

Metternich and the Italian League Myth in 1833¹

Miroslav Šedivý

It would be very difficult to find in history a man who was the subject of so many imputations as the Austrian Chancellor, Klemens Wenzel Prince of Metternich, responsible for Austria's foreign policy for most of the first half of the 19th century. The surprisingly low number of admirable scholarly revisionist works published in recent decades cannot repair in full the damage to his reputation caused by the rumours raised by his contemporaries and blindly adopted by large numbers of nationalist, liberal, left-wing or simply superficial historians, unfortunately not only in the more distant past since some of these myths persist to the present time.²

Since the Apennines belonged to Austria's sphere of influence after 1815 and this Great Power was forced to play an active role in this part of the Continent, unsurprisingly many of the false accusations raised against Metternich were connected with his Italian policy, and not once with his effort to increase his influence over the local rulers' decision making through his idea of an Italian league (confederation). He had actually conceived of this plan at the close of the Napoleonic Wars and revived it again several years later at the Congress of Verona in 1822. It was often presumed that, from time to time until his political fall in 1848, he wished to implement it, a suspicion usually held by the diplomats and journalists in France which acted as Austria's rival in the peninsula. As this paper attempts to prove, Metternich, a highly pragmatic statesman, actually abandoned this idea in 1822 as unfeasible, and the rumours which occurred afterwards were generally unfounded like the one from the year of 1833 which is the subject of this brief survey.

To be able to understand why the rumour about Metternich's plan for an Italian league occurred in 1833 it is necessary to return to the last phase of the Napoleonic Wars when the destruction of Napoleon I's power was simply a question of a short

1 This paper has been written as a part of the research project GA15-04973S financed by the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR).

2 From the admirable monographs dealing with great skill and impartiality with Metternich's foreign policy it is necessary to mention R. D. BILLINGER, Jr., *Metternich and the German Question: State's Rights and Federal Duties, 1820-1834*, Newark / London / Toronto 1991; E. E. KRAEHE, *Metternich's German Policy*, 2 Vols., Princeton 1963 and 1983; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich*, 2 Vols., Washington 1979 and 1989.



time and various plans for the political reconstruction of Europe emerged. It was generally agreed on by the rulers, statesmen and diplomats that Italy, never politically united since the fall of the old Roman Empire, was to continue as such and most of the countries which had existed before the French Revolution were to be restored. According to the conclusions of the Congress of Vienna, Austria was to play the role of their protector against an eventual revival of France's hegemony experienced before 1815.³

For Metternich this responsibility, of course something which he had aspired to from the very beginning, implied the necessity to increase Austria's strength in the peninsula as much as possible to establish a solid operative power against an external (France) as well as internal (revolution) threats. Since he did not desire more Italian territories than Austria actually obtained at the Congress of Vienna — Lombardy and Venetia, the best way to achieve this goal was the placement of the Italian countries under a supranational body as had happened in the case of Germany: the German princes were formally independent but, at the same moment, were joined by mutual federal rights and duties in the German Confederation, whose principal role was the preservation of the external as well as internal security of Germany and the independence and territorial integrity of its members. The considerable improvement of Germany's military structure to what had existed before 1806 when the Holy Roman Empire collapsed was advantageous for the Confederation and also for Europe: it offered sufficient security to the former but simultaneously made an aggressive war against its neighbours impossible. The Confederation can thus be labelled as a defensive state of Europe lacking imperialistic designs.⁴

It would have been extremely advantageous for Austria to establish a similar confederation in Italy. Given her Lombard-Venetian possessions, she could become a member of it herself and, owing to her overwhelming power over all other Italian countries, she could assume the role of a formal leader much like in Germany where the Austrian emperor presided over the Confederation. For the first time, Metternich negotiated the plan of an "Italian league" under Austria's presidency from 1815 to 1816, but the hunger of Italian monarchs for their sovereignty and their unwillingness to limit it by any kind of obligations made the whole plan unfeasible; with the support of France and Russia they were able to reject the idea that would make them, as they feared, Austrian satellites. In 1820–1821, when the revolutions broke out in Naples and Piedmont and Austria had to crush them by force, Metternich renewed the project of a league that would ensure the better cooperation of Italian rulers against rebellions and would provide Austria with a more effective control over their anti-revolutionary struggle. Consequently, these two years witnessed Metternich's new offensive for closer political ties among Italian countries though he did not dare to propose openly an Italian confederation. Instead, he suggested the establishment of a general police commission in Milan or Parma where each Italian country would be represented, in both cases clearly under the leadership of Austria coordinating the fight against revolutionary "sects". This was to be the first step to a more united cooperation of the Italian rulers subjected to certain legal obligations, probably the first step to an

3 J. A. DAVIS, *Italy in the Nineteenth Century, 1796–1900*, Oxford 2000, p. 50.

4 D. G. WOLF, *Deutschland mitten in Europa*, Hamburg 1992, p. 45.

Italian confederation. His effort led to the negotiations at the Congress of Verona in 1822 where, however, the Papal States and Tuscany openly and Piedmont secretly opposed this project and finally thwarted it for the same reason they had forestalled the creation of the league several years earlier.⁵

Giving these diplomatic failures from 1815 to 1821, Austria's predominance in Italy during the whole Pre-March Period was based upon less solid footing: her military superiority, family ties with the local courts, a common interest to hinder the threat of revolution, and mutual defensive treaties concluded with the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Tuscany in 1815, Piedmont in 1831, Parma and Modena in 1847. However, these bilateral agreements were flawed in one important aspect: the small Italian countries always expected military assistance from Austria when a revolution broke out in their territories and they got it but, on the other hand, they displayed considerable unwillingness to fulfil their own commitments vis-a-vis this Great Power when a war with France seemed to be imminent, like after the July Revolution in 1830 or during the Rhine Crisis in 1840.⁶

There was one more important reason for Metternich to regret the absence of a league in Italy: its existence could improve Austria's chances of influencing the internal situations in the Italian countries, something extremely desirable regarding their urgent need of administrative, economic and judicial reforms and the predominant aversion of their governments to implement them. Since Metternich understood that a war against revolution could not be merely waged by arms but also by the improvement of the people's living conditions, something necessary to deprive the revolutionary thinkers of mass support, he strongly advised the rulers to implement administrative changes, thereby appeasing their own subjects and strengthening the pillars of their absolutist regimes. Unfortunately for him, the rulers' ears usually remained deaf to his far-sighted advice, bringing thus more and more Italians dissatisfied with their living conditions to the throngs of political opponents desiring fundamental political changes aimed at the issue of constitutions.⁷

Despite the negatives caused by the non-existence of a federalised Italy, Metternich never repeated his attempt to enforce such an option as he had tried to do in 1821. It is true that, from time to time, he discussed the topic with Italian diplomats and he seemed to tempt their respective governments to accept a closer cooperation with the cabinet in Vienna, often, however, rejecting the idea of any kind of Italian

5 A. M. BETTANINI, *Un disegno di confederazione italiana nella politica internazionale della Restaurazione*, in: *Studi di storia dei Trattati e Politica internazionale*, Padova 1939, pp. 3–50; F. J. COPPA, *The Origins of the Italian Wars of Independence*, London / New York 1992, pp. 9–12; K. GROßMANN, *Metternichs Plan eines italienischen Bundes*, in: *Historische Blätter*, Bd. 4, 1931, pp. 37–76; A. J. REINERMAN, *Metternich, Italy and the Congress of Verona, 1821–1822*, in: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 1971, pp. 266–287; DAVIS, p. 52.

6 V. SELLIN, *Il mezzogiorno nella diplomazia europea: 1806–1848*, in: G. GALASSO (Ed.), *Mezzogiorno, Risorgimento e Unità d'Italia. Atti del convegno Roma, 18, 19 e 20 maggio 2011*, Roma 2014, p. 166; M. ŠEDIVÝ, *Italy during the Rhine Crisis of 1840*, in: *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2015, pp. 486–504.

7 A. J. REINERMAN, *Metternich and Reform: The Case of the Papal State, 1814–1848*, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 1970, pp. 524–548; SELLIN, p. 170.

league or even denying that he would ever have tried to implement one in the Apennines. Regardless of his predominant passivity in this matter, he was often accused of seriously trying to tempt the Italian rulers into forming such a league, mostly by the French, which was a logical outcome of the struggle between France and the Habsburgs for supremacy over Italy. Although the threat became less imminent after 1815 owing to the former's defeat in the Napoleonic Wars, the French elites continued to consider the Apennines as France's natural sphere of influence and Austria as her traditional rival. After the success of the July Revolution in 1830, this unfriendly attitude became more obvious and France began to play a more active role in this part of the Continent, attempting to destroy Austria's political supremacy and increase her own control. The most evident proof of this more competitive policy was the French occupation of Ancona in the Papal States as a response to Austria's military intervention against a revolution in the Papal Legations at the beginning of 1832.⁸

Unsurprisingly, the French diplomatic correspondence of the early 1830s is abundant in the evaluations of Austria's Italian policy, her power and the "revelations" of her intrigues, often connected with the alleged attempts to enforce the establishment of an Italian league led by the cabinet in Vienna, something regarded in Paris as a vital threat to France's interests. Predictably, the French sprang to attention when the news about such a project started to arrive in Paris from early 1833: in February the king of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand II, told a French ambassador in Naples that the Duke of Modena, being a close ally of Austria, had proposed to him the creation of a league of south-Italian states but he, the king, had rejected it; at the same time the French foreign minister, Victor the Duke of Broglie, warned his ambassador in Naples of Austria's effort to create such a confederation with the assistance of the pope; in September of the same year, the king of the Sardinian Kingdom, Charles Albert, told a French representative in Turin that Austria had wished to gain his support for this idea but he had refused it as incompatible with his sovereignty.⁹

The suspicion provoked repeated interrogations of Ferdinand II by the French chargé d'affaires in Naples, Joseph Durant de Mareuil, who was repeatedly assured by the king that Austria had not submitted a proposal for the league and such an option was unacceptable to him; the king admitted that an Italian league could be useful to the local rulers for strengthening their security and independence though this could be achieved only under the condition that Austria would not be a member of it. The problem was, as the king openly declared in late August, that this Power was too strong "for the league to be formed either with or without her".¹⁰ Mareuil was satisfied with this answer and merely warned the king that France could never accept

8 M. GISCI, *Un episodio dell rivalità franco-austriaca nello Stato Pontificio*, in: *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, Vol. 17, 1931, pp. 365–447; N. RODOLICO, *Un disegno di Lega italiana del 1833*, in: *Archivio storico italiano*, Vol. 93, 1935, pp. 232–233; D. LAVEN, *Austria's Policy Reconsidered: Revolution and Reform in Restoration Italy*, in: *Modern Italy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1997, p. 19.

9 Latour-Maubourg to Broglie, Naples, 27 February 1833, in: A. SAITTA, *Le relazioni diplomatiche fra la Francia e il Regno delle due Sicilie, II serie: 1830–1848: 25 Agosto 1830 — 24 Dicembre 1835*, Vol. 1, Roma 1966, p. 229; RODOLICO, pp. 233–236.

10 Mareuil to Broglie, Naples, 28 August 1833, in: SAITTA, p. 267.

Austria's patronage over Italy. However, the king's words placated the French only for a short time, and Mareuil began to suspect the Austrians of plotting again by the latest from late November. Shortly before Christmas, he reported that Austria's plan for the Duke of Modena's control over a part of police and military troops of the Italian countries had obtained support in Turin, Florence and Rome, though Ferdinand II answered that no such a plan had been offered to him and if it were, he would refuse it. Mareuil's suspicion made Broglie rather nervous and engaged the French press with Austria's alleged plan of a league, but no detail was gained either from any Italian capitals or from Vienna, and nor it could be, simply for the reason that no such plan for an Italian confederation under Austria's leadership was contemplated by Metternich at that time.¹¹

The source of the whole plan could not be found in Vienna but in Naples, where young Ferdinand II, ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies since 1830, strongly resented foreign influence, especially Austria's; his attitude can be labelled as a real Austrophobia. He wished to be master of his own house, and even not to be seriously bound by the treaty obligations to Austria which he had inherited from his predecessors: in 1831 he made no secret of the fact that in the case of an Austro-French war in Italy he would not provide the former with his troops as he was obliged to do according to the treaty of 1815 but would remain neutral. Of all the Italian rulers he also had the greatest affection for French King Louis Philippe, who was the husband of his aunt, Maria Amalia of Naples and Sicily. However, he also did not want to be a puppet in France's hands and, moreover, he disliked her constitutionalist regime and revolutionary rhetoric.¹² What he wished was to play the two Great Powers against each other and make the best of their rivalry for the independence of his own kingdom, as is evident from these words: *"The French have no common sense! By encouraging revolution among the Italians they are acting against their own interests because they are simply drawing in the Austrians; the end result will be that they will crush every partial revolution and the whole peninsula will be delivered into their hands. I have told the French that they would do better to support order in Italy so that in the event of war, the southern States, banded together, may be strong enough to drive the Austrians beyond the Po, which is what the French really want."*¹³

This goal was closely connected with Ferdinand II's personal ambitions. He ruled the largest Italian country and, consequently, he wished to play a more significant

11 Königsmarck to Frederick William III, Naples, 13 Dec. 1833, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, HA III, MdA I, 5589; Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 21 Feb. 1834, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, (henceforth HHStA), Staatenabteilungen (henceforth StA), Neapel 82; Mareuil to Broglie, Naples, 29 June 1833, 28 August, 30 November, 19 and 30 December, 30 January and 13 March 1834, in: SAITTA, pp. 244–246, 265–266, 292, 295–296, 299, 306–307, 310; Broglie to Mareuil, Paris, 30 July, 23 September and 9 December 1833, 8 January and 20 February 1834, in: SAITTA, pp. 254–255, 273, 294, 303, 309.

12 G. CONIGLIO, *Orientamenti della politica estera napoletana nel 1832–34*, in: Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane, Vol. 73, 1953, pp. 311–313; E. di RIENZO, *Il Regno delle Due Sicilie e le Potenze europee 1830–1861*, Soveria Mannelli 2012, pp. 20–23.

13 Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 16 November 1832, HHStA, StA, Neapel 79. See also H. ACTON, *The Last Bourbons of Naples (1825–1861)*, London 1961, p. 56.

role in the Apennines. This was clearly demonstrated first in the early 1830s by his plan to increase his army to 80,000 men, a number absolutely beyond the financial means of his kingdom, and second at the end of 1832 by his personal letter to Charles Albert inviting him to agree on the means for the settlement protecting the Italian countries against the negative consequences of the Great Powers' interference, "*in order to repel foreign influence on Italian affairs and prevent the sovereigns of Italy from becoming involved in problems against their interests*".¹⁴ Although he assured the French ambassador in February 1833 that he was against any idea of an Italian league, in the autumn he proposed its creation by constituting a defensive alliance guaranteeing the security of each member against the revolutionaries. He seemed to be motivated towards this step by the pope's suggestion that summer of a gathering of the Italian rulers with the aim of preserving order in the peninsula, a gathering that never met and in which Ferdinand II refused to participate. In the king's project of the league there was no place for Austria despite her possession of Lombardy and Venetia; he wanted the unified Italian countries to be strong enough against revolutionary attempts that they would no longer need any foreign military support.¹⁵ He was rumoured to have told Mareuil in reaction to the temptation to become France's ally in the event of a general war that "*if a war occurs, he would be advised in his own interests to maintain neutrality and in no way to meddle in the quarrels of the Great Powers; as for the joint efforts of the Italian sovereigns for getting rid of all foreign influence, the situation would be different but it would involve France as much as Austria*".¹⁶

The proceeding of the young Neapolitan king came as no surprise to Metternich, who had started to distrust him soon after his accession to the throne. Together with his envoy in Naples, Count Ludwig von Lebzelttern, the Austrian chancellor suspected Ferdinand II of an inclination towards liberalism and France. He also knew of the king's readiness to avoid his treaty obligations in the case of an Austro-French war. When Ferdinand II sent his letter to Charles Albert at the end of 1832, its anti-Austrian bias came as no shock to the cabinet in Vienna, especially when it was already known there that during a personal meeting between the two sovereigns earlier in the year Ferdinand II had not concealed from Charles Albert his fear of Austria's predominance in Italy and, at the same moment, his doubts about France's alleged ambitious plans in the peninsula. The proposal to Charles Albert, however, was unlikely to disturb Metternich since the Sardinian king responded to it in early 1833 evasively in a polite, but in diplomatic language obviously negative way.¹⁷

14 Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 20 December 1832, HHStA, StA, Neapel 79. See also AC-TON, p. 72.

15 Lützwow to Metternich, Rome, 18 September 1833, HHStA, Staatskanzlei (henceforth StK), Rom 49; R. MOSCATI, *Il rapporti austro-napoletani nei primi anni del regno di Ferdinando II*, in: Archivio storico per le province napoletane, Vol. 25, 1939, pp. 154–156; RODOLICO, pp. 240–241.

16 Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 6 September 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81.

17 Bombelles to Metternich, Genoa, 30 November 1832, Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 16 November and 27 December 1832, HHStA, StA, Neapel 79; Lebzelttern to Metternich, Naples, 5 April 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 80; Metternich to Lebzelttern, Vienna, 3 May 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 82.

During 1833 Metternich's distrust was further fuelled by Lebzeltern's reports. The Austrian envoy connected Ferdinand II's plan to raise the Neapolitan army to 80,000 men with the king's ambitions in Italy, in other words his desire to assume the role of an Italian leader, even with the dream of becoming "*the sole Italian sovereign*".¹⁸ Although the latter report was exaggerated, the correctness of the former was proved in the autumn by Ferdinand II's idea of the league; since Charles Albert had rejected his first offer contained in the personal letter from 1832, he addressed his proposal now not to Turin but to Rome. This step was soon revealed to Metternich by his representatives both in Rome and Turin who were able to get the information unofficially before the middle of November. Metternich logically disliked the project for its obvious anti-Austrian nature; he could hardly agree with anything what would decrease Austria's influence over Italy.¹⁹ He was convinced, and correctly so, that Ferdinand II's mention of the need to get rid of foreign influence referred especially to Austria: "*He [Ferdinand II] is trying to form a confederation of which he hopes to become the leader, hence his anxiety to increase his army to 80,000 men, a figure too large for the means and requirements of his State not to doubt the purity of his intentions. [...] It is enough to know that France is not opposed to Ferdinand's ideas to conclude that these are not aimed against France but against Vienna.*"²⁰

At the end of November 1833, the Neapolitan foreign minister, Prince Cassaro, surprised Lebzeltern when he officially conveyed to him the plan of the king "*to establish an accord among the Italian sovereigns with the aim of opposing by means of a common defensive policy the effects of [revolutionary] propaganda and to agree on the position and proceeding to assume towards foreign powers which would like to support the advances of the sectarian troublemakers*".²¹ Ferdinand II wished to know Metternich's opinion of the plan. The chancellor responded in a typically diplomatic way saying that he could not assess the plan without further details. Since the project actually was rather vague, this explanation seemed to be sincere but this was naturally not the only reason. Metternich continued to distrust Ferdinand II and he even wondered whether the king was not advised in his plan by France. Therefore, the chancellor used the request for further information to temporise: he bet on the negative attitudes of the Italian monarchs, much like Lebzeltern who was convinced that the project was too vague to be accepted by them and who assumed the role of an attendant and did nothing in Naples to thwart it since he found it unnecessary.²²

This presumption proved to be entirely well-founded. The Italian rulers strongly distrusted the designs of the Neapolitan king whose ambitions, pro-French tendencies and incorrectly reputed inclination to liberalism did not meet with much favour

18 Lebzeltern to Metternich Naples, 12 and 26 July 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81.

19 Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 20 September, 6 and 15 November 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81; Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 16 and 23 November 1833, HHStA, StK, Rom 49; Metternich to Lebzeltern, Vienna, 29 November 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 82; RODOLICO, p. 241.

20 ACTON, p. 72.

21 Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 29 November 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81.

22 Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 29 November and 13 December 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81; Metternich to Lebzeltern, Vienna, 13 December 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 82.

among them. In Rome this mistrust was connected with Ferdinand II's well-known desire to obtain some Papal territories, especially the enclaves in the Neapolitan domain like Benevento which he would probably attempt to take by force in the case of a general war. The pope's final answer was negative though written in the same evasive manner as Charles Albert's response at the beginning of 1833: he did not openly reject the project but asked for more details about the obligations connected with this union. Charles Albert continued to be sceptical regarding cooperation with Ferdinand II and showed no sympathy for the plan of the league when he learnt of it; in his case there was another reason for this negative attitude: since Charles Albert was also ambitious and wanted to play a significant role in Italian affairs himself, he regarded Ferdinand II as the second "cock in the same backyard." Since in the event of a general war the Sardinian Kingdom, namely Piedmont, would be the first place attacked by France during her invasion of Italy, the loyalty of other Italian countries was of great significance for him but, like Metternich, he highly suspected Ferdinand II of having a pro-French attitude in such a case.²³

Since Francis IV of Modena also rejected the league and no support was gained in Tuscany either, it was clear in January 1834 that Ferdinand II's plan had entirely failed. The king himself was well aware of this fact, and when Lebzeltern communicated Metternich's request for a more detailed outline of the project later in the month, the king refused to give one with the rather surprising explanation "that it seemed that from all quarters everyone wanted to attribute to him the initiative for this project, whereas it was up to the Holy Father [written by Metternich in the margin: "!" — M. Š.] that he [the pope — M. Š.] was the man who should explain his ideas, so much the more so since he was the sovereign who was in the greatest need of support, [...] that as for him (the king of Naples) he was ready to take part in the proposed plan if such a plan was still desirable or to no longer think about it if one was not, given the fact that he found himself at the bottom of a sack (Italy) and possessed enough forces to ensure his own security and to protect himself against any dangers whatsoever".²⁴ Lebzeltern did not believe this explanation and correctly understood these words to be a manoeuvre aimed at abandoning the whole plan while saving face — a proposal that met with rejection was regarded in diplomatic circles as a serious defeat of its author, something Ferdinand II naturally wanted to avoid. With this lie the king actually planned to be free of responsibility for the project and escape further discussions on this topic, which were so annoying for him. Since no one else wanted to continue in them, in early 1834 the negotiations were over.²⁵

This was not the only lie Ferdinand II used to remove any hints that might reveal the fact that the idea of the league had originated with him. Dissatisfied with his

²³ Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 9 August and 27 December 1833, HHStA, StA, Neapel 81; Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 7, 14, 21 and 28 December 1833, HHStA, StK, Rom 49; F. LEMNI, *Carlo Alberto e Francesco IV. Lettere inedite*, in: *Il Risorgimento Italiano*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1927, p. 311; F. LEMNI, *La politica estera di Carlo Alberto nei suoi primi anni di regno*, Firenze 1928, pp. 88–93; REINERMANN, Vol. 2, p. 227; RODOLICO, p. 242.

²⁴ Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 24 January 1834, HHStA, StA, Neapel 82.

²⁵ Lebzeltern to Metternich, Naples, 10 and 24 January, 7 February 1834, HHStA, StA, Neapel 82.

failure, he accused Austria of being the culprit and claimed that the plan was offered to him by this Great Power and that he rejected it. This lie was easily accepted by the French always suspicious of Metternich's plots in Italy and, therefore, always willing to accept a mere rumour as fact, all the more since in Turin Charles Albert did not conceal his conviction that Ferdinand II's proposal had been prepared in Vienna. Consequently, in Paris it was widely believed that Austria was the author of the plan and that it was Ferdinand II's opposition that thwarted it.²⁶

As seen above, nothing could be further from the truth. Metternich in no way incited the plan of the league in 1833 and he did not even play a particularly active role in the discussions about it. He did not even have to go to any great lengths to forestall it; he did not hide from the Italian rulers his doubts and he also ensured them that they could count on the support of conservative Powers — Austria, Prussia and Russia — against a revolution, making thus the need of an Italian confederation less urgent, but actually the mistrust of these rulers towards Ferdinand II and their wish to keep their own sovereignty intact entirely sufficed for the fiasco caused by the Neapolitan king.²⁷

The whole affair offers an example of how easy it was to incriminate Metternich and portray him as a cunning intriguer hiding his real aims from the eyes of Europe and the world. The Austrian chancellor naturally was no saint but it must be acknowledged that a considerable number of the allegations made against him are entirely unfounded or exaggerated, a fact that must be remembered by all historians dealing with this man's character and actions.

METTERNICH AND THE ITALIAN LEAGUE MYTH IN 1833

ABSTRACT

Based upon the thorough research of primary archival as well as published sources and scholar literature, the article deals with the rumour of Metternich's alleged project for an Italian league in 1833, revealing the falsity of this imputation and proving that even if such a project actually existed at that time, not the Austrian chancellor but the king of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand II, was its author.

KEYWORDS

Metternich; Austria; Italian League; Italian Confederation; 1833; Ferdinand II of Naples

Miroslav Šedivý | Department of Historical Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Tylova 18, 306 14, Plzeň, Czech Republic, sedivym@khv.zcu.cz

²⁶ ACTON, p. 72; MOSCATI, pp. 159-169; RODOLICO, p. 243.

²⁷ ACTON, p. 72; RIENZO, p. 24.