits of Italian Catholicism, although he had to take the precautions needed not to alarm the Fascist censor. In March 1935 he cited the full text of a speech by the Archbishop of Mechelen praising the merits of the Catholic Party and calling for political power not to be left in the hands of the Church's enemies. 'All those therefore for whom the defence of the spiritual postulates is important, must form a robust and well organised Party which has strong discipline and which is, if necessary, an impregnable citadel'⁸³. While these were not De Gasperi's words, it was not without significance that *Spectator* reproduced them in the midst of the Fascist regime.

He does not seem to have made any comment on the Ethiopian affair. In the issue of 16 September 1935, there are detailed references to the speeches of Pius XI on just war and lawful ways of resolving international disputes and a historic reference to Benedict XV, who had called on peoples and governments to renounce war. He then sought to give an interpretation of the Spanish

81. *Ibid.*, p. 175 (16 August 1934).

82. *Ibid.*, p. 200 (1 November 1934).

83. *Ibid.*, p. 253 (16 March 1935).

Civil War which went beyond the opposition between Fascists and Communists, hoping for a peaceful settlement of the war and concerned for the position of the Catholic Church. He closely followed the shift of international Communism towards agreement with democratic parties, hoping that the Communist parties would 'review their propaganda position and their doctrinaire prejudices'⁸⁴.

Every so often, De Gasperi found a way of affirming the role of Catholics in political life, with an ill-concealed nostalgia for the times of the People's Party:

'There is no other alternative for Catholics in modern life. Either they have their own social programme which directly, through their own organisations, or indirectly, through others, influences the working classes and turns them to Catholicism, or they run the risk of being overtaken, here by the right or there by the left, thereby compromising the fate of their own principles'⁸⁵.

In the second half of 1938, articles critical of Nazi Germany became more numerous. Spectator responded to racism in Italy by reproducing the Pope's speech of 15 July 1938, in which Pius XI had stressed that Catholic was to be understood as universal and not as racist or nationalist⁸⁶.

After helping, between 1934 and 1937, with the organisation of the world exhibition of the Catholic press, on 15 June 1939 De Gasperi was promoted to the post of Secretary of the Vatican Library, at the request of its Prefect, the Spanish Benedictine Father Anselmo Albareda. An increase in his salary helped to improve the financial situation of his family, which had grown with the birth of two more daughters, Cecilia (called Lia by her father) and Paola. The eve of the war had nevertheless been reached and a new period was about to begin in the life of Alcide De Gasperi.

84. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 377 (1 March 1936).

85. *Ibid.*, p. 440 (1 September 1936).

86. *Ibid.*, p. 702 (16 August 1938).

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read "De Gasperi", is located in the top right corner of the page.

Leggiamo

6. Resumption of Political Activities



1. FOUNDING CHRISTIAN DEMOCRACY

Mario Scelba recalled that on the day on which Italy entered the war, De Gasperi called some former People's Party members to his modest house at 8, via Bonifacio in Rome and told them: 'Declaring war is the latest crime that Mussolini has committed against this country. He will lose the war and Italy will suffer the most serious injuries'. De Gasperi predicted that the United Kingdom would persuade the US to fight against the Axis powers, which would be defeated, thereby bringing down the Fascist regime. It was therefore necessary to prepare to take over⁸⁷.

Whatever the accuracy of Scelba's recollection, from at least November 1941 De Gasperi certainly held meetings with a group of former PPI MPs who had resisted the charms of the regime: Giuseppe Spataro, Mario Scelba, Guido Gonella, Mario Cingolani, Umberto Tupini, Igino Giordani, Camillo Corsanego, Achille Grandi, Giulio Pastore and Giovanni Gronchi. At the same time, he tried to forge closer links with the new generation of Catholics trained by the FUCI (the Italian Catholic University Federation) and Catholic Action's Graduates' Movement, and with some of the teachers at the Catholic University of Milan.

Initially De Gasperi considered setting up a Party at the centre of the political spectrum and including some lay members such as Ivano Bonomi, Meuccio Ruini and Giuseppe Romita, with whom he had various talks at Giuseppe Spataro's house. Bearing witness to the changing political climate and the fact that the war was leading many to lay out their wares as successors to Fascism, the chief of police sometimes warned those taking part in these meetings to be careful ... because they were being monitored by the police.

Between the spring and summer of 1942, De Gasperi went back to the Trentino, partly to recover from severe nervous exhaustion. He took the opportunity to meet, in Borgo Valsugana, some members of the 'Guelph' movement, the only Catholics in the dark years of the regime to oppose it through clandestine resistance, including Edoardo Clerici, Piero Malvestiti and Enrico Falk. In October he went to Milan, where he met Giovanni Gronchi, Achille Grandi, Stefano Jacini and Gerolamo and Luigi, the sons of Filippo Meda.

Following these meetings he fine-tuned the idea of creating a Catholic-inspired Party which differed from the People's Party and took account of the various experiences of younger Catholics in the twenty years of Fascist rule. After long discussions, De Gasperi chose the name Christian Democracy for the new Party, taking up the name that had been used by the democratic Catholics committed to social work in the Italy of the early 20th century. Taking up the People's Party name again, which was

87. Cf. Scelba, M., *Per l'Italia e per l'Europa*, Cinque Lune, Rome, 1990, p. 26, and CARRILLO, E. A., *De Gasperi. The Long Apprenticeship*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1965, p. 115.

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the preferred solution of some of his closest allies such as Spataro and Scelba, might have given younger people the impression that they were being invited 'to an assembly where the stage and the stalls were already occupied on the basis of past merit and length of service'⁸⁸. It was not therefore to emphasize its denominational nature, but to help the old and new generations to integrate within the new Party, that De Gasperi chose Christian Democracy as a name.

Talks were meanwhile continuing with representatives of the other parties, not initially attended by the Communists, who had not joined the Aventine secession in 1924. It was during this period that Myron Taylor, the personal representative of Roosevelt, the US President, to Pius XII, asked Count Dalla Torre, the influential editor of *L'Observatore Romano*, for a briefing on the Italian political situation focusing in particular on the forces opposing Fascism. Dalla Torre passed this task on to De Gasperi⁸⁹, who drew up a very detailed analysis, predicting, for the post-Fascist period, a government made up of Christian Democrats, Liberals, Social Reformists such as Bonomi and perhaps Socialists, with help from leading lights on the cultural scene (among whom he listed Gallarati Scotti, Jacini, Casati, Croce, De Ruggiero, Parri, Calamandrei, Salvatorelli and La Pira), a few generals (Badoglio, Caviglia) and US exiles such as Sforza and Sturzo. The Communists were left out of the picture, although he detailed their strength and importance⁹⁰. Bearing in mind the scope of the briefing and the people for whom it was intended, their exclusion seemed significant and shed light on the Vatican's policy and not just that of De Gasperi. It was only in January 1943 that the Communists were included in the group of anti-Fascist parties, to some extent as a result of pressure from the Socialists. De Gasperi was persuaded, taking the view that in the international arena the US and the United Kingdom were collaborating with the USSR in the war against Hitler and also that everyone needed to pull together as far as possible in the various countries. This was a view shared, moreover, by Spataro, one of De Gasperi's main allies in this period.

When Fascism fell on 25 July and the King asked Marshal Badoglio to form a government, Liberals, Christian Democrats, Labour Democrats, the Action Party, Socialists and Communists set up the National Committee of anti-Fascist Movements which, following the announcement of the armistice on

88. DE GASPERI, A., *I cattolici dall'opposizione al governo*, Laterza, Bari, 1955, p. 492.

89. Cf. DALLA TORRE, G., *Memorie*, Mondadori, Milan, 1956, p. 144.

90. The petition formally addressed by G. Dalla Torre to M. Taylor and undated (but from September 1942) can be found in DI NOLFO, E., *Vaticano e Stati Uniti. 1939-1952*. From the papers of Myron C. Taylor, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1978, pp. 199-200.

8 September, became the CLN [Central National Liberation Committee] chaired by Ivanoe Bonomi. De Gasperi represented the Christian Democrats, together with Gronchi and Spataro.

The Trentino politician, appointed Chairman of CD's provisional central committee, was unanimously seen as the natural leader of the new political group, in which he exercised, as he later wrote to Sturzo, a 'moral dictatorship which my friends have been kind enough to allow me'⁹¹. It was therefore De Gasperi who, drawing on the discussions held during those months and with the help of some friends, drew up the new Party's manifesto, *Le idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana* [Christian Democracy's Ideas for Reconstruction]⁹².

Between April and July 1943, the CD manifesto was handed out to loyal friends throughout Italy. It was distributed more widely after 25 July, however, and sent to parish priests and former People's Party members. The Ideas for Reconstruction stressed that political freedom was an essential premise for a new system based on representative democracy, the separation of the powers of the State and wide-ranging administrative decentralisation through the establishment of autonomous regions. The document affirmed all the fundamental ideas traditionally held by the Italian Catholic movement: freedom of education, protection of the family, 'free and comprehensive cooperation between all the factors of production'⁹³, participation by workers in enterprise management and profits, making farm workers into sharecroppers or small landowners and tax reform on a progressive basis. There were nevertheless some innovations. The fundamental role of private ownership and the free market was recognised, although a stance was taken against large industrial and financial concentrations and monopolies, making provision, in particular cases, for their expropriation to prevent 'the creation and continuation of an industrial and financial feudalism which we also consider dangerous for a free people'⁹⁴. There was support for a bicameral system, with one assembly elected by universal suffrage and the other made up of representatives of the professions. There were calls for the creation of a new international community with more adequate resources and more specific tasks in order not to repeat the failure of the League of Nations.

91. A. DE GASPERI TO L. STURZO, [Naples], 15 June 1944, *Carteggio L. Sturzo-A. De Gasperi (1920-1953)*, op. cit., p. 123.

92. *Idee ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*, *Atti e documenti della Democrazia Cristiana. 1943-1967*, A. Damilano (ed.), Cinque Lune, Rome, 1968, Vol. I, pp. 1-8.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

2. SEEKING SUPPORT FROM THE CHURCH

This draft CD manifesto made no reference to the Lateran Pacts (about which, as mentioned above, Catholic thinking differed). There was merely a call for 'the spiritual mission of the Catholic Church' to be carried out 'in full freedom'⁹⁵. The Lateran Pacts did appear, however, in subsequent planning documents. In the Milan Manifesto, which appeared the day after 25 July and was the work of the Milanese 'Guelphs', there had already been talk of the inviolability of the Treaty and the Concordat, adding, in relation to the Concordat, 'until the contracting parties unanimously deem its amendment to be necessary'⁹⁶. In the Christian Democrats' *La Parola* [The Word], published on December 1943 in the underground *Il Popolo*, the Lateran Pacts were seen as a 'foundation stone' for relations between the State and the Church in Italy⁹⁷, making no further mention of any changes. These adjustments were obviously made to ensure the Vatican's support for the new Party, to avoid any calling into question of religious peace and to foster the Church's support for the revival of democracy in Italy.

The path followed by Christian Democracy differed from and was in some ways contrary to the People's Party's path. The Holy See had looked favourably on Sturzo's Party from the outset, then, as Fascism took hold, had left it in a state of 'almost humiliating abandonment'⁹⁸. The CD had, in contrast, gradually to gain the sympathy and support of the Church leaders. De Gasperi was able to do this with great skill, taking a balanced and moderate line. He made sure that the principle of the single Catholic Party worked in his favour against those who had favoured two potential Catholic groups, one conservative and one progressive. De Gasperi was trying to set up a Party which built on the non-denominational and autonomous experience of the PPI and managed to gain the support of the majority of Catholics. Vatican support was essential for this purpose. If the Church agreed to support CD as Party of Catholics and not a Catholic Party, it would also help to install a democratic system in Italy in the post-Fascist period, something that had not been entirely discounted in the early 1940s.

The onset of the war fostered the democratic choice. The flight of the King from Rome on 8 September, discrediting the monarchy in the eyes of large swathes of public opinion, the brutality of the German occupation and the participation of many Catholics, inside and outside the Church, in

95. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

96. *The Milan programme of the Christian Democrats, ibid.*, p. 9.

97. *The Milan programme of the Christian Democrats, ibid.*, p. 25.

98. JACINI, S., *Storia del partito popolare italiano*, Garzanti, Milan, 1951, p. 116.

the Resistance, helped, together with other factors, to sway the Holy See towards democratic solutions, although with all the caveats that the Acting Secretary of State, Monsignor Domenico Tardini, set out in a long briefing in December 1943 to the US government⁹⁹. The other Acting Secretary of State, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini, supported De Gasperi and acted as a go-between with the Pope in this delicate operation.

3. REVIVAL OF POLITICAL LIFE IN ROME

The brief period of fleeting freedom which had begun with the fall of Fascism on 25 July ended with the announcement of the armistice on 8 September 1943 and the flight of the King and part of the Badoglio government to Brindisi under Allied protection. Italy was left at the mercy of the Germans who, helped by a puppet Fascist-Republican government, started to arrest Jews and political opponents and send them to the concentration and extermination camps. De Gasperi took refuge first at Castelgandolfo and then, in early December, in the Lateran Seminary, where he joined many of the leaders of the Central National Liberation Committee, including Bonomi, Saragat, Ruini and Nenni. A special relationship of respect and cordiality was forged here between ‘the reserved Member from the Trentino and the extrovert Socialist Member from Romagna’¹⁰⁰ which was never lost even during the later political battles which saw them on opposing sides.

One of the main problems that De Gasperi had to face during this period was the impatience of many Communist, Socialist and Action Party members of the CLN (National Liberation Committee) for an immediate resolution of the institutional question through the creation of a republic. A positive view expressed by Scelba, and shared by Gronchi and Spataro, in the underground *Il Popolo* in relation to a largely anti-monarchy agenda approved by the CLN on 16 October 1943 met with a very strong reaction from De Gasperi, who even threatened to resign as Chairman of the CD Committee. He was convinced that it was entirely wrong at this point to take a positive stance on a republic. Leaving aside the fact that the monarchy was the main point of contact with the Allies, it was wrong to divide the anti-Fascist forces over a problem that would be better tackled when the war was over and the decision could be made by the Italian population as a whole. This was the position that the CD adopted after lengthy discussions¹⁰¹.

99. [TARDINI, D.], ‘L’Italia: situazione e rimedi’, December 1943, op. cit., in DI NOLFO, E., *Vaticano e Stati Uniti*, op. cit., pp. 279-297.

100. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi e il suo tempo*, op. cit., p. 197.

101. On this see Spataro, G., *I democratici cristiani dalla dittatura alla repubblica*, Mondadori, Milan, 1968, pp. 227-232 and 235-240.



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After February 1944, even the Lateran palaces were becoming unsafe. De Gasperi then asked Monsignor Celso Costantini to take him in at the Propaganda Fide palace, where he stayed for four months until Rome was liberated. During that period, he wrote articles for the underground *Il Popolo* which he passed on to the typesetters with the help of his daughter Maria Romana, who was unknown to the police. In the midst of so many dangers, he also had to cope with the ongoing impatience of the Socialists, who threatened to desert the CLN, taking the Communist and Action Party members with them, if the monarchy was not immediately abolished. De Gasperi rejected the 'Jacobin proposals' of the Socialists and wrote bitterly to Bonomi: 'What a shame that in these tragic times we do not all feel ourselves to be brothers and that an implacable demagoguery is enveloping us in manoeuvres that are so out of keeping with the importance of the moment!'¹⁰². On 26 March Bonomi resigned as Chairman of the CLN, unable to accept that three parties wanted to impose their will on all the others¹⁰³. The arrival in Salerno of the Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti who, at Moscow's suggestion, proposed that the institutional question be shelved and said that he was willing to work with the Badoglio government, changed the situation. The Socialists and Action Party members followed the Communist lead and Bonomi returned to the head of the CLN.

Finally, on 4 June 1944, American and British troops entered Rome and political life could come out of the shadows and begin again. Ivanoe Bonomi succeeded Marshal Badoglio with a government supported by the so-called hexarchy, i.e. the six parties making up the CLN: Labour Democrats, Liberals, Christian Democrats, the Action Party, the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity and the Communist Party. De Gasperi became a Cabinet Minister without portfolio, alongside some of the leading personalities of the other political parties: the Communist Palmiro Togliatti, the Liberal Benedetto Croce, the Socialist Giuseppe Saragat and Carlo Sforza. The oath to be sworn stated that ministers, until the constituent Assembly was called, should not undertake acts likely to prejudice the resolution of the institutional question. While awaiting the elections, all the parties were deemed to be on a par and decisions were to be taken by unanimity, something that frequently led the government into an impasse. All decisions were, moreover, subject to the approval of the Allied Control Commission.

In this precarious situation, subject to the humiliating control of the military Allies, Alcide De Gasperi, at the age of 63, gained his first government post. For the next ten years he would be at the top of Italian political life and play a fundamental role in the country's moral and material reconstruction.

102. A. De Gasperi to I. Bonomi, Rome, 18 February 1944, *ibid.*, p. 254.

103. I. Bonomi's letter of resignation, 24 March 1944, *ibid.*, p. 404.

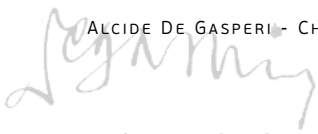
4. MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

On 30 July 1944, at the Inter-regional CD Congress held in Naples, De Gasperi was appointed Secretary. He held that post until 22 September 1946, when he was replaced by Attilio Piccioni, one of his closest friends. Between 1944 and 1954 De Gasperi, although occupied with government work, always managed to keep tight control of the Party, taking decisions that were accepted by the vast majority of Party activists because of his considerable personal standing. This nevertheless created a confusion between Party action and government action in the eyes of public opinion. The CD took advantage of this situation, but did not set up an organisational structure in keeping with a modern mass Party. It was therefore largely down to the ecclesiastical structures and Catholic associations to rally support and mobilise voters at election time, even though this could, rather dangerously for both sides, identify the Party with the Church.

In late November 1944, the problem of the purging of State officials compromised by Fascism brought the Bonomi government into crisis. Togliatti then proposed that a three-Party government headed by De Gasperi be set up with Communists, Socialists and Christian Democrats. He refused, however, convinced that in the circumstances all the political forces needed to work together, and supported the restoration of the Bonomi government. In the new government, in which the Action Party and the Socialists refused to take part, De Gasperi became Foreign Minister.

This was a very far-sighted move by the Trentino politician. He understood that, in the very difficult international situation in which Italy found itself, the Foreign Ministry was the key government post, providing direct and immediate contact with the British and US occupation forces in whose hands the real power lay. His political experience in the multinational Empire of the Habsburgs, consolidated in the 1930s when he had been concerned with international issues from the influential viewpoint of the Vatican, had made De Gasperi more aware than others of the importance of foreign policy for Italy's future: he became the go-between between the Italian ruling class and the victorious powers and managed, in the space of a few years, to return Italy to the international arena, to some extent by exploiting the clashes that had started to break out between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

After the Second World War, Italy was certainly no longer, if it ever had been, a 'major power'. However, its geographical position at the centre of the Mediterranean and on the border between what were starting to become the zones of Soviet and Western influence made it extremely

RESUMPTION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

important strategically. If Italy could skilfully play the few cards that it had, it could well obtain the massive economic and political aid needed for its reconstruction. Badoglio and Bonomi, De Gasperi's immediate predecessors at the Foreign Ministry, had tried to exploit the rivalry between the powers of the anti-Hitler coalition to gain what they could. De Gasperi, rejecting both neutrality and isolation, which would have been ruinous both politically and economically, preferred the solution of loyalty to a major ally which, for various reasons, could only be the United States.

The Washington administration had meanwhile become convinced that it needed to keep an active American presence in Italy to prevent it from falling under the sway of Soviet influence. The US was very concerned that Italy had a well-organised Communist Party, strengthened by its Resistance experience and closely dependent on the decisions of its 'mother house' in Moscow. Over and above its strategically important geographical position, Italy was also the seat of the papacy and the focus for Catholics throughout the world. To prevent any authoritarian moves by the left (or by the right) in Italy, the US was willing to support those political forces drawing their inspiration from democracy.

De Gasperi's relationship with the US was one in which neither side had much in common. De Gasperi was not very keen on the American civilisation and culture, shot through with Protestantism and materialism, and therefore very remote from his central European origins. The US, proud of its notion of the separation of State and Church, was rather reluctant to deal with the leader of a Party drawing its inspiration from the Catholic religion. At the outset it would have preferred to deal with a representative of the moderate left, then, as time passed, it was won over by the secularism of the Catholic De Gasperi and accepted him as the main go-between for its Italian policy.

De Gasperi's role at the Foreign Ministry was very difficult. It was possibly the area of the administration that was facing most problems. Very few countries had maintained diplomatic relations with Italy and therefore any dealings with abroad were subject to control by the Allies. De Gasperi understood that foreign policy was the cornerstone of reconstruction. It was from its former enemies that Italy could obtain the grain it needed for food and the raw materials it needed to get its factories going again. Any delay in the supply of food aid could well cause famine in entire regions. The problem of the repatriation of prisoners had also to be tackled, new trade treaties drawn up and international links forged again, while seeking friendships that might be exploited to obtain non-punitive conditions in the peace treaty that would have to be signed.

If formal relations were to be re-established with the former enemy countries, the diplomatic corps, starting with ambassadors, would have to change to provide tangible proof of the birth of the new democratic Italy. New men from political and cultural circles were appointed as ambassadors and, moreover, showed considerable skills as diplomats: Tommaso Gallarati Scotti, Nicolò Carandini, Alberto Tarchiani, Manlio Brosio, Giuseppe Saragat, Egidio Reale, Sergio Fenoaltea. It was thanks to these 'political' ambassadors and to brilliant youngsters from the diplomatic service, such as Pietro Quaroni and Egidio Ortona, that De Gasperi was able to rebuild an excellent diplomatic network which helped him with the difficult task of getting Italy out of the most serious crisis that it had experienced since unification.

Leggenda

7. A Catholic in the Presidency of the Council



1. FROM PARRI TO DE GASPERI

The war in Italy came to an end on 25 April 1945. With the Germans defeated and the North liberated, the next problem was to renew the government on a broader national basis. The people's euphoria of those days and the 'wind from the North', fuelled by the Resistance, convinced the left-wing parties that they were on the brink of power. It was for that reason that Pietro Nenni put himself forward as a candidate for Prime Minister. The Christian Democrats reacted immediately by proposing De Gasperi, who had promised Nenni the post of Deputy Prime Minister. Togliatti, keen to make the Communist Party the leading left-wing force in Italy and therefore fearing competition from the Socialists, failed to provide Nenni with the support that he needed, paving the way for a compromise agreement on Ferruccio Parri, who was also to be Home Minister.

A member of the Action Party, and a man of considerable moral standing, Parri had been a courageous Resistance commander, but was a politically undistinguished figure upon whom everyone could agree. In the new government, which took power on 20 June, De Gasperi kept his post as Foreign Minister, with the Socialist Nenni and the Liberal Brosio as Deputy Prime Ministers and the Communist Togliatti as Minister of Justice. De Gasperi had not been successful on this occasion, but the Christian Democrats had shown that they were the only Party able to stand up to the Socialists and Communists, linked by a pact of unity of action, whose strength and organisation terrified the Italian middle classes.

In the second half of 1945 De Gasperi had to act on a number of fronts. As Foreign Minister he monitored, with mounting concern, the drawing up of the peace treaty, which looked as though it would be punitive for Italy. The main problem was the fate of the eastern border and in particular Trieste, a city as dear to the Italians in 1945 as it had been in 1918. The Yugoslav army of Marshal Tito, contravening the previous agreements with the Allies, had occupied the city on 30 April, two days before the British and US forces reached the city on 2 May. Two days later, De Gasperi went with Bonomi to the Allied Headquarters in Caserta to ask for troops to be sent to Istria and Dalmatia to protect the Italian population living there from Slav reprisals and prevent any situations which would have to be settled by the peace talks. As a result of Allied intervention, Tito was persuaded to withdraw from Trieste (11 June) and to move his army to the east of the Isonzo, but the situation remained very difficult for those Italians remaining in the zones occupied by the Yugoslavs. It is estimated that 4 000 to 10 000 people lost their lives during that period, many being thrown into the sinkholes of the Karst for ethnic as well as political reasons.

De Gasperi made every effort to try to forge cordial relations with the victors, especially the Americans. This was no easy task, however, as Italy was, after all, a former enemy country and was treated as such. When De Gasperi asked if Italy could be invited to the San Francisco Conference for the foundation

A CATHOLIC IN THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL

of the UN, for instance, he was refused. Diplomatic events also showed how the new Italy was being viewed. On 22 August 1945 De Gasperi wrote to American Secretary of State Byrnes, detailing Italy's proposals in relation to its eastern frontier. He was called to London, with notice of only 36 hours, to face the Foreign Ministers of the major powers. He arrived in the British capital on 18 September, 'the first journey by a representative of Italy since the war'¹⁰⁴. He was not spared humiliation, having to queue for a customs inspection and wait around for a day because the Yugoslav Foreign Minister was to be heard before him. De Gasperi made a sober and dignified speech to the American Byrnes, the British Bevin, the French Bidault, the Soviet Molotov and the Chinese Shin-chieh:

'I shall avoid the traditional tactic of asking for the moon in order to settle on something less later, but I shall clearly indicate those sacrifices that we can and must make in the name of European solidarity and the rebuilding of a fairer world, while highlighting those solutions that no democratic government in Italy could make on their own'¹⁰⁵.

His words made a good impression, which De Gasperi sought to improve upon in private talks with the 'leaders.' The situation nevertheless continued to be difficult. No power was willing to let Italy off the hook, although their reasons differed.

On top of these serious international problems, De Gasperi also had to deal with the delicate situation at home. The widespread lack of law and order which always follows wars, heightened by the after-effects of the civil war, was causing social and political tremors which threatened to jeopardise democracy itself. There was growing social unrest, often exploited by the extreme parties, about the precarious situation of the economy, and a dangerous separatist movement was gaining ground in Sicily. An assassination attempt was made on De Gasperi himself on 2 October. Driving to Parliament, a revolver shot was fired at his car, fortunately only smashing a window. 'A small incident on the way to work with no harm done' was De Gasperi's comment, inviting everyone not to dramatise what had happened¹⁰⁶.

On 21 November 1945, the Liberal ministers resigned in protest at Parri's lack of progress, accusing him of being unable to maintain law and order in the country and of allowing the

104. ADSTANS [Canali, P.], *Alcide De Gasperi nella politica estera italiana (1944-1953)*, Mondadori, Milan, 1953, p. 32.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

106. Cf. *Christian Democrat Central Office, 5 October 1945, Atti e documenti della Democrazia Cristiana*, op. cit., p. 204.

local National Liberation Committees, over which the left held sway almost everywhere, to replace the organs of the State. The CD, keen rapidly to return the institutional situation to normal and sharing the hostility to the 'Jacobin democracy' of the CLNs, refused to remain in a government without the Liberals, forcing Parri to resign. On 24 November, at a meeting of the CLNs, with journalists from the Italian and foreign press in attendance, Parri accused the Liberals and the Christian Democrats of attempting a coup d'état. De Gasperi spoke immediately, concerned that Parri's words would be interpreted literally abroad, with disastrous consequences. All of De Gasperi's work to convince the major powers that a democratic regime had been restored in Italy risked coming to nothing. De Gasperi said that the CD had acted only 'to defend the foundations of political freedom against anyone from the left or from any other Party intent on its destruction'¹⁰⁷. He went on to affirm that the six-Party formula was the only possible formula for the government until the elections were held. This was the solution that was reached, after long and difficult discussions, on 10 December. Alcide De Gasperi was to head this new government. He remained in that post for almost eight years.

2. PRIME MINISTER

It was the first time in Italy's history that a practising Catholic had held the country's top political job. It was also the first time that a Foreign Minister had become Prime Minister. It was not without significance that De Gasperi was keen to keep this portfolio, since he could then continue to manage Italy's international relations, forging ever closer ties especially with the Americans who had started to recognise his worth. The proof of this relationship of trust was the immediate transfer of jurisdiction over the whole of Italy to the Italian government, the only exception being Venezia Giulia. The Allies also increased food and financial aid to Italy, essential for the country's recovery. De Gasperi's work during 1945 as Foreign Minister, in close contact with those in charge of US and British foreign policy, was starting to bear fruit.

Action Party historians (led by Leo Valiani) have interpreted De Gasperi's first government as the beginning of a return to conservatism, in contrast to the fresh direction represented by the Parri government. This interpretation is clearly mistaken. The fact that a Catholic was at the head of

107. Statements made by De Gasperi when he was political secretary of the Christian Democrats at the meeting of the National Liberation Committee (CLN), 24 November 1945, *ibid.*, p. 212.



the Italian government was undoubtedly a novelty, but, overall, the crisis triggered by the Liberals had been resolved and the left had even managed to gain greater ministerial powers. The Socialists retained Nenni in the post of Deputy Prime Minister (and also Minister of the Constituent Assembly) with Barbareschi as Minister of Labour and Romita as Home Minister. The Communists kept their ministries: Togliatti as Minister of Justice, Scoccimarro as Minister of Finance and Gullo as Minister of Agriculture. The elite parties were nevertheless on the wane. The time of the grass-roots parties had come: Catholics, Socialists and Communists now had the fate of the country in their hands. This was summed up by the Communist leader, Togliatti: 'De Gasperi is the leader of a grass-roots Party. This alone makes him more acceptable to us than those so-called "independents" who answer for their actions only to a few friends and their vanity'¹⁰⁸.

In the first half of 1946, De Gasperi was engaged on two fronts: monitoring the drawing up of the peace treaty, over which he had little influence, and ensuring a proper transition to a democratic system. 'The return to democracy through elections' was also felt to be essential by the Vatican, as Tardini told Harold Tittman, one of Taylor's colleagues, calling on the US to provide De Gasperi with 'the support that he needs to ensure the success of his administration'¹⁰⁹. De Gasperi also had to find the best way of resolving the institutional question which, as mentioned above, had been shelved until the war was over.

After putting forward other proposals, De Gasperi agreed to the formula of a popular referendum, to be held on the same day as the election of the Constituent Assembly. This was undoubtedly the most democratic method and would ensure that whatever was decided was fully legitimate, but also had an advantage for the CD. In contrast to the left-wing parties, which were in favour of a republic, and the right-wing parties, which had lined up behind the monarchy, the Christian Democrats were very divided internally on this issue. Whatever the decision, part of its potential electorate would be unhappy. Through a popular referendum, however, the CD could leave its electors free to choose between monarchy and republic. The Party, however, after consulting its members, came out in favour of the republican solution, gaining approval at the CD's Rome Congress with close on 75% of votes.

108. *L'Unità*, 11 December 1945.

109. H. Tittman to J. Byrnes, 'Città del Vaticano', 8 December 1945, in DI NOLFO, E., *Vaticano e Stati Uniti*, op. cit., p. 475.

3. THE END OF THE MONARCHY

While waiting for the first political elections, the local elections - the first free elections after more than twenty years, in which women took part for the first time in Italy's history - had confirmed that the fight was between the three mass parties. Overall, the CD was the leading Party in terms of numbers, but the Communists and Socialists, linked by a pact of unity of action, were just in the lead if their votes were added together. On 2 June 1946, the elections for the Constituent Assembly bore out this situation. The CD received 35.2% of votes, the Socialists (PSIup) 20.7% and the Communists (PCI) 18.9%. The other parties were in a complete minority, bearing out the political decline of the elite parties.

The referendum to resolve the institutional question was held on the same day. Hoping to save the fate of the monarchy, Vittorio Emanuele III, who had already ceded power to his son Umberto as Lieutenant General on 5 June 1944, abdicated on 9 May, just under a month before the elections. Although Umberto II was fairly popular and had not in particular been compromised by the Fascist regime, he failed to reverse the situation despite a campaigning tour through the whole of Italy. The outcome of the institutional referendum was a majority, albeit small, in favour of a republic: 12 718 641 against 10 718 502.

Some Monarchists disputed the results, however, accusing Home Minister Romita of vote-rigging and a whole range of other irregularities. Others objected to the way in which the electoral law had been interpreted, considering that spoiled votes also had to be taken into account to calculate the majority. On 10 June, the Court of Cassation, rather than officially proclaiming the republic, merely took note of the numerical results of the referendum, and said that it would decide on the appeals that had been lodged at a later date. Umberto II postponed his planned departure from Italy and wrote De Gasperi a letter, announcing his intention to wait for the final decision by the Court of Cassation, which was not due to meet for a week. In the meantime, however, the situation seemed to be spiralling towards a full-scale civil war between monarchists and republicans. De Gasperi commuted back and forth between the government and the Quirinale to find a constructive solution. Then, all attempts at mediation having failed, he took the plunge and assigned the functions of interim Head of State to the government. The following day, Umberto II, the 'May King', went into exile, but not without firing off a proclamation to the Italians which branded the government's action as an act of revolution.

4. TRIPARTITE GOVERNMENT

In those difficult times, De Gasperi had shown a calm sense of purpose which enabled him to resolve a very thorny issue without too much damage to the new Italy. It was now necessary to start normal democratic life by forming a new government based on the actual power relationships within the Constituent Assembly. Resisting the pressures exerted on him by Pius XII to form a government without the Communists, he then set up the first of the so-called 'tripartite governments'¹¹⁰ made up of the three mass parties, the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, which together held just under 80% of seats. The cooperation which had made it possible to achieve trade union unity was thus achieved in the political arena as well. The CGIL, the Italian General Confederation of Labour, had been founded on 3 June 1944 by the Pact of Rome between the Christian, Socialist and Communist unionists.

De Gasperi continued as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, on the understanding that, once the peace treaty had been drawn up, the latter post would pass to Pietro Nenni. In order to tackle the serious problem of law and order he also took on the post of Home Minister. Palmiro Togliatti, concerned that the PCI had polled fewer votes than the Socialists, was intending to devote himself solely to the Party's problems and did not accept a post in the new government. This also allowed him to distance himself to some extent from the government. This was symptomatic of the complex position that the Communists took in subsequent months, with one foot in the government camp and one foot in the opposition camp. As a result of this two-track policy, the Communist ministers approved decisions that they then disputed in their journals and speeches, often leading to protest demonstrations which were difficult to control and worsened the already serious problems of law and order.

In the Asti area (and in other areas of northern Italy as well) groups of Resistance fighters had re-armed and were refusing to comply with the law. In Emilia, in the so-called 'triangle of death', there were episodes of political terrorism, with murders of priests and Christian Democrat activists. In Sicily, where the movement for independence had been politically defeated by the grant of autonomy, banditry and Mafia attacks on trade unionists and supporters of left-wing parties were ongoing. Violence, illegality and disorder were being reported throughout Italy. Discoveries of arsenals of

110. In reality this was a four-Party government, with the participation of the Republican Party, who waited until the end of the monarchy before taking on institutional tasks.

weapons, hidden at the end of the Resistance struggle by the Communists (and others) for future use, were being reported every day.

The problem was not always one of political unrest and the protesters were not always calling for social revolution. Economic hardship was also leading to strikes and protests. Very large numbers of people were unemployed, the cost of living was rising daily, inflation was rampant and those on fixed incomes were becoming increasingly poor, while a handful of speculators and black marketeers were coining it in. The government had few resources to tackle the situation, but was nevertheless held responsible. On 19 October 1946, a group of protesters invaded the Viminale, where the offices of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister are located. One person died and hundreds were injured in clashes with the police.

These events placed the leaders of the left-wing parties in a very difficult position. They knew that a popular insurrection would probably, as in Greece, be put down by the occupying forces in a bloodbath. Moreover, they could not take a firm stand against such insurrections as that would disappoint those electors looking to them for economic and social recovery whatever the path taken to achieve it. De Gasperi was only too well aware of what had happened after the First World War and feared a repetition of the situation in 1922, when the Facta government had turned a blind eye to the unlawful activities of the Fascists, thereby paving the way for dictatorship. He spoke very plainly at the meeting of the Cabinet on 29 August 1946:

‘Never has such an open and mass display of arms been seen. Letting this matter go would turn us into Facta and we know what became of him. I have no intention of meeting such a fate even if some colleagues are willing to compromise. Armed insurrection has to be condemned. We cannot turn a blind eye to it. With what arguments and what forces could we in future counter any reformed Fascist squads? While we have to act cautiously, action is nevertheless needed and that action has to be ordered by the State’¹¹¹.

He therefore ordered the police forces, suitably reorganised, to take firm action. Measures to help those who had been part of the Resistance and social measures for the unemployed were also approved. As the months passed, law and order improved and the authority of the State grew.

111. *Verbali del Consiglio dei Ministri. Luglio 1943 - Maggio 1948, VII 2, Governo De Gasperi, 13 luglio 1946 - 2 febbraio 1947*, A. G. Ricci (ed.), Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Rome, 1997, p. 215.

The economic situation continued to be serious, however. The Liberal Epicarmo Corbino, Treasury Minister, who had tried to introduce austerity measures, leading to swingeing attacks in the Communist press, resigned (2 September 1946). De Gasperi replaced him with an old People's Party member, Giovanni Battista Bertone, who launched the 'reconstruction loan' (11 October 1946). This thirty-year loan at a rate of 3.50% made it possible to collect 231 billion lire, giving State finances a bit of breathing space. Shortly after, on 27 October, an agreement between the unitary CGIL and Confindustria approved an increase of 35% in minimum wages, a thirteenth monthly wage for workers and the continuation of the cost-of-living allowance in return for a six-month pay freeze.

5. THE PEACE TREATY

While the Constituent Assembly was beginning its work in Italy, the Peace Conference opened in Paris on 19 July 1946. Any hope that the existence of the Resistance and the fact that Italy had ultimately fought on the same side would make Italy's prospects less bleak soon proved to be unfounded. The talks between the 'Four', i.e. the USA, the USSR, the United Kingdom and France, which had preceded the Conference had not been promising. De Gasperi had travelled to Paris in May to plead the cause of Trieste again. There seemed to be grounds for some hope, but in early June came news of plans to create the Free Territory of Trieste and to cede the whole of Istria, including the city of Pola, to Yugoslavia.

The Italian delegation led by De Gasperi and including, among others, Ivano Bonomi and Giuseppe Saragat, arrived in Paris in early August. De Gasperi was to speak to the Assembly of the Twenty-One on the afternoon of 10 August. The preceding days were occupied by lengthy meetings at the Embassy to decide on the main lines of the speech. The news was certainly not good, but De Gasperi felt that national interest should take precedence over any recriminations:

'I consider', he said to members of the delegation, 'that we should also get across the fact that we want to make a positive contribution to world reconstruction, taking what we say in the debate beyond Italy's interests alone and into the realm of ideas. We need to put forward a European programme; we must give the clear impression that we are firmly on a democratic track. We must therefore say something new which will enable us to reach out to world public opinion. If we return home defeated, we must do so with dignity'¹¹².

112. ADG, Foreign Affairs, IIIB, Peace Conference, 2, Minutes of the meeting which took place at the Italian Embassy in Paris on 7 August 1946 at 18.20.

When De Gasperi began to speak to the Conference of the Twenty-One, the atmosphere was cold. 'Leaving aside your personal courtesy, I feel that everyone is against me'¹¹³, De Gasperi said while presenting Italy's point of view. Paradoxically, a man who had suffered under the Fascists was now having to pay the debts of his persecutors. When he had finished speaking, the US Secretary of State, James Byrnes, got up and shook his hand. While a token of human solidarity, it meant little in practical terms. In reality it was not so much a treaty that was being discussed as the imposition of a diktat on Italy. De Gasperi was very worried.

As the minutes of the meeting of 12 August at the Embassy show, De Gasperi took the view that if the delegation were to return to Italy with the Treaty unchanged and with the sacrifice of Pola, the Constituent Assembly would not vote in favour of accepting the Treaty. There would be a sentimental and nationalist outcry against the acceptance of such a sacrifice.

In such a case, the Allies had said that they would place Italy under military occupation. If they also wanted to govern, they would also experience how difficult that was¹¹⁴.

The chips were now down, however. The most painful territorial losses were on the eastern frontier: Istria, with Pola, and part of Venezia Giulia and the city of Zara went to Yugoslavia, while Trieste became a Free Territory. The French obtained Briga and Tende, Greece obtained Rhodes and the Dodecanese and the countries with which Italy had been at war were awarded substantial reparations. Italy also lost all its colonies, including those pre-dating the Fascists. The Treaty drastically limited numbers in the army, navy and air force.

In the midst of these disasters, however, De Gasperi managed during the Paris Conference to hang on to the border with Austria at the Brenner, agreeing this with Austrian Foreign Minister Gruber on 6 September. There, at least, Italy had not suffered territorial losses, and in return granted autonomous status to the region to protect the national characteristics of its German-speaking inhabitants. De Gasperi achieved this positive result largely because Austria was, after all, a defeated country and no major power would have seriously entertained a request from Vienna for the Alto Adige. The agreement gave the Prime Minister considerable satisfaction, especially as the autonomy of the Alto Adige was linked to that of the Trentino. In this way De Gasperi had also managed to satisfy the calls for autonomy which were coming from his homeland and for which there had been such a struggle after the First World War¹¹⁵.

113. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 234.

114. ADG, Foreign Affairs, IIIb Peace Conference, 2, Minutes of the meeting of the Italian Delegation to the Peace Conference, held at the Italian Embassy at 09.30 on 12 August 1946.

115. On the question of the autonomy of the Trento region during the Second World War, see CANAVERO, A., *Gli anni della Regione (1948-1962)*, Verifiche, Trento, 1978.

With the Peace Treaty largely decided and ultimately signed on 10 February 1947, De Gasperi passed on the Foreign Ministry to Nenni as had been agreed. He continued to keep a close eye on the government's foreign policy, however, and in particular retained high-level and direct channels of communication with the Washington administration. This provided the backdrop to his famous visit to the United States.

6. VISITING THE USA

In the local elections of 9 November 1946, the CD had lost votes in the North to the left and in the South to Uomo Qualunque [Anyman], a political group set up by the playwright Guglielmo Giannini which drew on the discontent of the middle classes and their lack of satisfaction with the new anti-Fascist ruling class. The government's existence was becoming increasingly precarious and differences as to the advisability of ratifying the peace treaty were emerging within the parties. The Vatican was exerting more pressure on the CD to stop working with the Communists, the economy was worsening, the prices of staple goods were increasing and more than two million people were unemployed. Togliatti's initiative, of which De Gasperi and Nenni were unaware, to offer Gorizia, whose belonging to Italy had never been called into question, to Marshal Tito in exchange for Trieste, had created further tensions.

De Gasperi was especially concerned by criticisms from the Communists and Socialists even though they were part of the government.

'No government can pull together', he told the Cabinet on 30 December 1946, 'with the defeatist attitude that is currently holding sway. What that leads to is the break-up of the authority of the State. [...] It is time to put an end to such a defeatist attitude towards a Government of which you are all members'¹¹⁶.

De Gasperi had been looking for some time for something that would improve his standing. A visit to the United States, especially if it led to further food or financial aid, would consolidate his role as the preferred partner of the administration in Washington and his standing in Italy. The results of the elections and the government's internal situation persuaded him to speed matters up. The

116. *Minutes of the Council of Ministers*, op. cit., p. 1118.

United States was also keen to strengthen De Gasperi's position, seeing him now as the only politician able to ensure stable government and keep the Communists at bay.

It is difficult to say exactly from whom the initiative for the trip came. Officially, the magazine *Time* had invited De Gasperi to Cleveland to take part in a meeting examining post-war problems. De Gasperi welcomed this move, but made it known to the American Embassy that he would accept only if he also received an official invitation from the US government, which was forthcoming on 9 December. He took a few days before deciding to accept, asking for the invitation to be kept secret during that time. He did not decide until 16 December. While De Gasperi undoubtedly hoped that the initiative would have a successful political outcome, he also hoped that something concrete would come of it in terms of the financial and food aid that Italy so desperately needed. Before accepting, he therefore needed to find out what the realistic chances of success actually were.

The Italian Embassy in Washington worked with the US Department of State to plan the details of the trip, and on 4 January 1947 De Gasperi left for the USA. As well as attending the meeting in Cleveland, De Gasperi had much more substantive meetings with President Truman, the Secretary of State and other leading lights of the US administration.

It is often argued that De Gasperi went to the USA to 'take orders' from his powerful US ally, in particular the order to remove the forces of the left from his government. In reality, however, there is no trace of this in the visit documents. The main purpose of the visit was to improve his standing and, possibly, to gain some financial aid. Both of these goals were achieved, although De Gasperi's visit was no triumphal march and there was no shortage of setbacks. Only at the last moment and with great difficulty did he obtain a loan of USD 100 million from the Export-Import Bank and a cheque for USD 50 million by way of repayment of the expenses incurred in Italy by the US armed forces, supplies of grain and coal, and the sale on advantageous terms of 48 Liberty ships and eight tankers. While this was not a major result from an economic point of view, the political goals of the visit had undoubtedly been achieved. Truman had received De Gasperi at the White House, something that was not wasted on public opinion in a defeated and disillusioned country. The relationship of trust with the United States had been further consolidated and De Gasperi could now turn his attention more calmly to the thorny situation at home.

Leggenda

8. From the Tripartite Pact to Centrism



1. TRIPARTITE GOVERNMENT AGAIN

De Gasperi returned to Italy on 17 January to find the government in total crisis. The PSLUP Congress (Rome, 9-11 January 1947) had led to a split: Saragat, complaining that the PCI had too much hold over the Party, had decided to set up the PSLI (Socialist Party of Italian Workers) and had resigned as Speaker of the Constituent Assembly. Nenni had in turn resigned as Foreign Minister. On 20 January, De Gasperi tendered the resignation of the government as a whole and was asked by the Acting President of the Republic, Enrico De Nicola, to form a new government.

The crisis was short-lived, especially as the peace treaty was scheduled to be signed in Paris on 10 February and a government that had tendered its resignation could not very well turn up. De Gasperi re-formed the tripartite government, but with some significant changes. The Socialists lost the Foreign Ministry, which went to the independent Republican Carlo Sforza, and the Communists lost the Ministry of Finance, which was merged with the Treasury and went to the Christian Democrat Pietro Campilli. The Home Ministry was taken over by Mario Scelba, another Christian Democrat destined to become the government's strongman and the Communists' *bête noire*. Foreign Trade went to another Christian Democrat, Ezio Vanoni. This scaling down of the Socialists and Communists and the take-over of the economy by the CD was very momentous. Sforza at the Foreign Ministry would also ensure that De Gasperi's pro-American policy would be continued.

The decision to reform the tripartite government had not been taken lightly. After the local elections of the preceding November, the CD's Secretary, Attilio Piccioni, had spoken of it as a 'forced cohabitation'. The loss of votes in the South to Uomo Qualunque bore witness to a gradual decline in support for the CD among the middle classes. The Vatican, for its part, had recently stepped up pressure on De Gasperi not to work with the 'anti-clerical' parties. A nephew of Pius XII, Prince Marcantonio Pacelli, often met the Prime Minister during this period and relayed the Pope's political desiderata¹¹⁷. Why had De Gasperi decided to reform a tripartite government? Various domestic and international policy considerations provide an answer. First, although relations between the USA and the USSR had deteriorated, it was only during 1947 that they broke down irreparably. This meant that there was still no 'international need' to break off relations with the Socialists and Communists. It was for domestic policy considerations in particular, however, that De Gasperi needed to continue this cooperation. The peace treaty, extremely harsh and unpopular, had to be signed and De Gasperi

117. A diary containing an account of meetings between De Gasperi and Marcantonio Pacelli between June 1946 and July 1947 was published by DE MARCO, V., *Diario di un anno: le scelte politiche di De Gasperi negli appunti di Marcantonio Pacelli (1946-1947)*; *Società, Chiesa e ricerca storica. Studi di storia moderna e contemporanea in onore di Pietro Borzomati*, M. Naro (ed.), Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta-Rome, 2002, pp. 187-201.

wanted the left-wing parties to share responsibility for doing so, to prevent the CD from becoming a sitting target for later attacks. One of the first acts of the new tripartite government was to decide to sign the treaty (7 February), subject to ratification by the Constituent Assembly. However, there was perhaps an even more important reason. Drafting of the constitutional charter, which was to set the 'rules of the game' for future years, needed to be completed. The Constitution needed to be approved by as broad a consensus as possible if it was to be common ground accepted by all.

Agreement on the Constitution also involved the thorny issue of relations between State and Church. The Vatican wanted the Lateran Pacts to be enshrined in the new Constitution. They had given very clear signals in this respect.

'The Holy Father', wrote Marcantonio Pacelli in his diary, 'has instructed me to tell De Gasperi that as far as the Concordat is concerned the Christian Democrats must put up a vigorous resistance; the Holy See would have to speak out were there to be any weakness or worse in religious matters'¹¹⁸.

The support of the Communists was nevertheless needed to achieve this result. The Constituent Assembly debated what would become Article 7 of the Constitution in March and approved a wording that was acceptable to the Vatican¹¹⁹. De Gasperi made a speech on 25 March from the parliamentary benches and not from the Prime Minister's seat. He recalled that, under the Concordat, the bishops swore allegiance to the Republic and the government and added: 'Friends, Italy is not so strong and the form of our regime is not so set in stone that we can allow ourselves the luxury of waiving such solemnly made undertakings'¹²⁰. Togliatti understood the meaning of De Gasperi's words perfectly and called on the Communists to vote in favour, justifying this decision by the need to forestall dangerous religious rifts within the country. The Liberals and the Uomo Qualunque members also voted in favour, while the Socialists, Republicans and Action Party members voted against.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 191 (26 May 1946).

119. 'The State and the Church are, each in their own way, independent and sovereign. Their relations are governed by the Lateran Pacts. The amendments to the Pacts, accepted by both parties, do not require any constitutional review process.'

120. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 259.

2. MOVING AWAY FROM THE LEFT

In spring 1947, the domestic and foreign reasons that had made it necessary to press on with tripartite cooperation had become less important. Internationally, the breakdown between the powers that had defeated Nazi Germany had become irreparable. The Truman doctrine (12 March 1947), the failure of the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Four (Moscow, 24 April 1947) and the proposal of the Marshall Plan (5 June) were the most obvious outward signs. Domestically, after signing the peace treaty and approving Article 7 of the Constitution, there was no longer any reason for delaying the removal of the Socialists and Communists from the government, putting an end to a relationship which had withered away. There were all sorts of other reasons as well. The CD had suffered an overall loss of 13 percentage points in the elections for the Sicilian Regional Assembly held on 20 April, while the left-wing Bloc had emerged victorious. The economic situation was continuing to deteriorate. Blue- and white-collar workers were calling for pay increases. Industrial circles no longer felt that the government was solid. The weapon of scandal was constantly being used to attack the CD Ministers in charge of the economy, including Campilli and Vanoni, with unfounded accusations of corruption being levelled against them. Parasitic speculation was rife.

‘A wind of panic and madness’, said De Gasperi in a dramatic speech on the radio on 28 April 1947, ‘is blowing through some areas of the country. [...] Coldly calculating speculation is on the increase, hiding goods, smuggling valuables and jewellery abroad, and lying in ambush for the crisis in the criminal hope that it can prosper from the general misery’¹²¹.

Two days later he told the Cabinet that the agreement between the three mass parties was no longer enough to govern the country. He also needed the support of the ‘fourth Party’, i.e. those members of the economic world who could decide the success or failure of any economic reconstruction initiative. Making the general situation more dramatic, the outlaw Salvatore Giuliano’s men shot at workers meeting at Portella della Ginestra, close to Palermo, to celebrate May Day.

Before bringing the crisis to an official head, on 5 May De Gasperi discussed first with Togliatti and then with Nenni the possibility of expanding the government to include representatives of the centre parties. Togliatti was in agreement, but Nenni opposed the idea, perhaps because this would have opened the door to the Social Democrats. De Gasperi was in all likelihood thinking at this point merely of ways of scaling down the Communist presence and including people liked in economic

121. Quoted by GAMBINO, A., *Storia del dopoguerra. Dalla Liberazione al potere DC*, Laterza, Bari, 1978, p. 367.



FROM THE TRIPARTITE PACT TO CENTRISM

circles in the government, such as Luigi Einaudi, with whom he had been in contact. On the evening of 5 May he informed the US Ambassador to Rome, Dunn, of his talks and also asked him to call for economic aid for Italy¹²². Seeing no other way out of the situation, De Gasperi tendered his resignation on 13 May.

The crisis was long and difficult. De Nicola first asked Nitti, an old pre-Fascist politician, to form a government, and then Orlando. Faced with their failure, he had to return to De Gasperi on 24 May. De Gasperi knew that the US would be happy with a government with a smaller number of Communists and would perhaps have moved in that direction, when he was informed of the very bad impression that had been created among the US government by an article by Togliatti in *L'Unità* of 20 May, entitled 'What cretins they are!', obviously referring to the Americans. This incident could well have jeopardised the success of the Italian economic mission which had gone to Washington to seek the aid that Italy so desperately needed. It was probably the straw that broke De Gasperi's back. During a meeting with Togliatti, with Sforza in attendance, on 26 May, De Gasperi told the Communist leader in no uncertain terms that his Party would not in these circumstances be included in government. The following day he informed Ambassador Dunn of his intention to form a government solely of Christian Democrats with some ministers appointed for their particular expertise. If this experiment were to fail, De Gasperi added dramatically, the next government would be from the far left and the efforts to preserve democracy in Italy would have foundered. The United States should therefore do everything they could to support him with economic aid¹²³.

For De Gasperi, the choice that he made in those days was dramatic and took place in relative solitude. Some members of the CD leadership, such as Gronchi, would have preferred the Party to pass the buck to someone else, in view of the dramatic economic and social situation. Other Christian Democrats, such as Piccioni and Taviani, and also those circles which were not keen in principle on tripartite cooperation, were very concerned about the removal of the Communists from government, fearing unrest. 'Either we do it now', De Gasperi said to Piccioni, 'or we'll never do it: the time has come'¹²⁴.

'I have waged a very hard war', he wrote some time later to the Italian Ambassador to Washington,

122. *Foreign relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1947, Vol. III, *The British Commonwealth; Europe*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1972, p. 893.

123. *Ibid.*, p. 911.

124. TAVIANI, P.E., *Politica a memoria d'uomo*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2002, p. 124.

Alberto Tarchiani, 'and some days I haven't even had a chance to catch my breath, because the people believed that I had in my pocket who knows what assurances from America; I was endeavouring, however, not to win success but to prevent disaster. [...] I experienced hours that could have been fatal; I felt alone and abandoned by many friends, and only the awareness of working for my country kept me going. If, over there, they do not understand the efforts I made for the good of Italy and for peace, if they do not fully approve what I have done at this hazardous turning point, it will be futile to hope for anything in return'¹²⁵.

In other words, if the US failed to comprehend the serious problems facing Italy and did not step up their economic and political support, the first government without the parties of the left would be short-lived and the consequences hard to imagine, but undoubtedly not in the interests of the Western coalition.

3. TOWARDS CENTRE GOVERNMENT

The way in which De Gasperi was hoping to resolve the crisis was not through an unbalanced right-leaning government, an anti-Communist bloc, but through a government with the minor centre parties. This was not immediately possible and it was only in the following month of December that a reshuffle brought Social Democrats, Liberals and Republicans into the government. He now managed to get men of considerable standing to take part on a personal basis, including Luigi Einaudi, for whom the Budget Ministry was created, and Carlo Sforza, who remained at the Foreign Ministry. The 'fourth Party' was reassured by the inclusion of Einaudi and other liberalising 'experts' such as Del Vecchio, Pella and Merzagora in the economic ministries. 31 May saw the formation of a predominantly Christian Democrat government, the forerunner of the quadripartite centre governments that De Gasperi led up to 1953.

The 'turning point' of spring 1947 was undoubtedly a defeat for the left, compelled, as it had been, to leave government. The much-feared popular unrest came to nothing and the Socialists and Communists, although mounting tough opposition in Parliament, did not oppose the democratic system. There was also a defeat, however, for that wing of the CD that had tried to take a solidarity-based and Christian approach to economic reconstruction. As mentioned above, the economic ministries were given to men liked by the liberalising right. De Gasperi, who often said that he did

125. A. De Gasperi to A. Tarchiani, 11 July 1947, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 130-131.

not understand economics, preferred to leave the conduct of the economy to men of the 'old school', ruling out any possible third way between capitalism and collectivism.

Einaudi drew up a strict economic policy which included tight controls over public spending. Although there were heavy social costs, especially in terms of unemployment, he managed to curb inflation and rescue the Italian lira. A strict credit squeeze helped to foster the return of capital and the re-establishment of dollar currency reserves. This policy was in line with what the US wanted and it therefore supplied aid in larger quantities, especially in view of the forthcoming approval of the Marshall Plan, which Italy had accepted without hesitation. Italy's participation in the American aid plan, strongly supported by De Gasperi and Sforza despite some concerns in government and diplomatic circles, signalled Italy's return to international politics.

De Gasperi found it difficult to steer the new government between the opposing rocks of the left and the right. The government nevertheless had some major successes: in late July the Constituent Assembly approved the ratification of the peace treaty, which was opposed by Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Benedetto Croce; in early October it overcame the motions of no confidence tabled by the left-wing parties; and on 22 December the new Constitution of the Italian Republic was approved by a large majority of 453 to 62. The municipal elections in Rome on 12 October 1947 had shown that the CD was making a substantial recovery, that the tide of public opinion had turned and that there was confidence in the government again.

It has already been said that the left-wing parties reacted with moderation to their removal from power. There were nevertheless still fears of a Communist revolt in Italy, which increased after the news that on 27 September the Cominform had been set up, a liaison office between the Communist parties in power in Central and Eastern Europe plus the French and Italian parties. The occupation of the Prefecture of Milan on 27 November 1947 by former resistance fighters led by the Communist Gian Carlo Pajetta, taking as a pretext the transfer of one of the last political Prefects, Ettore Troilo, seemed to bear out these fears. The firm stance taken by Home Minister Scelba, together with mediation by De Gasperi and Togliatti himself, prevented the situation from becoming any worse, but many were left with the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that the Communist Party would use any opportunity, lawful or not, to gain power. This seemed to be borne out by the Communist coup d'état in Czechoslovakia which put an end, in March 1948, to the last democratic government still in power in the area of Soviet influence. The 'iron curtain' of which Churchill had spoken in a famous speech

at Fulton had finally come down in Europe. Any domestic or international event would henceforth be conditioned by the Cold War.

4. 18 APRIL 1948

Italy was right on the border between the West and the East or, to use the words of the time, between the 'free' and the 'Communist' world. The political elections for the Republic's first Parliament, set for 18 April 1948, were therefore of particular significance. The election was seen as crucial, not just for the future of Italy, but for the safety of the 'free' West and Christian civilisation itself. The decision by the Socialists and Communists to join forces in the People's Front further heightened the impression of a head-on clash between two worlds and two civilisations. This helps to explain the attitude of the Catholic Church, which rallied *en masse* to support Christian Democracy, to a much greater extent than in 1946. At the initiative of the President of Men of Catholic Action, Luigi Gedda, the 'Civic Committees' were created to link up all the forces of Christian inspiration and encourage them to turn out to vote, obviously for the CD. In a crusading atmosphere ('The great battle has come: for Christ or against Christ' were the words of a pamphlet about the Committees distributed to all parishes)¹²⁶, all the Catholic organisations were mustered and no stone left unturned to help the Christian Democrats to win. The religious persecution under way in the Soviet satellites provided a wealth of propaganda material.

Help for the government coalition also came from the countries of the West. On 20 March, the US, the UK and France made it known that, failing agreement as to who should be the governor of the Free Territory of Trieste, the Territory should be returned to Italian sovereignty. The 'Tripartite Declaration', as it was known, had very little chance of being put into practice, as it lacked the support of the USSR and Yugoslavia, but had a positive impact in the run-up to the election. The CD also made the most of US aid and the extent to which it had helped, as well as the threat of its suspension if the People's Front were to win. Two days before the elections, on 16 April, the Treaty establishing the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was signed in Paris; the OEEC was to manage the distribution of funds under the Marshall Plan. This was the first occasion since the war that Italy had been a founding member of an international organisation. The election campaign for the anti-Communist parties was financed with US money and the People's Front campaign with Soviet funds. Thousands of letters were written by Americans of Italian descent to their relatives in

126. Cf. CASELLA, M., *18 April 1948. La mobilitazione delle organizzazioni cattoliche*, Congedo, Galatina, 1992, p. 126.

Italy asking them to vote against the People's Front. De Gasperi threw himself into the campaign and held tens of meetings throughout Italy between 23 February and 16 April. Overall, this was a very bitter election campaign, in which cataclysmic and apocalyptic, not to say violent, words featured in the propaganda of both the CD and the People's Front.

The fear of Communism ultimately got the better of Italian electors. The CD came close to an absolute majority of votes in the Chamber (48.5%) and had an absolute majority of seats (305 out of 574). The People's Front gained only 31%, the Social Democrats 7.1% and a list of Liberals and Uomo Qualunque members only 3.8%. The support of the Church had undoubtedly been key to the Christian Democrat success, but votes for the CD had also come from many non-Catholic circles in Italian society which saw the CD as the safest bulwark against the Communists.

The scale of the success surprised even De Gasperi and caused him quite a few problems. The Catholic world has often been seen as a tightly knit and all-powerful world rallying behind Christian Democracy, which it wanted to 'occupy power' on its own after triumphing in the 1948 elections. In reality, the various branches of the Catholic world had different expectations and hopes. Some circles, partly linked to the Curia in Rome and partly to Catholic Action, wanted to see the establishment of a 'new Christian society', a strong and firm policy against the Communists and even the establishment of a 'Catholic State' along the lines, as was frequently said, of Spain under Franco. The left wing within the CD, led by Dossetti, Fanfani, La Pira and Lazzati and the journal *Cronache Sociali* [Social Chronicles], had very different expectations. The victory on 18 April finally made it possible for the Party to put its manifesto into practice, especially in the economic policy field. It was thus necessary to step aside from the liberalising line of Einaudi and Pella and to implement an economic policy leading to full employment and a more direct involvement of the State in the economy to gear it towards social goals. As Dossetti said, there could be no freedom without social justice.

Caught between the ecclesiastical and Party right and the left wing of Dossetti and Gronchi, De Gasperi tried to steer a middle course, founded on the notion of democracy, a democracy which had to be defended against any outside interference, even if that interference came from the Church. To highlight the government's secular nature, he was keen to continue cooperation with the centre parties even after the triumph of 18 April. The Christian Democrats were not and did not want to be seen as the 'Church Party', as that would have had adverse effects on both the CD and the Church itself. As for the left-wing parties, De Gasperi took the view that they were destined to stay on the fringes of the democratic State, at least until they had fully accepted the democratic freedoms and had freed themselves from the yoke of Soviet policy.

The first major measure by the new Chambers was the election of the President of the Republic. De Gasperi proposed Carlo Sforza, who was not to the liking of the CD MPs. Dossetti's supporters felt that he was too pro-American and others that he was too 'secular'. After three ballots had failed to produce a result, De Gasperi decided to put forward Luigi Einaudi, who was elected on 11 May against Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, supported by the left-wing. As required, De Gasperi tendered the Government's resignation, which Einaudi rejected. With a slight reshuffle from the former government, De Gasperi formed his fifth government on 23 May.

The feverish atmosphere which had surrounded the elections of 18 April had a dramatic epilogue on 14 July when a young right-wing student fired several revolver shots at the Communist leader Togliatti, as he was leaving Parliament. Even before the political and union leaders could decide anything, the militants immediately organised protest demonstrations throughout Italy. Weapons squirrelled away after the Liberation were brought out, barricades set up, factories occupied and the offices of government and right-wing parties destroyed. The firm stance taken by Home Minister Scelba nevertheless soon put an end to any possibility of insurrection. Even the leaders of the PCI, encouraged to do so by Togliatti, tried to restore calm, fearing intervention by the army. On the evening of 15 May, the CGIL cancelled the general strike that it had proclaimed the previous day and calm was restored in Italy on 16 May.

These events were not without repercussions, however. The Christian trade union wing left the CGIL, destroying the union unity that had been achieved in 1944 and subsequently set up the Free CGIL, appointing Giulio Pastore as Secretary. The opposing blocs facing one another at international level were now mirrored within Italy.

Into this climate of opposition came the decree of the Vatican of 15 July 1949, which excommunicated anyone who had been a member of the Communist parties or had collaborated with them. This measure followed on from the massive anti-religious offensive being conducted in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in particular, showing that any co-existence between Communist governments and the Catholic Church was out of the question. Although the Holy See explained that this was a pastoral and not a political measure, there is no doubt that it placed a barrier, especially in Italy, in the way of those who had not lost hope of a dialogue with the Communists. The decree soon became a way of controlling those in the Catholic world who supported any left-wing programme, however generic, and a way for some ecclesiastical circles to exert pressure on government policy.

Leggenda

9. Governing in the Cold War Era



1. THE ATLANTIC PACT

The Cold War and the resulting division of the world into two opposing blocs would henceforth shape any political choice. The West lived in fear of Soviet aggression and sought mutual guarantees of safety. In 1948 France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg had drawn up the Treaty of Brussels (also known as the Western Union), but it was clear that the alliance could be militarily effective only if an agreement could be reached with the United States.

Italy had also been invited to join when the Western Union was being set up, in March 1948. De Gasperi had declined this offer on the ground that there was no parliamentary assembly which could take a decision of this importance. The Constituent Assembly had been dissolved and the new parliament had not yet been elected. In reality, however, the real reasons for his refusal were different. In the run-up to the elections, De Gasperi was afraid that the agreement could be portrayed by the parties of the left not as a defence pact, but as an ill-omened aggressive Fascist military alliance. He was also well aware of the strength of support for neutrality in both the CD and the other government parties and of the annoyance in Italian public opinion with the United Kingdom and France which, alongside the USSR, were felt to be the ringleaders of the harsh peace treaty that had been imposed on Italy. De Gasperi, hoping to enter into a future bilateral support treaty with the US, therefore declined the offer. There was considerable annoyance, especially in the British camp, because Italy had given the impression that it wanted to use its entry into the Union as a 'bargaining chip' for a revision of the peace treaty.

After the elections of 18 April 1948, however, De Gasperi became aware that his decision in March had been an error of judgment. Italy ran the risk of isolation, with no military support, as the US had made it clear that it had no intention of entering into bilateral agreements. When the preliminary talks began in Washington between the US, Canada and the countries of the Western Union with a view to setting up the Atlantic Pact, there were major doubts about including Italy, especially as Italy was seen as more of a weakness than a strength. Refusing to join the Western Union now appeared to have ruled out joining the much more important Atlantic Pact.

De Gasperi, assisted by Sforza and Ambassador Tarchiani, then embarked on a difficult diplomatic battle, facing reluctance and opposition at home and abroad, to gain acceptance for Italy. This result was achieved largely through the support of France which was aware, if Italy were to be included in the Atlantic Pact, that the defence line would be moved further east and could extend the Alliance's support to Algeria as well. On 4 April 1949 the Atlantic Pact was signed in Washington. Italy obtained the hoped-for and crucial military support and in particular lost its status as a former enemy State, becoming an equal member of the world community. Many problems were still unresolved in the international arena, especially the situation of Trieste and the colonies, but it was

now possible to draw up a foreign policy geared towards a revision of some clauses of the peace treaty.

There were conflicting views in Italy about membership of the Atlantic Pact. The parties of the left concocted a hard-hitting propaganda campaign, accusing De Gasperi of wanting to take Italy into the service of US imperialism. Not everyone in the CD agreed about membership either. Dossetti's supporters, for instance, criticised both the advisability of the decision and the line that had been taken. Dossetti accused De Gasperi of setting greater store by the Foreign Minister and the Ambassadors than by the opinion of the Party. The alternatives suggested by Dossetti and his friends, in particular neutrality, were dead ends, however. Disarmed neutrality would have made Italy, as in past centuries, into a battleground for foreign armies. 'Armed neutrality, that is to say defence', De Gasperi told the Senate, 'is impossible because we do not have enough money and we do not have enough raw materials from overseas'¹²⁷. Ultimately, only three Party members (Dossetti, Gui and Del Bo, a supporter of Gronchi) voted against, and six abstained in the vote in the Chamber's CD parliamentary group following the debate between Members and Senators on the advisability of joining the Atlantic Pact (15 March 1949). It nevertheless did much to heighten the lack of understanding that already existed between De Gasperi and Dossetti¹²⁸.

2. REFORMS

Dossetti's critical comments did not have much impact on Italian foreign policy, especially as many of his friends did not share his views on neutrality and did not fully support him. He nevertheless had substantial influence within the Party. In July 1949, at the CD's Congress in Venice, Dossetti again accused De Gasperi of being too attached to a liberalising economic policy which was doing little to reduce unemployment. The main criticisms were levelled against the 'Pella line', from the name of the Treasury Minister who had pursued the strict economic policy instigated by Einaudi with a view to maintaining the stability of the lira and seeking to balance the budget. In his speech, Dossetti spoke of the need to 'goad' the government to take more incisive reforming action on economic and social matters. De Gasperi, taking up Dossetti's words, said:

127. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 645, speech before the Senate on 27 March 1949.

128. Cf. exchange of letters between Dossetti and De Gasperi of 22 February and 5 March 1949, quoted in *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 296-304.

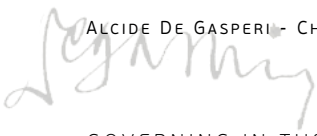
'It is true that every government needs some stimulus, a goad if you like (although I don't like the word because it reminds me of oxen), and I will therefore accept this "goad" on one condition: that at some point those who are goading get down from the cart, put their shoulders to the shaft and show that they can also pull it'¹²⁹.

This seemed to be a genuine offer of a place in government for Dossetti and his supporters, something which, for various reasons, did not happen until January 1950 when De Gasperi formed his sixth government, which included some Republicans and Social Democrats as well. In the meantime, there were new openings for Dossetti and his supporters in the Party. In April, when Gonella took over as Secretary of the CD, the post of Deputy Secretary went to Dossetti.

In November 1949, when the Social Democrat ministers and under-secretaries had resigned for reasons to do with their own Party, De Gasperi decided to provide members of the government with acting status. In the following January, however, following disputes with the Liberal ministers over agrarian reforms, he decided to tender his resignation. His aim was to create a ministerial team with a view to a complex and comprehensive package of economic and social reforms. Although there were no Dossetti supporters in the government, he took up some of their premises such as achieving full employment, measures in depressed areas and agrarian reform. Reforms were also planned in the tax, schools, administrative and legal fields.

Reforms could no longer be postponed in a social climate which was continuing to worsen. After their defeat on 18 April, the Communists and Socialists had moved their fight with the government from the political to the economic and union level, making the most of the CGIL's closely dependent relationship as a 'conveyor belt' for passing on the Party's orders to the working world. Their political opposition had led to strikes, demonstrations and unrest which had, however, also been fuelled by the precarious economic situation of many workers. On a number of occasions, the forces of law and order had used weapons to deal with this unrest. The most striking example was in Modena, where on 9 January 1950 six workers were killed during a demonstration. Following this event, Scelba banned the forces of law and order from carrying loaded weapons, but it was clear to all that the issue could be resolved only by measures to maintain law and order.

129. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi politici*, op. cit., p. 252.

GOVERNING IN THE COLD WAR ERA

The new government thus set in motion very substantial economic and social measures. Antonio Segni, Minister for Agriculture, drew up an agrarian reform which was approved only in part. This led to the Sila law, named after an area in Calabria, and the transitional law which was called such because it was the first stage of a much wider-ranging plan. These measures were supplemented by the Sicilian Regional Assembly with agrarian reform for the island. Using criteria that differed from area to area, 700 000 hectares of uncultivated or badly cultivated land were expropriated at market prices from their owners, and assigned in lots of some 10 hectares to rural families. Assignees would in turn pay for the land over thirty years, after which they would gain full ownership. Measures were also planned for the construction of farmhouses and for the improvement of expropriated land. It is estimated that over 100 000 rural families benefited from this agrarian reform, which had two aims: to create a class of small landowners which would support the democratic Republic and would not be influenced by the far-left and far-right parties, and to increase national agricultural output. Coming rather late, on the eve of Italy's resounding industrial development in the 1950s, the reform did not fully achieve these aims, but was undoubtedly the most significant measure ever taken by the Italian State in this sector.

Segni also tabled some draft laws on prospecting, exploitation and transport of oil, one of which provided for the creation of a State body which would have a monopoly over oil prospecting in the Po Valley. After a long course through parliament, which ended only in early 1953, this led to the creation of ENI which, in the capable hands of Enrico Mattei, made a major contribution to Italy's economic development.

The Law of 10 August 1950 established the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* [Southern Italian Development Fund] (or, to give it its full name, the *Cassa per opere straordinarie di pubblico interesse nell'Italia meridionale* [Fund for Extraordinary Works of Public Interest in Southern Italy]). This new body was to help to develop the South of Italy (as well as some depressed areas in the Centre and North) through sizeable investment in infrastructure: reclamation works, roads, aqueducts and industrial plant for the marketing of agricultural output. In addition to direct measures, targeted chiefly on the agricultural sector, the Fund could grant finance for private initiatives in industry in particular. With a substantial financial appropriation, it had an unusual degree of operating autonomy for a State body. The Fund's managing and supervisory organ was a committee made up of the ministers with economic and financial portfolios.

Ezio Vanoni, Finance Minister, undertook a tax reform, which bore his name, through which a modern and fairer taxation system could be introduced. He introduced the annual income return for individuals and companies, reduced tax rates and exempted small incomes, introducing a genuinely progressive criterion into direct taxation. The aim was to reduce tax evasion and provide the State

with more secure revenue. He hoped that it would be possible to create a relationship of trust between Italians and the tax authorities, exploiting the notion of taxation as a social duty and an expression of solidarity between citizens. The reform was a financial success, although there was no radical change in relations between the tax authorities and citizens.

Other reforming measures included the 'Ina-Casa' plan (also known as the Fanfani plan after the name of the Labour Minister in the previous government), which provided for the construction of 147 000 inexpensive dwellings over seven years, financed in part from workers' and employers' contributions and in part from State funds. In order to provide work for some of the unemployed work force, working sites were then set up and plans drawn up for reforestation. Other ministers tabled reforms of schools, union organisation and decentralisation to the regions which were not, however, immediately approved.

3. THE KOREAN WAR

While the government was in the midst of its reforms, North Korean troops invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950. Fears spread throughout the Western world that the military operations in the Far East were no more than a dress rehearsal for a Communist attack on Western Europe, spearheaded from the neighbouring German Democratic Republic. Concerns about an imminent 'Third World War' were rife in all circles. International congresses were held to draw up a common strategy to resist a Communist attack, felt by many to be more than likely, and the countries of the 'free world' started to increase their military budgets.

The Korean war had a considerable impact on Italy's domestic and foreign policy. De Gasperi was personally of the view that the USSR would not wage war in Europe, but feared possible attempts at subversion by the Italian Communists. The government therefore approved large appropriations not just to meet the needs of the armed forces, but also to bolster the forces of law and order. This meant that resources had to be taken away from the reform plans, which then had to be scaled down. Taking the view that a plan to destabilise the West had been devised by Moscow and was to be put into practice by local Communist parties, the government introduced measures against potential saboteurs at home. 'Italy', De Gasperi told the Chamber on 11 July 1950, 'has a fifth column, a systematic and organised column which, in times of emergency, tries to aggravate the domestic situation by fomenting division. [...] A democratic government has to counter this psychological infiltration through a wise policy of reforms with a constant focus on social justice. [...] It would nevertheless be a serious mistake to believe that measures of a social nature could prevent attacks on the political system: the State and the

parties also have to insist that it is mandatory for everyone to accept the principle of democracy'¹³⁰.

Memories of 1922 led De Gasperi to defend democracy with every possible means at his disposal. He therefore started working on special measures to defend the State against the 'fifth column', those citizens willing to obey 'external' orders, i.e. from international Communism. The Home Minister Mario Scelba drew up a draft law on civil defence which gave his ministry exceptional powers if the security of the country were to be threatened; the Justice Minister Attilio Piccioni proposed to amend some articles of the Criminal Code to increase the penalties for military and economic sabotage, which also included the occupation of land and industrial plant; the Labour Minister Achille Marazza proposed to regulate the right to strike, limiting it to public service employees and banning political strikes and strikes by civil servants.

De Gasperi was not just concerned by the threat that the left might pose to the democratic State. He was also afraid that the neo-Fascist right could exploit any weakness on the part of the government to show that the democratic system was unable to defend itself against Communism, thereby opening the door to authoritarian solutions. As a result he also had a draft law tabled banning the re-establishment of the Fascist Party, even though there were reservations in some wings of the CD and in moderate public opinion. The local elections were approaching and these measures would prevent any candidates from the neo-Fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* [Italian Social Movement] from standing for the lists presented in southern Italy. The government's allies (but not Defence Minister Pacciardi, who had thrown his lot in with the extremists) were, moreover, very concerned about Scelba's proposals.

De Gasperi had to mediate between the various positions, pursuing the struggle to defend democracy, but without giving in to illiberal or authoritarian solutions. When he read in *Il Quotidiano*, the journal of Catholic Action, a comment on a speech which Scelba had made to Christian Working Youth, which said that the constitutional guarantees should not 'become a trap for the freedom of the Italian people'¹³¹, he was concerned and wrote to Andreotti:

'The jibe at the government is obvious; I felt as though I was reading one of Pacciardi's arguments. As the Defence Minister, he is entitled to say this, but the fact that this is being written in the organ of Catholic Action, the accepted "unofficial" organ of the Holy See, seems to me to be strange, not to say dangerous. If Catholic Action is an organisation within which a Home Minister makes a militant

130. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 891-892.

131. '*Occorre temprare gli spiriti contro l'azione nefasta del comunismo*', *Il Quotidiano*, 17 August 1950.

speech, and whose journal calls for arms, are pacifist statements from the throne enough to cancel out such impressions?’¹³²

Problems worsened in the autumn, when the US again began to insist on an increase in Italian military appropriations. The Italian chief of the European Cooperation Administration (ECA), the US body responsible for supervising aid under the Marshall Plan, accused the government of not knowing how to use US aid properly to support a strict policy to curb inflation. In response, De Gasperi made strong diplomatic representations and told a meeting of the Cabinet that he would not tolerate Italy being ‘treated as a colonial nation’¹³³. This event left De Gasperi convinced that Italy should have implemented a more daring international policy, forging closer ties with Europe.

The government’s reform policy was being opposed by conservative circles within and outside the CD. Even Sturzo, who, in the last years of his life, was waging a staunch liberalising battle, wrote to De Gasperi about the agrarian reform, warning him to ‘beware of those who, under a social mantle, are laying the legislative foundations for the Bolshevisation of our country’¹³⁴. Despite their fresh commitment to oppose the Communists, the CD was losing the support of vast swathes of the electorate. Landowners, in the South in particular, dissatisfied and concerned by the agrarian reform, started to switch their votes to the Monarchists and the MSI. The results of the local elections in May and the elections for the Sicilian Regional Assembly in June 1951 were complex. The centre coalition managed to win the municipalities of Milan, Turin, Genoa, Florence and Venice, previously controlled by left-wing councils, but there was a sharp upturn in votes for the right. Overall, the CD lost votes, while there was no change or a slight increase for the left.

After the elections De Gasperi, who had managed to postpone the fall of the government even though the Social Democrat ministers had left in April, was forced to resign on 16 July. At the CD National Congress at Grottaferrata (29 June-3 July 1951), Dossetti’s supporters had again levelled criticisms against the government’s foreign and economic policies, leading to the resignation of Pella and then

132. A. De Gasperi to G. Andreotti, [Sella di Valsugana], 5 September 1950, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 391-392.

133. De Gasperi’s words, taken from the minutes of the Council of Ministers of 24 October 1950, are quoted by FORMIGONI, G., *La Democrazia Cristiana e l’alleanza occidentale (1943-1953)*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1996, p. 378.

134. L. Sturzo to A. De Gasperi, Rome, 31 July 1950, *Carteggio L. STURZO-A. DE GASPERI (1920-1953)*, op. cit., p. 201.

the government as a whole. The crisis was resolved by a compromise. Sforza handed the Foreign Ministry to De Gasperi and became a Minister without portfolio for European Affairs. Pella kept the Budget Ministry but had to share the Treasury with Vanoni who kept the Finance Ministry. Overall, this marked the end of the reforming drive of De Gasperi's centre governments. Dossetti stood down as Deputy Secretary and then, in October, from the Party leadership. He began to think about giving up active politics and indeed resigned as an MP the following year.

That put an end to the Dossetti experience. This did not just mark the disappearance from Italian political life of a highly ethical and cultured member, but also the end of the left-wing counterbalance in the CD, and more generally the Catholic world, that had enabled De Gasperi to maintain a balanced centre position. It would now be more difficult for De Gasperi to withstand the pressures from various circles, ecclesiastical and secular, for an increasingly firm anti-Communist commitment. He was urged to take such a stance by Monsignor Pietro Pavan, who visited him on 5 December 1951 to put forward various questions that the Pope considered important. The main concern of Pius XII, said Pavan, was the growing strength of Communism which the Pope felt was not being adequately opposed by the CD which was nevertheless taking a very hard line against the neo-Fascist right. During the meeting, De Gasperi, who was sceptical about the efficacy of exclusively repressive laws and any talk of outlawing the Communist Party, replied: 'How can we tackle Communism head-on in Italy today? There would be civil war, and perhaps even real war'¹³⁵. This was no more than a foretaste of the pressures that would soon be exerted on him.

4. THE ROMAN ELECTIONS OF 1952

The way in which the crisis had unfolded in 1951 had left De Gasperi very bitter. As his daughter Maria Romana has said: 'the government crisis was an internal crisis of the Christian Democrats'; it was in particular, however, the self-serving interests, vanity, egotism, envy, hypocrisy and intrigues of his Party colleagues that had left him deeply disillusioned. The acrimonious events of 1951 would seem no more than a drop in the ocean in comparison with the following year.

Catholic circles led by Luigi Gedda, who had become General President of Catholic Action in January 1952, Monsignor Roberto Ronca, the founder of *Civiltà Italica* and what is usually called the 'Roman Party', an ecclesiastical and lay pressure group of the Catholic right, and 'God's microphone', Father

135. Account of the meeting in RICCARDI, A., *Pio XII e Alcide De Gasperi. Una storia segreta*, Laterza, Bari, 2003, p. 75.

Riccardo Lombardi, considered De Gasperi's policy towards the Communists to be too weak and were calling for the formation of a wide-ranging anti-Communist front which would also include the right-wing parties, and the neo-Fascists of the MSI, in the political game. Even the Vatican leaders seemed to be leaning in this direction, as the run-up to the local elections in Rome in May 1952 showed.

The Socialists and Communists had decided to stand on a common platform, on a list headed by the veteran Francesco Saverio Nitti, in order to win votes from the lay and middle class electorate as well. To prevent a Communist success, which would have caused Rome, the 'sacred city', to fall into the hands of 'militant atheists', the Holy See felt that what was needed was a civic list without Party symbols made up of the CD, Monarchists and MSI. The CD secretary Gonella, in agreement with De Gasperi, had replied that such a solution, as well as causing a rift with the northern CD, would force the Republicans to withdraw from the government, thereby precipitating a political crisis whose outcome was uncertain. It had to be borne in mind that the CD had a majority in the Chamber but not in the Senate. The CD counter-proposal was to rally the centre majority (CD, Liberals, Social Democrats and Republicans), possibly with the addition of the Uomo Qualunque candidates, to win votes from the right.

The Holy See insisted, however, on an alliance with the right and to provide this operation with a veneer of democracy invited Father Luigi Sturzo to promote a civic list which included all the anti-Communist parties. This was a skilful choice of advocate. Sturzo had an unblemished anti-Fascist past and had personally suffered in the defence of democracy, but was a Communist opponent and was liked in conservative circles for his recent polemics against the State's economic measures.

De Gasperi was saddened by this initiative, which showed a lack of trust in his commitment and the democratic system and jeopardised the government and perhaps the very existence of the Christian Democrats. As he later wrote to Scelba about the Vatican:

'The truth is that all our arguments for the democratic system are falling on deaf ears because they feel that democracy is too weak to resist to the end'¹³⁶.

136. A. De Gasperi to M. Scelba, Rome, 9 June 1952, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 209.

According to Monsignor Montini, some circles close to the Pope, and possibly even the Pope himself, had very little faith in De Gasperi and the CD:

'For some time they have done nothing but say that the Party is ruining us and think that Gedda and Catholic Action are the only force capable of replacing the Party and tackling Communism head on'¹³⁷.

For his part, Sturzo, having heard the views of the Liberals, Social Democrats and Republicans, all strongly opposed to any agreement with the parties of the right, put forward only a list of centre parties including a few experts from outside the parties but liked by the right. Gedda opposed this move and withdrew the 15 Catholic Action candidates from the CD list, while the Vatican even proposed a Catholic list as an alternative to the CD, supported by the Civil Committees and the ecclesiastical authorities¹³⁸. This solution was felt by De Gasperi and Gonella to be 'disastrous from every point of view'¹³⁹, and to prevent it the Prime Minister was willing to resign. He asked, however, if he could meet Pius XII, considering that the Pope had not been appropriately informed of the situation that would be created. The meeting never took place, but Andreotti managed to get a briefing on the situation to the Pope which was not without effect¹⁴⁰.

Gedda, who was pressing for the solution including the Monarchists and MSI, had meanwhile discovered that the Presidents of four of the five branches of Catholic Action, as well as FUCI and the Catholic Graduates, were opposed to it¹⁴¹. In a very confused situation which is difficult to reconstruct, Sturzo also gave up any mediation as it was proving impossible to find any common ground between all those involved. The Vatican, although annoyed by the turn that events had taken, decided that it would once again support the CD, which would stand for election alongside the centre parties.

137. Cf. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 329.<

138. Cf. D'ANGELO, A., *De Gasperi, le destre e l'«operazione Sturzo»*. *Voto amministrativo del 1952 e progetti di riforma elettorale*, Studium, Rome, 2002, pp. 78-79.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

140. The text of the note of 20 April is quoted in ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi visto da vicino*, Rizzoli, Milan 1986, pp. 205-207.

141. Cf. GEDDA, L., *18 April 1948. Memorie inedite dell'artefice della sconfitta del Fronte Popolare*, Mondadori, Milan, 1998, p. 153.

De Gasperi had put up such a tenacious fight because he was aware that it was not just the local elections in Rome that were at stake, but the prospect of political agreements with the right-wing parties. This would have meant the failure of De Gasperi's entire democratic political approach, the end of centre politics and the beginning of a worrying shift to the right. His firmness, the opposition from some Catholic circles and Catholic Action itself, the discreet action to convince the Pope, helped by support from within the Pope's entourage, together with the unwillingness of the centre parties to enter into an unnatural alliance with the right and the political ineptness of the right, had led the operation to fail. The centre parties won the elections on 25 May 1952.

De Gasperi paid a heavy cost for this success both politically and personally. Politically, the episode signalled the end of Pius XII's faith in the politician from the Trentino (and in those members of the Curia, such as Montini, who supported him). Personally, the repercussions were much worse. When in the following June De Gasperi asked for a private audience to mark his thirtieth wedding anniversary and the final vows of his daughter Lucia, he was turned down despite Monsignor Montini's insistence. Pius XII 'considered that the moment was inauspicious'¹⁴². De Gasperi's reply was disappointed, but tough. As a believer he would submit, but as head of government he could not accept such an insult to the office that he held.

'As a Christian I accept humiliation', he wrote to the Italian Ambassador to the Holy See, 'although I find it difficult to justify; as Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Italy, the dignity and authority that I represent, and of which I cannot divest myself even in my private relations, mean that I must express my astonishment at such an extraordinary refusal and to ask the Secretary of State to provide me with an explanation'¹⁴³.

While the centre coalition had been successful in Rome, the results of the local elections in the rest of Italy had seen an increase in votes for both the right- and left-wing opposition parties. If this outcome were to be repeated in the 1953 political elections, the Monarchists and MSI would hold the balance of power in Parliament. De Gasperi then started to think about a change to the electoral law, to make the coalition emerging as the winner more stable. With a more solid majority, De Gasperi's CD would be able better to resist any religious pressures, keeping itself firmly at the centre of the political coalition.

142. Cf. D'ANGELO, A., *De Gasperi, le destre e l'«operazione Sturzo»*, op. cit., p. 105, note by the Italian ambassador at S. Sede Francesco Mameli.

143. Cf. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 335.

The idea of a political agreement between the CD and the Monarchists, if not the MSI, was nevertheless still popular in the Vatican. On 13 August 1952, Monsignor Pavan visited De Gasperi in Sella di Valsugana to put this idea forward with vigour and to propose that he met Pius XII, possibly to make up for the audience that he had been refused in the previous June. De Gasperi was rather reluctant to accept this offer. He said that he would again put his centre political vision and the advisability of joining forces only with the centre parties to the Pope. His moral strength as a man and a Christian is evident from the report that Monsignor Pavan drew up as to the possible consequences of the visit:

'Please explain my argument [to the Pope] as frankly as possible:

- 1) If the Holy Father will consider it, so much the better.
- 2) If the Holy Father - for His own reasons - does not find it convincing, but leaves me free to choose, I shall take the necessary action, as I am convinced that my argument is in keeping with the events of history, and certain that I am acting in the best interests of Italy and the Church.
- 3) If the Holy Father decides otherwise, I shall in that case retire from political life. I am a Christian, I am nearing the end of my days and I shall never act against the express wishes of the Holy Father. [...] I shall retire from political life as I cannot in all conscience take political action that I consider to be damaging for my homeland and for the Church.
In such a case others will replace me'¹⁴⁴.

A couple of months later, speaking openly to Nenni, who recorded his words in his diary, he said:

'I am the first Catholic Prime Minister. I believe that I have done my duty to the Church. Yet I am just about tolerated'¹⁴⁵.

144. An account of the conversation is given by RICCARDI, A., *Pio XII e Alcide De Gasperi*, op. cit., pp. 86-87

145. NENNI, P., *Tempo di guerra fredda. Diari 1943-1956*, G. Nenni and D. Zucàro (ed.), SugarCo, Milan, 1981, p. 546 (11 October 1952).

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'De Gasperi', is located in the top right corner of the page.

Leggiamo

10. Our European Homeland



1. LENGTHY PREPARATIONS

1951 and 1952 were probably the worst years of De Gasperi's life, even more perhaps than the dark days of Fascism. He was aware that his life was passing by, too rapidly for all the things that he felt he still had to do. Matters were becoming more problematic every day. The Pope's lack of understanding, shared by some sections of the Church hierarchy, did little to help. His political opponents, and perhaps even those in his own Party, were not showing him the respect and tolerance that he had always shown to others. He feared that Italian democracy would not withstand the clash between right and left. Pinning his hopes on European integration, he was aware that very few people really shared his enthusiasm.

His Europeanism was undoubtedly one of the most significant features of De Gasperi's last years of political life. Like Robert Schuman from Lorraine and Konrad Adenauer from the Rhineland, the other two 'Fathers of Europe', to use a description which is perhaps rather hackneyed, he was a frontier man and a Christian, convinced that the peoples of Europe shared a common heritage of spiritual and moral values going back to their Christian roots. Turning this belief into a concrete policy for the integration of the countries of Europe was no easy task, however. Immediately after the Second World War, De Gasperi had not felt that this was an immediate prospect. There were other concerns at the time, as the official manifestos of the Christian Democrats clearly show. Only in the very last lines of the 'Christian Democrat Ideas for Reconstruction', cited above, was there any mention, for instance, of a 'European Community' with which Italy could 'loyally' work. This reference, however, seemed to have more to do with defining the geographical area in which Italy could 'return to its centuries-old civilising role' than any idea of a supranational institution¹⁴⁶.

A stage of international politics had also been reached in which each Western European State was trying to deal with the far-reaching crisis of the post-war years, looking after its own interests and seeking privileged links with the United States. The Europeanist speech given by Winston Churchill in Zurich on 19 September 1946 had aroused considerable interest throughout the world, but had not been followed by any tangible government action. In Italy, the tripartite formula had made it difficult to talk about Europe. The Communists, in deference to the directives of the USSR which considered that Europeanist initiatives could isolate it, and the majority of the Socialists, were deaf to such arguments.

Although there are many references to Europe in the speeches that De Gasperi gave during his collaboration with the Communists and Socialists, it was at the time of the quadripartite centre

146. DEMOFILO [De Gasperi, A.], *Idee ricostruttive della Democrazia cristiana*, op. cit., p. 8.

governments that the Foreign Minister, Sforza, and in particular the Prime Minister focused on European policy again. The reasons for joining the Marshall Plan, in addition to the above-mentioned desire to return Italy to the international fold with a status on a par with the other countries, also included the prospect of resolving Italy's economic problems at a European level. De Gasperi felt that European integration was a real alternative to the imperialist solution that Fascism had attempted to impose on these problems. At the end of August 1948, Italy therefore drew up a plan to transform the OEEC into a body with powers not just in the economic but in the social and cultural spheres as well. The plan included a Political Committee which would examine international issues jointly and a European Court of Justice. The reactions of the European governments were far from encouraging and De Gasperi withdrew his plan¹⁴⁷.

In subsequent months Italian diplomacy was occupied with attempts to get Italy into the Atlantic Pact; although ultimately successful, Italy was aware that it would always be a minor ally receiving little support in resolving those of its international problems which were still unresolved. The revision of the peace treaty, or at least the removal of some of its clauses, was a remote prospect. Despite the attempts by De Gasperi and Sforza to find a compromise solution with the United Kingdom, the colonies had been lost. Receiving trusteeship for Somaliland had been scant consolation. Trieste, despite the tripartite declaration of March 1948, continued to be an open wound. Tito's break with the Soviets raised further problems, as the West did not want to deter Yugoslavia's shift towards the 'free world' by coming down in favour of Italy.

It was then that De Gasperi became convinced that Europe was the only way out of Italy's problems. His cultural baggage provided him with what he needed to flesh out this idea politically and ideologically and he became one of the staunchest and most consistent supporters of the old continent's integration. While his Catholic faith naturally predisposed him to ecumenism and universalism, his political experiences in the multinational Empire of the Habsburgs and his close analysis of international events in the 1930s from the privileged standpoint of the Vatican gave him an open-mindedness and sensitivity to international relations that were rare among Italian politicians of the post-Fascist years. From late 1949, De Gasperi's Europeanist work, prefigured in the speech which he gave in Brussels on 20 November 1948 on 'The moral foundations of democracy', continued apace.

147. Cf. PASTORELLI, P., 'La politica europeistica di De Gasperi', in PASTORELLI, P., *La politica estera italiana del dopoguerra*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1987, pp. 160-165 and VARSORI, A., 'L'Italia e l'integrazione europea. Dal piano Marshall al piano Pleven', *La politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra (1943-1957)*, A. Varsori (ed.), Led, Milan, 1993, pp. 344-346.

To those critical of his Europeanist policy, he replied that there was no question of neglecting Italy's domestic interests, but of finding a solution to them in a European context. De Gasperi contacted Europeanist organisations and in particular, having overcome some initial doubts, Altiero Spinelli's European Federalist Movement, which convinced him that the federal solution was the right solution. This led De Gasperi, on 4 November 1950 in Rome, to sign the people's petition for a European Federal State promoted by the Union of European Federalists.

2. TANGIBLE EUROPEANISM

He kept up with Europeanist thinking. De Gasperi insisted, encountering considerable international resistance, that Italy should take part in at least the final stage of the negotiations which were to lead in May 1949 to the Council of Europe. In May 1950, he agreed that Italy should immediately join the negotiations on the Schuman Plan which were to result on 18 April 1951 in the formation of the first European body, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The instructions that he gave to Paolo Emilio Taviani, heading the Italian delegation, specify that Taviani was to take 'a genuinely European stance'¹⁴⁸ and to try to promote the United Kingdom's participation in the agreement as well. According to Taviani, it was initially Sforza who convinced De Gasperi that Italy should join up immediately. The politician from the Trentino considered in practice that European integration could only really be achieved with a single currency or with a European army¹⁴⁹. De Gasperi was subsequently won over, however, by the soundness of Schuman's initiative, especially as it seemed to open the door to the free movement of labour which would help to reduce unemployment in Italy.

The Schuman Plan was undoubtedly the first serious attempt in Europe to confer sovereign powers on a supranational authority. This worried those nostalgic for the prerogatives of the nation State. The Korean war had, however, convinced those less enthusiastic about Europe. To defend Western Europe against the Soviet attack that was so feared, talk had begun about Germany's rearmament. Concerned by the idea of Germans in uniform again, France proposed the creation of an integrated European army, answerable to a common Defence Minister who would in turn be answerable to the governments and to a European Assembly. This was known as the Plevin Plan after the name of the French Prime Minister of the time.

148. Cf. SFORZA, C., *Cinque anni a Palazzo Chigi. La politica estera italiana dal 1947 al 1951*, Atlante, Rome 1952, p. 305.

149. TAVIANI, P. E., *Politica a memoria d'uomo*, op. cit., p. 184 (diary of 26 June 1950).

De Gasperi supported it immediately, both because, as has been said, he was convinced that European integration could be achieved by an army or a currency, and because he immediately grasped the Europeanist potential behind the plan. This was an opportunity to move on from integration limited solely to military matters towards political and economic integration which would help to resolve Italy's traditional problems of backwardness. The main problem was how to make Italian public opinion, for the most part still not very sensitive to the Europeanist ideal, understand that the starting point should be military integration and the European Defence Community (EDC). While this might seem outlandish, it was only superficially so: in practice it opened the door to a first tangible form of Western European integration. As De Gasperi said on 10 December 1951 in a speech to the Council of Europe Assembly, it was 'an opportunity that would never arise again'¹⁵⁰.

3. DE GASPERI AND THE USA

The policy of European integration was supported at that time by the US, which felt that it was crucial for the old continent's military and economic recovery. A united Europe would also be able better to withstand the rise of Communism which, against the backdrop of the Cold War, continued to be the main concern of the US.

The Italian local elections of 1951 had consequently triggered a degree of nervousness in Washington. It was not just the fact that the far left had retained its support that worried the USA, but also the rise of the neo-Fascist right with the MSI's anti-Western and pro-neutrality policy. De Gasperi was therefore the only Italian politician to be supported and bolstered, especially within his own Party, where there was no shortage of supporters, for instance Gronchi, of a worrying international shift for Italy. US Secretary of State Acheson therefore decided to invite De Gasperi to the United States, profiting from the Foreign and Prime Minister's visit to Canada to attend the Atlantic Council meeting in Ottawa. From a formal and official point of view, this was a very different visit from the 1947 visit. President Truman himself met De Gasperi at the railway station in Washington on 23 September 1951. The Italian Prime Minister then had the honour of speaking to the US Congress in joint session. The *Washington Post* rightly wrote in its headline to an article "The capital is today rolling out the red carpet for De Gasperi"¹⁵¹.

150. DE GASPERI, A., 'L'occasione che passa', *De Gasperi e l'Europa*, M. R. De Gasperi (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia, 1979, p. 122.

151. CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 305.

From a substantive point of view, however, matters did not go quite as well. De Gasperi had travelled to the United States to call for a review of the clauses of the peace treaty not just from a military point of view, but also firmly to address the question of Trieste and obtain an increase in US immigration quotas for Italians. Resolving these problems would have been something of a propaganda coup in view of the forthcoming elections. While recognising that De Gasperi's reasoning was sound, the US could not, however, entertain most of these requests. The advisability of maintaining good relations with Yugoslavia meant that the question of Trieste was off the agenda (or to be dealt with in bilateral talks between the parties involved), while immigration quotas could not be changed for reasons of domestic policy. The only achievements were therefore a US commitment to promote Italy's accession to the UN, which had been blocked on various occasions by the Soviet veto, the promise of an increase in trade relations and, shortly after, a joint statement by the USA, the UK and France which stated that the military clauses of the peace treaty with Italy had lapsed.

There is no doubt that the visit was a success for De Gasperi and improved relations with the USA in the Atlantic policy arena. In his talks with Acheson, moreover, De Gasperi criticised US policy to contain Communism which, in his view, was entirely negative. NATO also needed to be transformed by developing, alongside military aspects, cultural and economic cooperation among its member countries. De Gasperi felt that too much stress was being placed on military aspects and 'fear of the Reds', neglecting issues such as peace, by which public opinion in Europe set great store¹⁵². More stress needed to be placed on positive issues, on ways of bolstering democracy and achieving European integration. He devoted the last years of his life to this task.

4. THE EDC AND EUROPE

De Gasperi then decided to try to transform the original plan for the European Defence Community into the driving force for a future European Political Community. He had in mind the creation of an elected European assembly with deliberative powers, to which an executive body would be answerable. Both would be supported by a common budget, financed by contributions from the individual member States. This turned the Treaty's original approach on its head. While the Treaty had focused at the outset solely on military aspects, it now became the foundation for the construction of a federated Europe. His dealings with the federalists, from Spinelli to Carandini, had been useful. At the Council of Europe Consultative Assembly (10 December 1951) and at the meetings of the

152. Cf. DEL PERO, M., *L'alleato scomodo. Gli USA e la DC negli anni del centrismo (1948-1955)*, Carocci, Rome, 2001, pp. 146-149.

six Foreign Ministers of the ECSC in Strasbourg (11 December) and Paris (27 December), De Gasperi resolutely supported the award of constituent powers to the EDC Assembly. As a result of his insistence, Article 38 of the draft Treaty provided that this assembly would act as a kind of European constituent assembly with the task of drawing up an overall federal proposal. As De Gasperi said when he returned from Paris:

'Although the Treaty had a preamble of federalist type, this aspect was then put on the back burner. In Paris, we tried to reverse the way in which the Treaty was structured, including precise commitments and also specific deadlines in it to ensure a federative outcome'¹⁵³.

With US approval and despite British opposition, the Treaty establishing the EDC was signed in Paris on 27 May 1952 by the six countries which had already created the ECSC: Italy, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The Treaty was to come into force once it had been ratified by all the Parliaments involved.

De Gasperi was aware, however, that time was against Europe. He had seen the initial signs of a thaw and of detente, evident from the election of Eisenhower as President of the United States and the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953. Enthusiasm seemed set to wane among those who had supported the EDC, not because they believed in Europe but as a way of countering the Soviet threat. De Gasperi therefore attempted to speed matters up. Taking up Spinelli's suggestions, in June 1952 he proposed that the Assembly of the ECSC, whose treaty had just come into force, be tasked with starting to draw up a draft European federal constitution while awaiting ratification of the EDC. On 10 September, with Adenauer's support, De Gasperi's proposal was accepted by the six Foreign Ministers of the ECSC meeting in Luxembourg.

De Gasperi was the architect and the main supporter of the plan. His methods had been prudent and cautious, but he had pursued his goals with a great deal of perseverance. This was the high point of his Europeanist policy, which led to him being awarded the Charlemagne Prize in Aachen on 24 September 1952. On that occasion he gave a speech in which he argued that a European mentality had to be created as no federal institution would be able to function without it:

153. DE GASPERI, A., '*La CED come strumento di pace*', *De Gasperi e l'Europa*, M. R. De Gasperi (ed.), Morcelliana, Brescia, 1979, p. 126. These are the statements that De Gasperi gave to the press on 31 December 1951.

‘Supranational institutions will not be enough and may well become no more than a playing field in which particular interests are competing, if the men assigned to them do not feel that they represent higher and European interests. Without this European mentality, any formula upon which we decide may well be no more than an empty legal abstraction’¹⁵⁴.

On the following 10 March, the *ad hoc* Assembly presented its draft European constitution. The threshold of European integration had been reached. Crisis was nevertheless waiting behind the door.

5. THE 1953 ELECTIONS

As mentioned above, to counter the risk of a rise in support for the extremes of the Italian political spectrum, De Gasperi felt that a new electoral law needed to be pushed through. After examining the possibility of re-establishing the one-member system, used until the advent of Fascism, with one or two adjustments, he shifted towards a majority bonus system. In substance, the Party or group of allied parties which obtained an absolute majority of votes would receive two thirds of seats in the Chamber. This system would forge closer links between the CD and the secular centre parties and would stave off pressures from the religious right. The Social Democrats, in turn, would be strengthened and become a major focus of attraction for Nenni’s Socialists, thereby isolating the Communists.

The majority law was immediately dubbed the ‘scam law’ by the opposition and strenuously opposed by the right and the left. A very bitter battle started in Parliament and in the country. Much play was made of the ill-omened ‘Acerbo law’ which had helped the Fascist dictatorship to take power, even though there were many differences. Under the Acerbo law, two thirds of seats were allocated to the list which had obtained only 25% of votes; the majority bonus would be applied only if over 50% of votes were obtained. The opposition used obstructionist tactics in the Chambers, which paralysed Italy’s political life for months. The sitting for the final vote lasted 69 hours in the Chamber of Deputies and 77 in the Senate. There were also serious incidents in the Senate and the Speaker, Ruini, was struck on the head by a plank thrown by a Socialist Senator.

154. DE GASPERI, A., ‘*Le radici spirituali dell’Europa*’, *De Gasperi e l’Europa*, op. cit., p. 172.

De Gasperi ultimately won the fight and the law was approved on 29 March 1953. This was nevertheless at the expense of ratification of the EDC Treaty which could not be put before the Chambers. De Gasperi perhaps thought that he could postpone ratification to the new Parliament, in which he hoped to have a larger majority as a result of the majority bonus law. However, events did not turn out as he expected in the elections of 7 June 1953. The CD polled only 40.1% of votes, the Social Democrats 4.5%, the Liberals 3% and the Republicans 1.6%. The Communists with 22.6% and the Socialists with 12.7% polled more votes than in 1948. There was more support for the Monarchists (6.9%) and the MSI (5.8%). This meant that the total number of votes needed for the majority bonus to be applied was 55 038 short, a quarter of the votes which had gone to two lists of Social Democrats and Liberals who had left their parties because they disagreed with the majority bonus law. A very large number of ballot papers with votes for the CD were, moreover, contested by candidates on the Communist and Socialist lists (the number of invalid ballot papers was over double the figure for 1948), although they were partly valid. To cut short any recriminations, Home Minister Scelba quickly made it known that the quorum for the application of the law had not been obtained.

Everything now became more difficult for De Gasperi, even though the centre coalition parties had a very slender majority of eight in the Chamber. After this electoral defeat, De Gasperi, aware among other things that the Social Democrats were unwilling to be involved, would have liked to stand aside or merely keep the Foreign Ministry in order to bring his Europeanist policy to fruition. President Einaudi insisted, however, and persuaded him to try to form a new government again. For the first time after many years, bearing witness to the change in the international climate, De Gasperi had official talks with all the political Party leaders, including the Communists, Socialists, Monarchists and MSI. In some cases (the talks with Togliatti and Nenni, for instance), this restored the human contact that had been lost for many years, but did not bring about significant political changes.

As the minor centre parties were refusing to take part, De Gasperi had to form his eighth government under the CD flag alone. He was perhaps hoping to obtain a vote of confidence, with the support of the Monarchist vote, so that he could then ask Einaudi to dissolve the Chamber and re-run the elections with the majority bonus law again. The Chamber, however, on 28 July, returned a vote of no confidence by 282 votes (PCI, PSI, PNM and MSI) to 263 (CD), with the Liberals, Republicans and Social Democrats abstaining. The government had been beaten by ten votes.

During that time, *L'Osservatore Romano* published an article praising the work of De Gasperi in his years as Prime Minister, and recognising his loyalty to Catholic social thinking and democratic custom¹⁵⁵. The ambassadors asked by Einaudi for information on the repercussions of the crisis abroad (Tarchiani, Brosio, Quaroni and Di Stefano) told him that De Gasperi's defeat had been viewed very negatively and felt that the now former Prime Minister should at least keep the post of Foreign Minister. This was a sign that De Gasperi's personality was viewed much more sympathetically internationally than in Italy, where rebuffs and self-interest had led to the end of his political career.

155. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi visto da vicino*, op. cit., pp. 259-260.

10. The Final Year



1. TRIESTE AGAIN

De Gasperi suggested Piccioni to Einaudi as his successor and made every effort to get the Party to support him. On 8 August, at a meeting with the President of the Republic who urged him to take on the Foreign Ministry, he replied that he would accept provided that it did not stand in the way of Piccioni's success. There was much resistance to his return especially among the smaller centre parties, who did not want De Gasperi at the Foreign Ministry, and he turned down the post on 12 August. De Gasperi, who had meanwhile returned to the Trentino, ruled out any return to Rome and made it known that he was not intending to take any part in the next government which, in his view, should be purely administrative in nature with little political characterisation¹⁵⁶. On 15 August Giuseppe Pella formed the Republic's first government not led by Alcide De Gasperi: a one-Party CD government which kept its head above water in Parliament through the votes of the Liberals and Republicans and the abstention of the Social Democrats and Monarchists.

Pella had been in office for a couple of weeks when the question of Trieste suddenly raised its head again. De Gasperi, as mentioned above, had obtained a declaration from the three main Western powers in March 1948 that the whole of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) should revert to Italy. Even though it was doubtful whether the declaration could actually be applied, it was because of this that De Gasperi had rejected any other plan to resolve the situation, convinced that Italian public opinion would not accept further sacrifices. This made it difficult to seek a negotiated solution with the Yugoslavs, who already administered zone B of the FTT, while zone A, which included the city of Trieste, was administered by the US and the UK.

After Tito's break with Moscow, US support for Italy over the issue of Trieste had been greatly weakened. De Gasperi had not therefore wanted to call into question Italy's loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance and European collaboration, as various sides had suggested to him, in order to put pressure on the Americans. The question of Trieste had continued to be a thorn in his side and shaped Italian foreign and domestic policy. The neo-Fascist right, as well as the Communists, exploited it, skilfully playing the card of patriotism in the run-up to every election.

The situation came to a head in late August 1953, when the official Jugopress agency announced that Yugoslavia was to annex zone B. Pella responded by sending troops to the eastern frontier and threatening to occupy zone A. Tito responded on 6 September, claiming the whole of the FTT, and Pella in turn made a strong speech in the Campidoglio in which he called on the US and the UK

156. See the message sent to the head of the Party, quoted by ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi visto da vicino*, op. cit., p. 261.

to ensure justice for Italy, with no further delay, because the Trieste question, Pella concluded, 'has repercussions on our whole international policy and is the test bed of our friendships'¹⁵⁷.

De Gasperi was very worried by Pella's speech and wrote him a letter setting out his case: the government should in no case betray its loyalty to the Allies and to European cooperation. Moreover, what would Italy be able to do if the reply was negative? 'War, no. That would ultimately be a victory for Communism. Withdrawal from NATO? That would be a victory for neutralism and all that entails'. He went on to add:

'I also hope that you have tacitly decided against any military show which may have had its rightful place, but which is very much out of kilter with the arbitration proposals which you have wisely put forward'¹⁵⁸.

De Gasperi had never been in favour of nationalism and did not agree with Pella's stance, which seemed to be urging public opinion in that direction. Italy ran the risk of losing its international position without obtaining any tangible result. On 8 October, the UK and the US announced that administration of zone A would revert to Italy, but faced with Yugoslav protests back-pedalled, leaving everything as it was before. The nationalist sentiments that had been stirred up led to incidents in Trieste involving British forces, ending in deaths and injuries.

2. SECRETARY OF THE CD

As he no longer had any ministerial office, De Gasperi could devote his final energies to Europe and the Party. On 28 September he was elected Secretary of the CD, but faced the humiliation of 22 blank ballot papers out of a total of 71. He had stood for the post which he had given up seven years earlier to increase unity in the Party, only to be faced by the fact that his name caused an immediate rift. It was rumoured that the old People's Party and the followers of Gronchi, annoyed by De Gasperi's liking for the young supporters of the 'Democratic Initiative' wing, had voted against him. The older members rejected this accusation, arguing that it had been the younger members who did not want De Gasperi

157. Pella's speech is quoted by Re, G. C., *Fine di una politica. Momenti drammatici della democrazia italiana*, Capelli, Bologna, 1971, p. 202.

158. A. De Gasperi to G. Pella, September 1953, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 240-241. According to G.C. Re in *Fine di una politica*, op. cit., pp. 249-250, Pella never received the letter.

in too strong a position. Others accused Pastore and the unionists of the CISL. Whatever the truth, it was another bitter disappointment for De Gasperi.

He had loyally supported Pella, but the clash that they had had over the question of Trieste had fuelled rumours that De Gasperi wanted to bring down the government and return as Prime Minister. Speaking in Milan on 18 October 1953, he tried to quash these rumours, calling for support for Pella¹⁵⁹. Although tired and ill, De Gasperi had accepted the post of Party secretary again. 'Why', he asked, without hiding his sadness, 'is a hostile political world slandering me with the accusation of intrigue and attacking my diligence?'¹⁶⁰. He also had the CD's central leadership adopt a resolution on the problem of Trieste which largely supported Pella's action¹⁶¹. Nevertheless, after a speech by Scelba which talked about a return to quadripartite government and an article by De Gasperi himself in *La Discussione* which called the Pella government a 'friendly' government¹⁶², Pella's fate was sealed.

It was now Fanfani's turn to form a government solely from the CD: De Gasperi supported this attempt in the hope that it might promote unity in the CD which was the 'cornerstone' in preserving Italian democracy¹⁶³. He also spoke in the Chamber, for the last time, in support of Fanfani, complaining of the 'Parliamentary wretchedness which has followed, in the space of a few years, the bright hopes of the first Assembly of the Republic'¹⁶⁴. His concern was the ability of Parliament to function when no majority could be found: 'Parliament should have a shared concern to maintain the present free regime and an awareness of the need for serious and sustained efforts to prevent the decline of the institutions from becoming inevitable and fatal'¹⁶⁵. As always, preserving freedom and democracy were central to his thinking. He had seen them succumb once in the 1920s through discord and an inability to work together, and did not want any repetition. His calls went unanswered and Fanfani also had to stand down.

159. DE GASPERI, A., 'Per un esame di coscienza', in DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi politici*, op. cit., pp. 519-543.

160. *Ibid.*, pp. 525-526.

161. *Resolution of Christian Democrat Central Office, 12 November 1953, in Atti e documenti della Democrazia Cristiana*, op. cit., pp. 640-643.

162. DE GASPERI, A., 'Il nostro cammino', *La Discussione*, 20 December 1953.

163. A. De Gasperi to A. Fanfani, Rome, 18 January 1954, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 330.

164. DE GASPERI, A., *Discorsi parlamentari*, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 1373, sitting of 29 January 1954.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 1374.

Ultimately it was Scelba's centre formula that won out when he received the votes from the smaller parties that had not gone to De Gasperi seven months earlier. Once again De Gasperi did what he could to help his old Home Minister to gain office, meeting Saragat and persuading the CD MPs to support Scelba to keep the Party united even if they did not believe in him.

This was his goal, and the reason he had accepted the post of Secretary again. He was aware that it was only with a united and solid Christian Democrat Party that Italy would be able to continue along its path without diversions to the right or left, and viewed the signs of a break-up with a great deal of concern and sadness:

'In this crisis,' he wrote to Piero Malvestiti when Fanfani was about to stand before the Chambers, 'I have spared no effort to rescue the Party's unity. I have probed deep into some states of mind and I am convinced that the threat of a break-up is worsening. We have to resist and throw water on the fire. There is no saving grace outside the union and it is wrong to believe that, if the CD falls, it can be replaced by a "Catholic Union"'¹⁶⁶.

This was a real threat, fuelled by the 'Roman Party', which wanted to force the CD into alliances with the right, felt that De Gasperi's commitment to fight Communism was too weak and wanted a shift in a more religious direction. De Gasperi reacted in a report to the CD's National Council on 20 March 1954. While, officially, this was a reply to an article by the editor of *Corriere della Sera*, Mario Missiroli, who had accused the CD of being a religious Party¹⁶⁷, it offered De Gasperi an opportunity to set out his secular vision of politics. He recalled that he had always wanted representatives of lay parties in government, ruled out any political responsibility on the part of Gedda's Civil Committees 'however well they have carried out their rallying work', and stressed the Party's autonomy, saying:

'Believers are citizens acting in the spirit and letter of the Constitution, and commit themselves, their group, their class, their Party and not the Church'¹⁶⁸.

166. A. De Gasperi to P. MALVESTITI, [Rome], 23 January 1954, *Lettere al Presidente. Carteggio De Gasperi-Malvestiti 1948-1953*, C. Bellò (ed.), Bonetti, Milan, 1964, pp. 317-318.

167. MISSIROLI, M., 'Aspetti della crisi', *Corriere della Sera*, 10 January 1954.

168. The speech was published in *Il Popolo* on 21 March 1954.

Pius XII was not at all pleased by De Gasperi's speech and ordered *La Civiltà Cattolica* to reply, setting out the Church's real doctrine and explicitly criticising De Gasperi¹⁶⁹. He 'understood from whom this reproach came, and was extremely saddened by it'¹⁷⁰.

3. THE FINAL MONTHS

The accusations which Giovanni Guareschi levelled against De Gasperi in the weekly *Candido* on 24 January 1954 came on top of all the other disappointments of this period. On the basis of documents which were later found to be counterfeit, Guareschi accused De Gasperi of having insisted in January 1944 that the Allies bomb Rome in order to make the people rise up against the Germans and Fascism. De Gasperi took Guareschi to court, largely because he wanted to prevent the legitimacy of the Resistance from being called into question. The trial, held in Milan from 13 to 15 April 1954, found that the charges against De Gasperi were completely untrue. This distressing event nevertheless took its toll on his physical and mental health and hastened his end.

The only satisfaction among so many disappointments was his unanimous election as President of the ECSC Assembly, a fair reward for his Europeanism. On 11 May he travelled to Strasbourg for his inauguration and gave a strong Europeanist speech, calling for the ratification of the EDC. Only Italy and France had still to ratify the Treaty, something that was proving very problematic in France. De Gasperi, for his part, did what he could to move ratification by Italy along, perhaps regretting that he had not done so before the end of the previous parliament. The deep-seated reason for his clash with Pella over Trieste was his well-founded fear that the Piedmontese politician would make ratification of the EDC Treaty subject to a satisfactory resolution of the problem of the Free Territory of Trieste. He advised Fanfani to make ratification a priority in his government programme¹⁷¹. He did not miss a chance to insist that Scelba take the same line.

169. MESSINEO, A., 'I cattolici e la vita politica', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 27 March 1954.

170. MARTINA, G., *La Chiesa in Italia negli ultimi trent'anni*, Studium, Rome, 1977, p. 36.

171. A. De Gasperi to A. Fanfani, Rome, 18 January 1954, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 331.

Speaking on 21 April 1954 to the European Parliamentary Conference in Paris he said that the profound link between his Europeanist faith and his Christianity could not be bettered:

‘Together with Toynbee I affirm that Christianity is at the root of our European civilisation, but I do not intend by that to judge our history by any exclusively religious criterion. I want more to talk about the common European heritage, that single morality that exalts the human person and his responsibility with the leaven of the evangelical brotherhood, that culture of law inherited from the classical world, that culture of beauty refined through the centuries and that desire for truth and justice sharpened by a thousand years of experience’¹⁷².

This speech was of particular significance bearing in mind De Gasperi’s health, which had started to deteriorate in February 1953, when he was diagnosed with renal sclerosis and given a poor prognosis. This news was kept entirely secret as De Gasperi did not want to cut down on his activities in any way. The effects that vicious rumours that he was preparing to take over this or that post might have had on him are nevertheless understandable.

His condition worsened from the beginning of 1954. He was absolutely determined to attend the Christian Democrat Congress in Naples to give what he said would be his political testament¹⁷³. In Naples he was seriously ill and had to remain seated while speaking, his face covered with a cold sweat, while his doctor looked on concerned.

It was a speech that was typical of De Gasperi’s pragmatic spirit. He started from a detailed analysis of the composition of Italian society, citing a great deal of statistical data, to show that the CD could and should represent the overall interest and therefore offer politics for all classes, with social justice as its target.

‘Before helping the poorest and most disadvantaged it is necessary [...] to take measures that do not worsen the circumstances of the middle classes, which are the most valuable part of private initiative and the bedrock of free democracy, which has helped to develop the human personality’¹⁷⁴.

172. *De Gasperi e l’Europa*, op. cit., p. 203.

173. ANDREOTTI, G., *De Gasperi e il suo tempo*, op. cit., p. 533.

174. DE GASPERI, A., ‘Nella lotta per la democrazia’, 1954-1973. *I congressi della Democrazia Cristiana*, Cinque Lune, Rome, 1976, p. 14.

Christianity had to remain the foundation of the Party and was essential in a Catholic country such as Italy. The influence of the Church should, however, go no further than the doctrinal and moral level. Practical decisions should therefore be taken by those in government solely in keeping with their own conscience.

‘There is no doubt that our support in matters connected with the Church is full and sincere. This is also true of the moral and social guidelines set out in papal documents which have daily nurtured and formed our vocation for public life. [...] Virtue and faith are not enough, however, for our work in the social and political arena; we need to create and nurture an instrument in keeping with the times: the Party, that is to say a political organisation which has a manifesto, its own methods, independent responsibility and is democratically financed and run’¹⁷⁵.

Once again, approaching the end of his life, De Gasperi confirmed the profoundly secular nature of his political vision which came, nevertheless, from his deep-rooted Christian faith.

The speech in Naples was De Gasperi’s swansong. On 16 July 1954, the CD’s National Council appointed him President by acclamation, but the politician’s health was continuing to deteriorate every day. From the mountains of his Trentino, he continued to follow political developments, concerned by the news reaching him from France about the EDC. ‘The EDC is the thorn in my side’¹⁷⁶, he wrote to the new CD Secretary Fanfani a few days before his death. ‘You can imagine how difficult it is for me when I am not strong enough and cannot raise my voice at least to stave off our country’s joint responsibility for such a calamity’¹⁷⁷. He was absolutely horrified that the failure of the EDC could ‘put off any movement towards European Union by ten to fifteen years’¹⁷⁸. His displeasure at the failure of the Europeanist plan was heightened by his sense of impotence and imminent death. His conscience was clear and he felt that he had done his duty honestly as a politician serving the people. A couple of days before his death, he told his daughter Maria Romana:

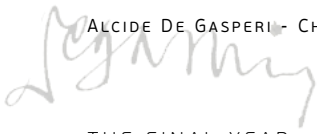
‘I have now done everything that was in my power and my conscience is at peace. The Lord lets you work, lets you draw up plans, gives you energy and life, and just when you think you are needed and your work is indispensable, suddenly takes everything away from you. He makes you understand that

175. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

176. A. De Gasperi to A. Fanfani, Sella di Valsugana, 9 August 1954, *De Gasperi scrive*, op. cit., p. 334.

177. A. De Gasperi to A. Fanfani, 14 August 1954, *ibid.*, p. 336.

178. *Ibid.*



THE FINAL YEAR

you are no more than useful, and tells you, enough, you can go now. You do not want to, however, you want to arrive up there with your work neatly finished. Our small human minds need finite things and find it difficult to leave things that we were passionate about to others¹⁷⁹.

Surrounded by his family, hearing the last rites as he had expressly requested, Alcide De Gasperi died on 19 August 1954, invoking the name of Jesus.

179. Quoted in CATTI DE GASPERI, M. R., *De Gasperi uomo solo*, op. cit., p. 415.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'De Gasperi', is located in the top right corner of the page.

Leggiamo

Essential Bibliography

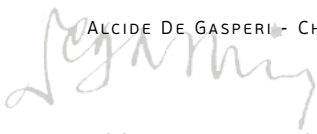


The papers of Alcide De Gasperi, retained by his family, are archived at the Historic Archives of the European Union in Fiesole at the European University Institute. The correspondence preserved at Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi in Rome, were also submitted to the same Historic Archives of the European Union. Many documents are also preserved in various public and private archives, Italian and foreign. For an introduction, visit the site www.degasperi.net, maintained by the Luigi Sturzo Institute in Rome, which also allows many documents to be browsed online. At the site of Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi in Trento (www.degasperitn.it) you can also find reproductions of the journals that De Gasperi headed: *La Voce Cattolica* [The Catholic Voice] (1905-1906), *Il Trentino* (1906-1915) and *Il nuovo Trentino* [The New Trentino] (1918-1926).

A broad scientific bibliography of Alcide De Gasperi, which also covers the less studied period of his life, is published by Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi, Rome and by Rubbettino (Alcide De Gasperi, 3 vols., Soveria Mannelli, 2009), with writings by G.B. RE, P. POMBENI, A. CANAVERO, G. VECCHIO, F. MALGERI and P.L. BALLINI. Important contributions are offered by the works of D. PREDA, Alcide De Gasperi, European federalist, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005 and P. CRAVERI, De Gasperi, Il Mulino, Bologna 2006.

Interesting reflections offered by the collection of lessons by De Gasperi held in Pieve Tesino from 2004 to 2013, now kept at G. TOGNON (ed.) *On De Gasperi. Ten lessons from history and politics*, Fondazione Bruno Kessler, writings by P. Scoppola, L. Elia, U. De Siervo, J.-D. Durand, S. Romano, I. Rogger, F. Traniello, G. Vacca, S. Zamagni, V. Zamagni and P. Castagnetti. In the same volume, F. Malgeri keeps an updated historical record on De Gasperi (pp.213-251). From 2009 Fondazione Alcide De Gasperi, Rome publishes *Quaderni degasperiani per la storia dell'Italia contemporanea* [Notes on De Gasperi for contemporary Italian history], ed. P.L. Ballini, of which now six volumes have come out, which contain important studies on particular aspects on the age of De Gasperi.

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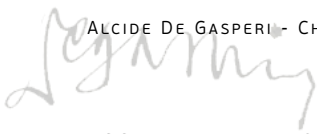
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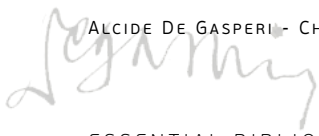
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NOTE

NOTE

NOTE

The man who ruled the fortunes of Italy between 1945 and 1953, taking the country out of the serious political, economic and social crisis of Fascism that precipitated from the dictatorship, the war and the defeat, lived a little less than the first 40 years of his life within the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire.

He therefore came from an experience that set him apart from other Catholic politicians, not having lived through the dramatic tension between the Liberal Italian State and the Church. He was an extremely able politician, but was also a man of faith who began his day by meditating on the sacred Scriptures and drawing strength and inspiration from them for his public activity.

Arrested and imprisoned by Fascism, during those years he earned a living by working at the Vatican Library, where he shaped his political culture and prepared for the difficult tasks of the post-war period. Amid many difficulties and misunderstandings, he knew how to restore Italy to the International Community on a plane of legal equality. He defended the secular state and always fought to defend democracy. To avoid being crushed a second time in Italy he acted with strength, but always within the scope of the fundamental principles guaranteed by the constitution.

His experience in the Parliament in Vienna, in contact with men of all nationalities, made him insensitive to nationalistic claims and predisposed him to favour and support the process of European integration in the period after the Second World War, to which he made a fundamental contribution.

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