

Memo Sent to the Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs Regarding the Italian Government's Lenient Treatment of Jews, October 1942

In the course of the measures aiming at the solution of the Jewish question in Germany and in certain other European countries, it becomes increasingly urgent to settle the question how Jews of Italian nationality are to be treated, and which attitude Italy herself is showing toward the solution of the Jewish problem. In practice, the Italians have in general shown but little understanding in this matter; they have even shown resentment in as much as the interests of Italian Jews were affected.

Altogether, the position with regard to this problem is, therefore, the following:

1. German Reich and Occupied Territories.

Within the orbit of German domination, Italian Jews have up to date been exempted from all measures taken. The continued existence of such groups of foreign Jews – who consider themselves privileged and behave themselves, therefore, in an arrogant way – constitutes a permanent burden of the German population and an element of subversion within our own sphere. In addition, this position reveals in a way which is difficult to understand the fact that the axis is not following a uniform policy in a matter of such importance; this, again implies criticism of the measures taken by Germany.

In addition, and as far as the occupied Western territories are concerned, this privileged treatment of Jews of foreign nationality affects the morale and thus becomes a strain on our politics. These facts have caused us to approach the Italian government with the request either to agree to subjecting their Jews residing in the occupied Western territories to the German measures, or to withdraw them from these territories by the end of the year.

(The actual numbers of Italian Jews in the German orbit are but small – about 200 in the Reich including the Protectorate, about 500 in Paris alone – but this does not detract from the importance of the question which must be solved according to our fundamental principles).

This diplomatic stop served the further purpose of furnishing an opportunity for a full discussion with Italy concerning the Jewish question. With regard to the Italian reaction to our request, reference is made to the separate report submitted on this subject.

II. Italy.

The Italian laws concerning the Jews have not gotten beyond certain feeble preliminary steps tending towards a solution. Even the war has up to date not caused any tendency of intensified action in this direction, the prevailing trend seems to be rather to evade any harsh action. The reserve maintained in this field is shown by many individual aspects, such as the retention of Jews in economic key positions, numerous permits for the Italianization of Jewish names, canceling of previous expatriations of Jews, etc. In practice, it therefore does not amount to much that the Fascist Party, on the other hand, has now started an intensified anti-Jewish propaganda, thus at least preparing the ground by influencing public opinion (public meetings, setting up of institutes for the studying of the Jewish question, press propaganda and the like). For this reason, Preziosi, an exponent of Italian anti-Semitism, considered it indicated some time ago to discuss the question in public whether the solution of the Jewish problem had been finally frustrated in Italy. The serious danger involved in such attitude consists in the fact that the continued existence and activity of Jewry, instead of serving the apparent aim - stabilization of the home front - is rather a strain on the Italian home front, which is shaky as such. On the other hand, a harsher policy will contribute toward the adjustment and strengthening of the home front.

III. Other European States.

In the rest of Europe, it is a crucial aspect of the problem that Italy is rating the economic power of the Italian Jews in the Mediterranean Area rather high, which applies particularly to Tunisia; for this reason, there prevails a general reluctance against anti-Jewish measures.

In Tunisia, this has led up to Italian protest against the French tendency toward Aryanization; furthermore, we have been requested ourselves by

diplomatic channels not to put any pressure on Vichy in this matter. As a matter of fact, the embassy in Paris had already pointed out that the Italian attitude was harmful to Italian colonial policy in as much as in Tunisia and in Algeria, the French were appearing in the part of Jew-baiters and the Italians in the part of protectors of the Jews. Thereupon, the embassy was instructed not to show any further interest in this question for the time being.

IN Greece, preliminary discussion on the question of introducing a distinctive badge for the Jews have taken place between the German and the Italian delegates; the result was that the Italian delegate stated, after consultation with Rome, that the Italian government wished to shelve the matter for the time being in view of the considerable economic power of the Italian Jews in the Mediterranean area. In fact, in Greece the problem is particularly urgent, because the Jews (70,000, of whom 40-45,000 in German occupied Saloniki) are mainly active in commerce, very often as usurers. Many of them speak German. They are doing very much harm to the economic position and to morale. The first decree of the Greek authorities concerning compulsory labor in Saloniki caused many Jews, particularly well-to-do people, to emigrate to the Italian occupied territory. Discussions of measures possibly to be taken are at present pending on the local level between the German and the Italian delegates; there is not much chance for uniform action.

According to reports from Rumania and other South Eastern states, the policy concerning the Jews, which had been partly enforced with great difficulties, is considerably counteracted by Italian quarters, not only in as much as Italian Jewish firms remain in important key positions, but even by the taking over by Italian firms of Jewish businessmen and employees, whose further activities had been curtailed by local measures. The fact that profitable business relations are thus switched over to the Italians has, of course, not enhanced the popularity of the policy concerning the Jews.

In Croatia, the Italian occupation authorities had assured the Jews of their protection, thus counteracting Croat evacuation measures. In this matter, a special decision of the Duce, which is already known to you, has been elicited, but it has obviously not yet been carried out on the spot. Reference is made to the separate report submitted on this subject.

In these circumstances, it is suggested to discuss the whole problem with Italy by way of a personal discussion either between the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs and Count Ciano or even between the Fuehrer and the Duce. Our wishes can be summarized as follows:

For German spheres of domination, the stops already taken with regard to the occupied territories should be supplemented to the effort that the Jews in the Reich, including the Protectorate too, will either be subjected to our measures or evacuated to Italy within a definite time limit.

It is necessary that Italy adapts the Italian measures and laws to our own principles and measures.

This follows from considerations of general policy which emphatically require that in an important field such as the Jewish issue the axis presents a united front. If Italy plays the part of the protector of the Jews as before, then the adversaries are supplied with a welcome opportunity of disturbing the harmony between the partners of the axis; they will do so increasingly, and at the same pace at which our policy concerning the Jews is being tightened. The time when this problem will form a serious danger can already been foreseen.

The part which Jewry is playing in Italy is no less dangerous than the part it formerly played in the Reich. Therefore, the reasons in favor of a solution to the problem which applied to the Reich do apply to Italy as well.

Finally, the comparatively low figure of the Jews in Italy (officially estimated at 43,000- a figure which is considered much too low by experts on the Italian Jewish question advancing cogent reasons) makes it improbable that the solution of the question will result in serious economic repercussions.

III. It is necessary that in her relations to other states, Italy furthers the policy concerning the Jews adopted by their state at any given time and that she co-ordinates her action with Germany by previous consultation, whenever possible.

The difficulties hampering a solution are mainly based on the fact that, according to her official statements made to date, Italy demands that the Italian Jews living abroad be treated not as Jews but as Italian nationals only.

As Italy has, by her own laws, recognized the fundamental racial principles involved in the Jewish question, her attitude in this matter and her handling of the discriminations provided in inner-Italian law are mainly influenced by her endeavors to maintain all existing economic positions in the Mediterranean area and in South East Europe and even to build up new ones. A memorandum on this matter composed by d'Aajata has been submitted by way of a separate report together with the attached report of the German embassy in Rome.

This argument, however, is dangerous, and is probably emanating from the Jews in Italy, who are still wielding considerable economic influence themselves. It is dangerous particularly for the reason that the attitude based on this argument means much more than the postponement of anti-Jewish measures which may be kept in abeyance. From our point of view and this we have to stress in conclusion, it means

- a) the strengthening of the resistance put up by certain governments (e.g. the Hungarian government) against our attempt to coordinate their policy concerning the Jews with ours,
- b) the prevention of measures which we consider necessary (Croatia, Greece),
- c) active encouragement of the Jews, who, helped by their instinct, are always on the alert and know how to make capital out of such connivance.

From the Italian point of view, too, this argument is fraught with serious dangers. The Jewish economic positions in the Mediterranean area are, in the final result, never serving the Italian interest. Throughout the world, Jewish capital is one of the most efficient arms used against us, and this is the way the Jews themselves feel about it. In addition, there will hardly be any Jews in Europe who do not consider their position at least insecure and in jeopardy; thus their very own business interest makes them try to use all possible means to divert their capital to the economy's camp. Up till now, we have established this fact in all cases in question, and we are observing it day by day. In Africa and at the same time in the whole adjacent part of the Mediterranean area, the danger of this diversion of capital is particularly serious, as the propinquity of the Anglo-American sphere of interest favors it

and even induces the Jews to change sides. Thus the danger that Italy enables the Jews by her very tactics of procrastination to evade, step by step, all economic control and to effectuate the diversion of their capital mentioned above must not be underrated.

On the other hand, certain preliminary measures, even if they are only forecasts of a future cooperation with us in this question, would cause the Jews to withdraw rapidly from their positions. Rapid Registration (Erfassung) and control of the Jews is, however, a prerequisite. Thus a start would be made, the removal of the Jewish influence would be carried out step by step, and their economic positions could be transferred to non-Jewish hands without any danger for the general interests of Italy.

Herewith submitted
through State Secretary
to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
who is asked for further directives
Berlin, 22 October 1942

Source: Yad Vashem Archives NG 4960 N11\553\E