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“ITALIAN SCANDALS” IN ODESA (ON THE HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN CONSULATE GENERAL ACTIVITIES IN ODESA IN 1924 – 1929)

Abstract. The purpose of this article is to analyse the Italian Consulate General activities in Odesa in 1924 – 1929, as well as to examine the methods of work of the United State Political Administration, the Main Intelligence Administration, the Comintern, MODR in forming the Soviet agent network of the ‘Italian direction’ in Odesa. The research methodology is based on a comprehensive approach, which is founded on the principles of historicism, scientific rigour, analysis, synthesis, generalisation, and prosopographic methods. Firstly, the scientific novelty of the article consists in reconstructing the overall picture of the consular office establishment, its staff, functions and daily activities; secondly, in highlighting the dramatic events and political scandals associated with the Italian Consulate General in Odesa in

1924 – 1929. **Conclusions.** In the 1920s the Soviet-Italian relations were shaped by a contradictory combination of economic pragmatism and ideological confrontation. Italy was one of the first major European powers to recognise the USSR, which opened up opportunities for active trade and cooperation in the field of transport and maritime shipping. For the Soviet leadership, these ties had a dual purpose: to meet the country's economic needs and, at the same time, to use diplomatic channels as a cover for the activities of an agent network aimed at supporting the 'world revolution', especially in Italy, where revolutionary sentiments after World War I were still quite strong. In response, Italian diplomatic missions in the USSR, in particular the Consulate General of Italy in Odessa, were actively involved not only in routine consular affairs, but also in counterintelligence. Their efforts were aimed at countering the spread of Soviet propaganda among Italian sailors and political emigrants, monitoring visits to the Interclub, and protecting Italy's national interests in the Soviet environment. The so-called 'Italian scandals' are indicative in this context: tragic events such as the murder of Italian Vice-Consul S. Cozzio, or numerous conflicts surrounding Odessa Interclub, which show that behind official diplomatic cooperation there was a tense struggle between two totalitarian regimes – Bolshevik and Fascist. This struggle had not only a local but also an international dimension, as it reflected the clash of two ideological projects – communist and fascist – for influence in Europe in the interwar period.

Keywords: Italy, USSR, Ukrainian SSR, Odessa, Consulate General, Interclub, agents.

“ІТАЛІЙСЬКІ СКАНДАЛИ” В ОДЕСІ (ДО ІСТОРІЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ ІТАЛІЙСЬКОГО ГЕНЕРАЛЬНОГО КОНСУЛЬСТВА В ОДЕСІ УПРОДОВЖ 1924 – 1929 рр.)

Анотація. *Метою статті* є аналіз діяльності італійського генерального консульства в Одесі упродовж 1924 – 1929 рр., а також розгляд методів роботи ОДПУ, ГРУ, Комінтерну, МОДР із формуванням радянської агентурної мережі “італійського напрямку” в Одесі. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтуються на комплексному підході, в основі якого принцип історизму, науковості, аналіз, синтез, узагальнення та просопографічний методи. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає, по-перше, у реконструюванні загальної картини щодо відкриття консульської установи, її штату, функцій та повсякденної діяльності; по-друге, у висвітленні драматичних подій і політичних скандалів, що були пов'язані із італійським генеральним консульством в Одесі упродовж 1924 – 1929 рр. **Висновки.** Радянсько-італійські відносини у 1920-х рр. формувалися в атмосфері суперечливого поєднання економічного прагматизму та ідеологічної конfrontації. Італія була однією з перших великих європейських держав, які визнали СРСР, що відкрило можливості для активної торгівлі, співпраці у сфері транспорту та морських перевезень. Для радянського керівництва ці зв'язки мали подвійну мету: забезпечити господарські потреби країни та воночес використати дипломатичні канали як прикриття для діяльності агентурної мережі, спрямованої на підтримку “світової революції”, особливо на території самої Італії, де революційні настрої після Першої світової ще були досить сильними. У відповідь італійські дипломатичні представництва в СРСР, зокрема генеральне консульство Італії в Одесі, вели активну роботу не лише у звичних консульських справах, але й у сфері контррозвідки. Їхні зусилля були спрямовані на протидію поширенню радянської пропаганди серед італійських моряків і політичних емігрантів, контроль за відбідуванням “Інтерклубу” та захист національних інтересів Італії в умовах радянського середовища. Показовими у цьому контексті є так звані “італійські скандали”: трагічні події, як-от убивство італійського віц-консула С. Коцціо, або численні конфлікти навколо одеського “Інтерклубу”, які свідчать, що за офіційною дипломатичною співпрацею приховувалася напружена боротьба між двома тоталітарними режимами – більшовицьким і фашистським. Ця боротьба мала не лише локальний, але й міжнародний вимір, оскільки відображала зіткнення обох ідеологічних проектів – комуністичного та фашистського – за вплив у Європі в міжвоєнний період.

Ключові слова: Італія, СРСР, УCPP, Одеса, генеральне консульство, Інтерклуб, агентура.

Problem Statement. The negotiation process on the normalization of the Soviet-Italian relations, which began in 1923, ended with the de jure recognition of the USSR by Italy on February 7, 1924. On the same day, the countries signed the agreement “On

Trade and Navigation” (Dogovor o torgovle i moreplavani, 1928), which consolidated the intensification of trade and economic relations between them. Fascist Italy became one of the main and reliable trading partners for the Soviet dictatorship. The majority of merchant ships that called at the Soviet ports were Italian in the second half of the 1920s. Thus, in 1926, 82 out of 131 foreign ships called at Odesa port (State Archives of Odesa Region – SAOR, f. P-7, d. 1, c. 2206).

However, the USSR leadership dreamed not only of establishing mutually beneficial trade relations with Western countries, but also of the “world revolution” and the capture of these countries. Therefore, Italy, which in 1919 – 1920 experienced a shocking revolutionary upheaval – “the red biennium”, was best suited for the realization of this goal. In order to prepare for a new Italian revolution, the ODPU, the Comintern, the International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters (MODR), and other Soviet hybrid warfare units created “Italian sections” within their secret structures, which conducted “active development” of Italian diplomatic institutions in the USSR. The Soviet citizens of Italian origin and Italian citizens who found themselves on the Soviet territory were monitored. The “International Organization for Aid to Revolutionary Fighters” used Italian political émigrés in the USSR as potential agents of “The Red Revolution in Italy”. Given this, the Italian Consulate General clerks in Odesa tried to recruit the Soviet agents, thereby minimizing the actions of the USSR’s special services.

Review of Recent Research Papers and Publications. The topic of the activities of Italian consulates and the Italian “presence” in the USSR and the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s has not been developed by the Ukrainian historians for a long time. The revived interest in studying the general presence of foreign consular institutions in the territory of Soviet Ukraine contributed to the emergence of certain developments regarding the Italian consulates in Odesa and Kharkiv. Among these, it is worth highlighting the monographic study by I. Matiash (Matiash, 2020), scientific articles by L. Vovchuk (Vovchuk, 2023), V. Savchenko and O. Tryhub (Savchenko, & Tryhub, 2019), which highlight the process of establishing the Italian Consulate in Odesa, the consular institution composition, the functions and powers of the consular institution staff.

No less important are the works of foreign researchers: A. Makolkin (Makolkin, 2004; Makolkin, 2007), which examined the life of the Italian vice-consul in Odesa, Silvio Cozzio; A. Graziosi (Graziosi, 1990), O. Dundovich, F. Gori and E. Guercetti (Dundovich, & Gori, 2009; Dundovich, Gori, & Guercetti, 2004). We should highlight the article by K. Solano, which debunks “the Soviet myths” regarding Italian political immigrants (Solano, 2020).

Despite this, the issue still has a number of unfilled gaps that require further research, especially regarding the intelligence activities of representatives of the Italian Consulate General in Odesa and the counterintelligence of the Soviet special services. Therefore, the **purpose** of this article is to study the activities of the Italian Consulate General in Odesa in 1924 – 1929, as well as to highlight the methods of work of the ODPU, GRU, Comintern, MODR in forming the Soviet agent network of the “Italian direction” in Odesa.

Research Results.

Establishment of the Consulate General and its Staff.

On April 13, 1924, according to Royal Decree No. 729, the Consulate General of the Kingdom of Italy in Odesa was established, which belonged to Class 2. Since there was no suitable building before the arrival of the head of the Consulate General, the Italian Consulate General was initially located in the London Hotel (11 Feldman Boulevard, nowadays –

Prymorsky Boulevard). Only a few months later, the consulate was located in the Lerche House (5 Feldman Boulevard).

The consular district of the Consulate General of Italy in Odesa included the territory not only of Odesa region, but the entire Ukrainian SSR, Don (Rostov-on-Don) and Kuban-Black Sea (Krasnodar) regions, the Republic of Crimea and the Adygea (Circassian) Autonomous Region (Vovchuk, 2023, pp. 167–168).

The first head of the Italian Consulate General in Odesa was a 45-year-old bachelor Vincenzo Galanti, who was officially appointed to this position on March 31, 1924. He came from an aristocratic family and at the time of his arrival in Odesa was the consul in Persia. The Vice-Consul was appointed to a 67-year-old Silvio Cozzio, who had held the same position since 1904, but his activities were brought to naught during the diplomatic uncertainty. A native of Tiflis, he had relatives in both Zinoviytsk and Odesa – a married niece with whom he lived. In the Consulate General there was also had a secretary-archivist, whose position was held by a native Odesa citizen, Giovanni Boschi, and Georgy Donati, an employee for assignments, who was mainly engaged in issuing various kinds of certificates for visiting Italians (The Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine – SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 8, 8rev.).

Since July 1924, a new Italian Consul General in Odesa had been Provana del Sabbione, who was issued an exequatur on September 24, 1924. However, he and his family arrived at their new destination no earlier than July 1925, as confirmed by V. Galanti's telegram to him in early November 1924, in which he inquired about the date of Provany's arrival in Odesa, to which the latter replied that he had not yet had an official appointment. According to documents from the State Administration of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), V. Galanti continued to perform the functions of the Italian Consul General in Odesa in January 1925: "In mid-January [1925], Tubino, the vice-consul in Kharkiv, arrived and brought officially received data on coal exports. V. Galanti officially received data on the throughput capacity of Odesa port and on the installation of a radio station. Cozzio was supposed to verify the indicated data unofficially". "[In early March 1925]...the correspondent of the Italian consulate in Novorossiysk, Gino-Bia, sent Consul Galanti data on the import and export of Novorossiysk port...". Only on June 15, 1925, Galanti officially left Odesa, having received an appointment to head the Italian Consulate General in Tiflis (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 17, 21, 28, 33, 34, 36).

The USSR Supreme Soviet, in announcing the appointment of Provan del Sabbione, clearly spelled out the rights and privileges enjoyed by the newly appointed head of the consular institution. For example, it was stated that he had the right to cooperate with all local Soviet institutions located within the consular district. But this cooperation could be organized exclusively through the mediation of the Agent of the People's Commissariat in Odesa. Provana del Sabbione could be detained only by court decision. Preliminary arrest was provided for on condition of initiation of legal proceedings for actions that were within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of the Union and the Republics. He was exempt from personal, in-kind, national and local taxes. And the last thing concerned the inviolability of the consular office and archives, which were not subject to search, inspection, etc. without the consent of the head of the consular institution (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 18).

In September 1925, G. Boschi was dismissed from the post of secretary of the Italian Consulate General. The official reason for this was, firstly, the latter's insufficient knowledge of the Italian language, and secondly, the lack of 50 pounds of firewood that had been brought to him for the needs of the consulate, and forgery of postal receipts. But the real reason was Galanti's

convictions in his collaboration with the GPU, which were entirely justified. Giovanni Boschi had indeed been recruited by the GPU and acted as an informant. The resentment over his dismissal was the key to his recruitment. An intercepted letter from G. Boschi to his girlfriend, who was temporarily living in Simferopol, clearly demonstrated his anger about the dismissal and his desire to inform the Italian Foreign Ministry about the abuses of the Consul General in Odesa. The GPU took advantage of this. G. Boschi worked under the pseudonym “Garibaldi” (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 33, 34, 48, 89, 90).

In the autumn of the same year, a typist named Popandopulo began working at the consulate. Due to the low salary (40 rubles), she quickly resigned from her position and went to work for the State Bank.

In addition, a new vice-consul, Alfredo Salvici, appeared, who also did not stay in this position for long. In early October 1925, it became known that, according to the order of the Italian Embassy in the USSR, he and Consul General Provan were to immediately hand over all their affairs and completely resign from the Italian Foreign Ministry. What preceded this, unfortunately, is unknown. In early November 1925, they returned to Italy with their families. Renato Scoppa Bova arrived to temporarily perform the duties of Consul General, but in October 1926, due to strained relations with the Italian ambassador in Moscow, he was recalled to Italy (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 43, 45, 58, 88).

The affairs of the Italian consulate were taken over by Vice-Consul S. Cozzio, who performed them until January 1927, until the arrival of the new acting Italian Consul General L. Tonker, whose appointment was announced by the NKZS at the end of December 1926 (екзекватура № 54/26) (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 88). In March 1928 he became a consul. Since May 1927, S. Cozzio, already at a fairly advanced age, became an honorary vice-consul (Matiash, 2020, pp. 227, 229). In June 1928, Lamberto Tonker was replaced by Francesco Mariano, who performed the functions assigned to him until April 1929. Alfredo Baistrocco was to take over, but he never arrived at his destination (Vovchuk, 2023, p. 177).

Functions and daily activities of the employees of the Italian Consulate General.

The key direction of the consulate's work was to deepen economic cooperation based on the collected political and economic information, its processing and evaluation. The Italians actively imported Soviet coal, manganese, oil and other raw materials, and the Soviet Union, in turn, imported equipment for large and small factories, tractors, steamships, etc.

An important component was the care of Italian subjects and Soviet citizens of Italian origin. The consulate not only performed its direct functions – granting visas, issuing passports, restoring Italian citizenship, protecting the interests of Italian sailors and businessmen, etc., but also provided material assistance in the form of parcels and money, took care of the problems of Catholic parishes and clergy, etc.

In addition, in 1924 – 1925, the consulate initiated the collection of applications from Italian citizens for compensation for losses incurred by the revolutionary events of 1917 – 1921. The questionnaires were received by the consulate from the Italian Foreign Ministry by diplomatic mail, since “much attention was paid to this work”. The application-questionnaire had to indicate the total amount of losses in rubles in gold, provide the testimony of three witnesses and, if possible, supporting documents. In general, for every ruble of losses, the Italian government promised to issue 15 kopecks compensation (Vovchuk, 2023, pp. 169–170). Thus, only Cozzio suffered losses in the amount of 104 thousand rubles in gold, as a result of which he was to be compensated with 15,600 rubles; Italian Maria Semeria – 869,739 rubles (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 31).

Italian consuls were also concerned about buried Italians. Thus, in 1929, F. Mariano travelled to the Crimea to inspect and restore Italian cemeteries (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 2, p. 414).

An integral function of the Italian Consulate General in Odesa was information, which was sometimes carried out by methods that were not always permitted. Thus, the Consulate General actively worked on the newspapers “Moriak”, “Komunist”, “Krasnaya Zvezda”, and “Izvestiia”. Considerable focus was on collecting information about political life in the Ukrainian SSR, the USSR, political emigrants, Italian communists, the number of Italians in the Soviet Union, later about Italian sailors, and the repressions of the Soviet authorities against people who maintained contact with foreign missions. The collection of military information was not ignored. Thus, in July 1926, it became known from a report by the Soviet intelligence services that the Italian consul in Odesa had notified the Italian Embassy in Moscow about the concentration of military units in Odesa area (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 21, 30, 53, 74).

Daily activities included establishing friendly relations with representatives of local authorities and the elite: professors, artists, cooperation with the consuls of Japan, Germany, and Turkey operating in Odesa, and foreign diplomats visiting the city. In July 1925, V. Galanti invited the British Chargé d’Affaires in the USSR, Mr. Hodgson, to dinner during his stay in Odesa (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 33). A chief focus was on the organization of various cultural events that contributed to the strengthening of communication with important and influential people of Odesa. Considerable efforts were also devoted to the management of the Italian language school for the Italian colony, which was established in Bova Skopa at the consulate on October 26, (Solano, 2020), which the Chekists considered the place of spreading fascism and tried to close it by the NKVD many times.

The heads of the consular institution did not forget about congratulating the Italian king and his family on the occasion of his birthday, a national holiday. Thus, on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Victor Emmanuel III (July 7), on the initiative of Galanti on behalf of the Consulate General and representatives of the Italian colony, congratulations were conveyed through a former member of the charitable society in Odesa, P. G. Sperandeo, who was in Rome at the time. On September 11, 1924, the Italian consul hosted a reception on the occasion of the king’s birthday (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 20, 34–35).

“Italian Scandals”: Soviet Secret Services and Their Methods of Operation

In the mid-1920s, Italian diplomatic representatives in the USSR noted the growing military hysteria and world ambitions among the Soviet leaders, which were clearly reflected in the Soviet propaganda. The establishment of the Soviet-Italian diplomatic relations did not mean that the USSR trusted Italy, where the fascist regime led by B. Mussolini had been established. These relations were rather pragmatic: on the one hand, Italy was a profitable economic partner for Moscow, and on the other hand, a hostile force in an ideological sense. Therefore, both the Italian embassy in Moscow and the consular institutions in the USSR, directly in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Kyiv, were under constant surveillance by the Soviet secret services as those who were among the spreaders of fascism in the USSR, through the involvement of the Italians living there. Therefore, to the best of their ability, the Italian diplomats tried to expose the secret operations of the Soviet secret services and minimize the “red threat” for Italy.

According to the Soviet intelligence services, sailors who found themselves in the Soviet ports were best suited to implement their propaganda policy. For this purpose, special cover

groups were created that made it possible to recruit these sailors, including the Soviet Bureau of the International Union of Seafarers and Dock Workers and Interclubs. In 1923, the “International Sailors’ Club” (“Foreign Sailors’ Club”, “Odesa Central International Karl Marx Club”, “Interclub”, “Mizhprop” Club) were established in Odesa, which was used for “communist propaganda” and to recruit “agents of the revolution”. The crews of Italian ships arriving in Odesa were the subject of “special attention” by the agitators of the “Interclub”. Even the Italian consul in Odesa regularly appealed to the NKZS to protest against the “anti-Italian propaganda” in the “Interclub” (banners with the slogans “Down with fascism”, caricatures of B. Mussolini, etc.) (Savchenko, & Tryhub, 2019, p. 121).

An active campaign against the influence of the International Sailors’ Club on Italian sailors was launched by Consul Lamberto Tonker. He visited every Italian ship that called on Odesa port and warned the crew that they were prohibited from going ashore. Violators were threatened with serious reprisals upon their return to Italy. However, despite these warnings, sailors still visited the Interclub. Then, with the consent of captains, Tonker began to confiscate their seaman’s books, without which staying on land became impossible. Such measures were applied to the crews of the ships “Nimbo” and “Carlo Pisacane”, but they did not give the desired result either. At the same time, Vice-Consul S. Cozzio from Odesa sent a consular dispatch to Rome, in which he reported “on the subversive activities of the Interclub” (holding rallies “against fascism”, “against Mussolini”, with the involvement of Italian sailors) (SAOR, f. P 8065, d. 2, c. 1190, pp. 16, 37).

In an attempt to tighten control, the consul hired Miro Avlic (Volodymyr Aulich), promising him assistance in resolving issues with Italian citizenship. Aulich’s task was to monitor sailors who illegally visited the Interclub, take their photographs, and report them to Tonker (Vovchuk, 2023, pp. 170–171).

However, the Soviet GPU exposed his activities quickly. He was accused of espionage in favour of Italy on April 15, 1927. According to the OGPU investigators, he was recruited by the Italian diplomats (his “agent” activities were recorded in the Italian sources). In September of the same year, M. Auvlich (Volodymyr Aulich) was sentenced to 10 years in the camps (according to other sources, he was exiled outside the USSR) for transmitting the “secret information” about the Italian sailors of the “Interclub”, who were under the Soviet influence and the arrival of the Soviet spy Ksenia Gerngross in Italy (Solano, 2020).

It should be noted that before becoming “a fascist spy”, M. Auvlich worked on the ships of the State Black Sea-Azov Shipping Company and “part-time” as a liaison officer for the Soviet Main Intelligence and Intelligence Directorate of the Comintern (SAOR, f. P 7, d. 1a, c. 88a, pp. 2–5).

Owing to the help of “MODR”, “Mizhprom”, “Interclub”, the Soviet secret services also included the Italian political immigrants to the numerous agents of the secret employees of the Comintern, GPU and GRU. There was created “The Group of the Italian Political Immigrants” in Odesa in 1924, which united the representatives of the Italian anarchist federations, the Communist Party of Italy, the left wing of the Italian Socialist Party. The political immigrants became the agent base of the Soviet secret services. The Soviet secret services used them for agitation and propaganda of the Soviet way of life among the foreign sailors, in agent, intelligence and counterintelligence work.

S. Cozzio began to hinder similar Soviet structures in Odesa in 1926 actively, resorting to recruiting the Italian sailors and some Italian political emigrants, with the help of whom he managed to carry out successful counter-operations. K. Solano wrote the following: “Fascism

in power armed itself with a significant spy network in Italy and abroad, which contributed to the detection and suppression of the anti-fascist organizations... The Soviet Union was the main center of the fascist spy network operations, which was constantly searching for new informants". The same author indicated that the centres of the ICP sent the Italian revolutionary "militants" to the USSR, including those for whom "suspicions arose mainly due to their release from prison or too easy escapes, which contributed to the formation of serious doubts about the attitude of the arrested militant or leader during interrogations by the fascist police" (Solano, 2020).

There was carried out a search on the Italian sailors of the ship "Tirreni" in February 1927 at the request of Vice-Consul S. Cozzio, who was in Italy, but the demand came from Odesa. There was found the "revolutionary literature" during the search, which led to the arrest of several sailors. There was the sailors' strike, who demanded a wage increase on the Italian steamer "Fium", which was ship loading in Odesa in May 1927. The Vice-Consul saw in this strike the hand of the "Interclub", whose agents incited the Italian sailors constantly (SAOR, f. P 7, d. 1, c. 1925, p. 33). In addition, S. Cozzio collected information about the stay and personal plans of the Italian political emigrants in the USSR constantly, there were "dangerous terrorists" – anarchists L. Evangelisti, R. Covanni, O. Scarcelli (who visited Italy and tried to assassinate B. Mussolini) among them. Information was also collected on the Italian communist figures, who settled in the USSR and visited Odesa: Livio Amodeo and Palmira Tagliatti (Bucci, Carolini, Lenzerini & Piermaria, N.d.), which made it possible to be prepared to counter their influence in Italy.

The Italian Consulate General in Odesa was often forced to turn a blind eye to the violations of the rights and interests of the Italian citizens by the Soviet authorities in order to maintain amicable relations with the USSR. Such was the murder of S. Cozzio, whose body was found on the street in the summer cottage area "Otrada", "not far from the house where he lived". The Counselor of the German consulate K. Hahn and other diplomats also lived in this estate (Matiash, 2020, p. 228). The murder had a great political resonance. The representatives of all foreign consulates in Odesa, who were present at the funeral (December 31, 1927), expressed serious concern about the murder of their colleague. The Italian ambassador was convinced that it was a political murder, the same opinion was expressed by the Japanese Consul in Odesa, Shimada Shigeru, who was sure that it was the deceased's contemptuous behaviour towards the communists that caused his death (Pavlenko, 2022, pp. 38–39). In fact, L. Tonker considered this murder to be politically motivated, while excluding the involvement of the Italian political immigrants in the tragedy.

Of course, the real murderer was not exposed, and the investigation process resembled "a theatre play". On January 5, 1928, the so-called "murderer" was arrested, who turned out to be V. Dobrovolsky, an unknown thief from Rostov, who was "touring" in Odesa at that time. The thief confessed quickly to everything, claiming that he did not want to kill the honorary Vice-Consul, but only intended to rob his mansion. But the unexpected appearance of the owner led to his death (Matiash, 2020, p. 232). The trial of the "murderer" was held openly in the hall of Odesa District Court (it began on February 10, 1928) and was actively covered in the press. The murderer was sentenced to the execution, which was a maximum penalty. According to the investigation, several people could have been involved in the murder ('Izvestiia', 1928, February), but of course no one found them.

There had happened another international scandal with an "Italian flavour", in particular, the assassination attempt on the captain of the Italian steamer "Kobbe" a few years before the

murder of the Italian Vice-Consul in Odesa. There was also involved the “Interclub story” and suspicious agitators operating among the Italian sailors in the above-mentioned scandal. Italian political émigrés Yevhen Herbovets (Eugenio, Riccardo Gerbovaz) and Dante Serpo committed an armed assassination attempt on the captain of the Italian ship “Kobbe” Haidanych in Odesa port on June 10, 1924.

It became known that Ye. Herbovets was involved in the MODR and the “Interclub” to carry out propaganda among the Italian sailors in favour of the “world revolution”. Ye. Herbovets along with D. Serpo were participants in the terrorist activities against the Italian anarchists right before it. D. Serpo was arrested for throwing a bomb and participating in a shootout “with the fascists”, during which he shot the Commander of the punitive detachment/unit back in 1921. He was involved in the murder of the Minister of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes M. Drašković. In 1923, D. Serpo was trained in Moscow to work as “a political agitator for the processing of the Italian sailors arriving in the port”. He received a reprimand “for connections with suspicious elements” after working in Odesa for six months, in May 1924 and was not only deprived of membership in the “Interclub”, but also suspended from “working on steamships” (Savchenko, & Tryhub, 2019, pp. 121–123).

On the contrary, Ye. Herbovets, won the trust of the Italian sailors of the steamer “Kobbe”, which gave him the opportunity to visit the steamer three times and have dinner with them in the sailor’s dining room. When he was noticed by the captain, he resorted to force at his request to leave the ship immediately. The captain beat Herbovets without giving a second thought to it, trying to throw the “uninvited guest” overboard. After this incident, Ye. Herbovets ran to the Bureau of the “International Union of Seafarers and Dock Workers” and complained about the captain’s behaviour to the secretary of the Bureau. The next day, his accomplice D. Serpo and he came to Odesa port, visited the “Kobbe” and tried to shoot the captain. Fortunately, D. Serpo was only wounded, and the attackers were arrested (SAOR, f. P 7, d. 1a, c. 88a, p. 7).

The representatives of the GPU and Odesa branch of the Office of the Commissioner of the National Defense Forces under the Government of the Ukrainian SSR persuaded them not to talk about their affiliation with the GPU during the investigation after the arrest of the attackers, promising that the case would not be politicized. The secretary of Mezhprom (the ODPU worker) offered to release them altogether “by sending them to work in the internal provinces”. Due to the international resonance of the case, there was required a trial, according to which Ye. Herbovets received 4 years in prison, D. Serpo – 3 years. They served their sentences in Moscow prison for about a month, but in January 1925 they were secretly released and sent to Poltava (“to the internal hibernia (provinces)”) – “at the disposal of the MODR”. D. Serpo was sent to Dnipropetrovsk (SAOR, f. P 7, d. 1a, c. 67, p. 54), where, according to the reports from the GPU, he “contacted a group of the local anarchists and carried out some kind of the conspiratorial work among them” (SAOR, f. P 8065, d. 2, c. 1398, p. 18). Ye. Herbovets returned to Odesa “Interclub” in 1925, but in 1926 he was arrested again for the “anti-Soviet propaganda”, spreading the “anarchist ideas”, the “threats to kill an Italian communist” (SAOR, f. P 7, d. 1a, c. 67, pp. 4–7, 78). It is interesting that after that he was treated in Moscow psychiatric hospital by force for more than a year and he was diagnosed with schizophrenia and persecution mania.

Ye. Herbovets and D. Serpo were seen in the “Interclub” in Odesa, with an interval of 5 months, in 1927. The sudden return of the “unsafe terrorists” was most likely sanctioned by the “Centre”, because naive Odesa Chekists suggested that the Central Committee of

the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party of Ukraine should draw attention to D. Serpo's inadequate behaviour and "counter-revolutionary sentiments", and then arrested him for threatening to kill the Italian consul. Nevertheless, D. Serpo was expelled from the "Interclub" in the autumn of 1927 and released from the port. During his interrogation in 1928, he stated that Odesa Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Party knew: "...that we intend to kill the Italian consul in Odesa" (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 3–19, 30–40).

It should be mentioned that neither D. Serpo, who had been publicly threatening to kill him for several months, nor Ye. Herbovets were questioned about the murder of the Italian vice-consul S. Cozzio. According to the logic of the investigation, it was they who could potentially be involved in the murder, given their "terrorist" experience and unexpected return to Odesa. The structures that were in charge of the secret activities of Mezhprom, "Interclub" were interested in the murder of the vice-consul, who fiercely opposed the spread of the anti-Italian propaganda both in Odesa and Italy.

The above-mentioned eminent men visited the Italian consulate in Odesa and met the newly appointed acting consul L. Tonker at the beginning of the 1928, during the investigation of the murder of S. Cozzio. The acting consul ordered D. Serpo to translate into Italian a number of articles from the Soviet magazines regarding the construction of Volga-Don Canal and the development of the port of Kerch. After that, the Chekists began to believe that D. Serpo became a double agent, because the recruitment of the Italian sailors began to fail. And it could have happened. According to the denunciations of the Soviet special agents, it became known that D. Serpo dreamed of returning to Italy and was trying to get secret help from Odesa consulate in this regard.

D. Serpo and Ye. Herbovets began to select any compromising materials about the party and the Comintern carefully, which they then wanted to transfer to Italy in order to damage the authority and popularity of the communist movement. Later on, these materials were seized from Ye. Herbovets by Odesa regional department through a search and sent to the disposal of the ODPU (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 2, p. 15). In August 1928, D. Serpo was arrested and accused of "connections with the Italian consul for the purpose of espionage". In October of the same year, Ye. Herbovets was also arrested. The new Italian consul general sought permission to meet with the arrested, and proposed to send D. Serpo to Italy. The ODPU Board decided to "hide" the Italians away on charges of the "counter-revolutionary activity" (Article 54-6) in October 1928. By the resolution of the ODPU Board, D. Serpo received five years in concentration camps, and Ye. Herbovets – three years. The Italian sources indicate that these two were "recruited" by the Italian diplomats (Solano, 2020).

In 1929, another high-profile event related to the Italians occurred. The Italian sailor Aprozio was killed in Mykolayiv. Among the consular staff there was a clear understanding that this was a political murder, but F. Mariano recognized this murder as accidental (Vovchuk, 2023, p. 169).

The Italians, who came to the "country of the Soviets" expected to see the realization of the dream of the working people, a country of "freedom and equality", where they would not live in poverty and would have a decent position. Instead, they were faced with the reality of the "NEP" city: hunger, unemployment, corruption. In this regard, D. Solano wrote about them: "...many considered the Soviet Union a golden exile, where they could take advantage of their refugee status" (Solano, 2020). Some Italians, having lived in the USSR for 3-6 years, lost faith in the Soviet model and succumbed to nostalgia for Italy. As it actually happened to D. Serpo.

However, the work of the Soviet secret services was not limited to influencing the sailors of Italian ships calling at Odesa port through “intermediary organizations” or external surveillance of the Italian Consulate General. The most effective method of collecting information and understanding the attitude towards the Soviet Union, Italy’s relations with Germany, etc., was the presence of the internal surveillance in the consular institution, which was implemented by recruiting the consulate employees, its visitors, and partners. Thus, in 1926, recruited the representatives operated at the consulate under the pseudonyms: “Garibaldi”, “Architect”, “Teacher” (Teacher Pezzollo, a friend of Galanti), “Soborny”, “Mironova”, “Fascist”, “Antonov”, “Margo”, who were supposed to provide a full report on the activities of the consular staff, their correspondence, communication, etc. And with the start of the operation of the Consulate General of Italy in Odesa, casts of all the consulate’s seals and stamps were even made for visas and passport renewals.

Did the heads of the Italian consulate in Odesa know that they were under constant surveillance? Yes, they did. Hence, a number of important information was sent encrypted. One of these was a telegram from V. Galanti to the Italian ambassador in Moscow: “8921 18986 17715 42165 17296....”. However, the Soviet special services never managed to decipher it due to the lack of a decryptor. When Galanti left Odesa, he took with him 2 books on encryption and decryption, intending to transfer them to the Italian embassy, which would then provide them to the new head of the Italian consulate in Odesa (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 20, 22, 33, 91–92).

The Soviet intelligence services repeatedly used their sex workers to obtain information. There was the Italian political emigrant among them, a member of the “Interclub” and the Ministry of the Navy, Antonio Buticchi, who was engaged in the propaganda among the sailors of the Italian steamships. In August 1927, he resumed his activities in Odesa “Interclub”, having access to the Italian steamships as a “commercial agent”. He worked for the Odesa State Police under the pseudonym “Senor”. In order to gain the trust of the Italian consul, he applied for an Italian passport. But this did not give the expected result (SSA SSU, f. 13, d. 1, c. 419, vol. 1, part 1, p. 66; part 2, p. 15). Instead, his brother Amadeo Buticchi (whom the Soviet intelligence services called “Fascist”) was able to return to Italy in 1926. According to one version, he managed to do this “with Moscow’s permission” and by order of the ODPU. According to another, he was expelled from the USSR as “unfit”. Information spread in the USSR that in Italy Amadeo “was betraying the communists to the fascists”. However, it was more like a well-planned “game” by the Soviet intelligence services, the main goal of which was to disinform the Italian intelligence services and mislead them (SAOR, f. P 8065, d. 2, c. 864, pp. 16, 36, 116). Amadeo Buticchi, under the guise of “his” for the Italians, clearly carried out the tasks assigned to him by the Soviet special services.

The duality of the USSR’s policy towards Italy was also written about by the Italian aviation minister, general, and Mussolini’s closest ally, Italo Balbo, who flew from Rome to Odesa in early June 1929 as part of the Italian “Storm” squadron: “...the Soviet authorities attach great importance to the international consequences of our visit, but they do not want it to worry the population too much...”. The reception organized in honour of the arriving guests (the representatives of Italian fascism, hated by the USSR) was to remain as unreported in the press as possible so as not to provoke a scandal in communist circles inside the country and abroad (Balbo, 1929, p. 217).

Reporting to B. Mussolini on the stages of the “Odesa expedition”, I. Balbo reported that the warm reception at the “Londonsky” Hotel, organized by the chairman of the City Council H.

Alekseyenko in honour of the Italians and the military, fell out of the understanding that caricatures of B. Mussolini and “anti-fascist posters” were hung on the territory of Odesa port and customs. In response, the leadership of the Italian Consulate General in Odesa protested to the representative of the National Army of Ukraine for carrying out “anti-Italian propaganda”, “subversive” activities of the Italian political emigrants in Odesa and tore down the anti-fascist posters “because they threaten the development of good-neighborly relations” (Matiash, 2020, p. 237).

It is clear that during the stay of the Italian military expedition in Odesa, the ODPU carefully monitored all conversations and rumors related to the “Italian visit”. In June 1929, the ODPU prepared several special reports under the heading “The Reaction of the population of Odesa to the arrival of the Italians”. The Chekists indicated that the Odesans were dissatisfied with the ceremonial reception of the “Italian fascists” in Odesa “at the highest level”. Some Odesans noted that this visit was “the beginning of the intervention”, others were dissatisfied with the fact that the Italians were treated as “great friends”, they were served “magnificent tables”, invited to theaters, but were not shown the “beds of the unemployed”, hiding the needy and miserable life of ordinary Odesans: “the fascists have banquets, all the transport, and we are starving” (SAOR, f. P-7, d. 1, c. 2206, pp. 1–10, 44).

Conclusion. The Soviet-Italian relations in the 1920s were shaped by a contradictory combination of economic pragmatism and ideological confrontation. Italy was one of the first major European powers to recognize the USSR, which opened up opportunities for active trade, cooperation in the field of transport and maritime transportation. For the Soviet leadership, these ties had a dual purpose: to ensure the economic needs of the country and at the same time to use diplomatic channels as a cover for the activities of an agent network aimed at supporting the “world revolution”, especially in Italy itself, where revolutionary sentiments after World War I were still quite strong.

In response, the Italian diplomatic missions in the USSR, in particular the Italian Consulate General in Odesa, were active not only in the usual consular affairs, but also in the field of counterintelligence. Their efforts were aimed at counteracting the spread of the Soviet propaganda among Italian sailors and political émigrés, controlling visits to the “Interclub” and protecting Italy’s national interests in the Soviet environment. This activity often took on a conflictive character, which manifested itself in scandalous incidents – from the seizure of shipping documents to the involvement of agents for surveillance, who, however, were often exposed by the Soviet intelligence services.

Indicative in this context are the so-called “Italian scandals”: tragic events, such as the murder of the Italian vice-consul S. Cozzio, or numerous conflicts around the Odesa “Interclub”, which indicate that behind the official diplomatic cooperation there was a tense struggle between two totalitarian regimes – the Bolshevik and fascist. This struggle had not only a local, but also an international dimension, as it reflected the clash of two ideological projects – communist and fascist – for influence in Europe during the interwar period.

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