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CHAPTER FIVE

ITALIAN ANTIFASCISM RESISTANCE IN SWITZERLAND AFTER THE 8TH SEPTEMBER 1943

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The context

Exile has characterised the history of Italian anti-fascism. Many anti-fascists, already from the early years of the regime, moved to the United States and Latin America, but especially to France, the UK and Switzerland, as far as the European continent was concerned. In this scenario, the role of the anti-fascist network in Switzerland, given its geographical location and its status as a neutral country, was decisive, especially during the early years of the Second World War. The key year is 1943 and, in particular, what happened after 8 September.

In fact, in November 1943, the *Federazione delle Colonie Libere Italiane in Svizzera* (FCLIS) was founded. It later became the reference organisation for Italian anti-fascism and the National Liberation Committee. The supporters were anti-fascists and exiles who had been taking refuge in Switzerland for years, especially in the cities of Geneva and Zurich.

On the Italian side, 1943 represented the beginning of one of the most tragic and controversial two-year period of recent Italian history. Italy played its future geopolitical, economic and social role within the international scenario.

If the war had ended in September 1943 with the capitulation without conditions, today our country would not discuss, in a relative condition of freedom, whether or not to ratify the peace treaty, but would be divided, like Germany, into four zones of occupation, with the Anglo-Americans occupying the islands and the peninsula as far as the Po Valley, the Soviets

on the Tagliamento, France in Liguria and Piedmont¹.

This passage, taken from Pietro Nenni's speech given during the Constituent Assembly on 30 July 1947, on the one hand suggests the role played by anti-fascism and the liberation movement, and on the other hand raises a much deeper question, namely what foreign policy Italy has chosen in the last year and a half of the conflict. Won, occupied, divided, did Italy have a foreign policy in the two-year period 1943-45? This is the question that Brunello Viguzzi tries to answer, and he comes to this conclusion with a careful analysis of the writings of exiles, anti-fascists and the future Republican ruling class:

Italy's foreign policy, in a proper sense, in 1943 or 1945, therefore, is not there; and it is even better to remember, even if only for a moment, 1870, 1919, fascism or anti-fascism: when Italy, in very different ways, still had a relatively autonomous initiative in international life. The situation in '43, in '45 changed too much; and if the men of the time, in order to find their way, sometimes refer to the first post-war period, in Versailles, to the crises of the red two-year period, they are immediately drawn to the differences. In '43, in '45, in fact, the perspective has clearly become a world perspective; and in this sphere, so fluid and vast, the very existence of the country is at stake!²

It was clear to everyone, protagonists and authors old and new, that the very existence of the country was at stake: from Salvemini to Sturzo, from Croce to Chabod or Toscano, up to Nenni himself, Parri and De Gasperi. As was immediately clear to Schiavetti, Reale, Einaudi and many others who gave life to the *Federazione delle Colonie Libere*. In essence, as on other occasions and probably more than others, Italy found itself at the centre of disputes and contests of influence among the powers that were preparing to win the Second World War, so much so that "the solution of the Italian problem will be one of the crucial and most decisive elements of the entire plan to reorganise the world"³.

¹ Guglielmo Negri, "La sistemazione postbellica e il trattato di pace," *La politica estera italiana nel secondo dopoguerra. Terzo programma*. No. 3 (1971): 171; Brunello Viguzzi, "Politica estera e opinione pubblica in Italia dalla seconda guerra mondiale ad oggi. *Orientamenti degli studi e prospettive della ricerca*," *Opinion publique et politique extérieure en Europe 1940-1981. Actes du colloque de Rome (17-20 février 1982)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1985): 93-94.

² (Viguzzi, *Politica estera*, 94).

³ Gaetano Salvemini and George La Piana, *La sorte dell'Italia* (Roma-Firenze-Milano: Edizioni U., 1945), 11.

Despite the fact that Italy was already part of the world powers and despite the sudden revaluation of its “extraordinary geographical position”⁴, which was to be more emphasized in the next phase of the world divided by blocks, there was a strong sensation that discussing, thinking and reorganizing the internal structures and balances had become a game that was played elsewhere, on the chessboard of international politics. It was at this level that the relations between Fascism and democracies, colonial problems linked to the future structure of Mediterranean policies, as well as institutional arrangements, were discussed, until the beginning of the twentieth century: problems related to borders, overpopulation and, therefore, problems related to emigration.

To these must be added another: the account to be settled with Fascism and what it represented for twenty years. It was to be paid through purges, both in Italy and abroad, and with a high tribute of blood that nobody in 1943 dared to imagine⁵.

In the same period, the Swiss Confederation will also be faced with completely new systemic conditions. “Switzerland, the little hedgehog, we catch him during the retreat” was one of the refrains of the Wehrmacht soldiers after the Italian armistice⁶. As early as three years earlier, in June 1940, the latent threat of its possible occupation had already mobilised the troops to the extent that 448,000 soldiers out of a population of around four million inhabitants had been mobilised. The occupation of France, which was redesigning a new Europe, led to the idea of abandoning neutrality in some quarters, pushing the Confederation along the Vichy collaborationist line⁷. Although the internal unity, the political and military organisation and the spirit of national solidarity were maintained, compared to Italy, social conflicts were banned throughout the war. In addition, all issues that could have exacerbated religious, linguistic and political conflicts were put aside.

The war economy took a series of measures to resist even a prolonged total isolation of the Confederation, even though the condition of economic autarchy threw Switzerland into a state of poor food supply. As a result, its interdependence on imports and the interconnections between the Allies and the Axis countries, especially Germany, was demonstrated. However, between 1938 and 1942, GDP increased by 8.3% (over 7 billion

⁴ Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998), 7-30.

⁵ Hans Woller, *I conti con il fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia 1945-1948* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1997), 8.

⁶ Jakob Tanner, *Geschichte der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2015), 256.

⁷ (Tanner, *Geschichte*, 255).

frances), a level that was restored again in 1946.

Compared to the First World War, it was more difficult to enforce neutrality. At this stage the Confederation was engaged in the most delicate diplomatic action in its history. On the one hand, pressure from Germany and, on the other, pressure from Great Britain led to the blockade of imports, especially food imports.

The strict rationing of food supplies, the increase in agricultural production and the creation of a small but efficient deep-sea fleet managed to supply the population with the minimum necessary. The situation in neutral Switzerland was not, therefore, the one it had maintained in European wars for centuries, except during the Napoleonic era and that Ugo Foscolo defined as “sacred single asylum of virtue and peaceful freedom”.

The closure of borders and military refugees

In 1942 Switzerland was a total autarchy, with men on the borders and in the mountains, while women worked in the fields and in the war industries. In the same year, while all over Europe the Nazis followed the final solution, Switzerland closed its borders for the first time, writing one of the darkest pages of its recent history: “Refugees on racial grounds, e.g. Jews, are not political refugees”⁸. Compared to the millions of deportees, only 8,300 persecuted people had found asylum in Switzerland by July 1942⁹.

The refugee issue – which will return to the centre of public debate several times during the recent history of the country – triggered a lively debate between those who claimed that the “boat is full” (*Das Boot ist voll*) and those who, referring to the right of asylum¹⁰, fought for the provisional acceptance of the persecuted. After 8 September 1943, refugees began to arrive in large numbers even along the entire Italian border. Since then, the strict *refoulement* measures against asylum seekers were no longer applied. In fact, a veritable river of Italians – about

⁸ Alfred Häslar, *Das Bot ist voll... Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge 1933-1945* (Zürich: Ex Libris, 1967), 90.

⁹ Toni Ricciardi, *Associazionismo ed emigrazione. Storia delle Colonie Libere e degli italiani in Svizzera* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013), 7.

¹⁰ Patrizia Audenino, *La casa perduta. La memoria dei profughi nell'Europa del Novecento* (Roma: Carocci, 2015); Antonio Ferrara and Niccolò Pianciola, *L'età delle migrazioni forzate. Esodi e deportazioni in Europa 1953-1953* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012); Silvia Salvatici, *Senza casa e senza paese. Profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008).

45,000¹¹, among them more than 3,800 Italian Jews¹² – invaded the Canton Ticino and the other neighbouring cantons. This was made possible by the fact that Switzerland, adopting an extraordinary flexibility, created a new category of military refugees¹³.

This new category, starting at the end of 1943 and for the following two years, helped to transform the Swiss landscape. Many camps of various kinds arose in which partisans, exiles or entire military divisions who had fled after the Armistice of 8 September 1943 were controlled and housed. In 1944, in the Zurich consulate district – which was the responsibility of German and Central Switzerland – there were *labour camps* in which refugees, mainly military refugees, were accommodated: in Birmensdorf 192 people, in Bonstetten 145, in Hedigen 138, in Rotkreuz 23, in Zweidlen-Weiach 38. To these must be added the *women's and girls' work camps* in Neuhausen and Sonnenberg/Kriens, occupied by 119 and 183 women and girls respectively. The *convalescent camp, Tivoli* was located in the Lucerne area of central Switzerland and had 290 people. Furthermore, in 1944, the *high school and labour camps* of Wallisellen and Zürichhorn, also on Canton Zurich territory¹⁴, were in preparation. In total there were 40 *Ruess camps (military)*, for a total of 3,676 military internees. In addition, there were 326 military internees working with farmers in Canton Lucerne; 170 in St. Gallen; 14 in Schaffhausen; and about 150 in the cantons of Zug, Zurich, Schaffhausen, St. Gallen and Thurgau¹⁵.

The conditions in which these people lived were of total destitution, as witnessed by the reports of the time:

Until the end of October there was a small group of Italians in this Work Camp, of whom I was interested in all matters concerning us. Towards the middle of November about forty Italians from Val d'Ossola arrived. All these brothers of ours are in a truly pitiful condition and they lack the indispensable. I took the trouble to solicit the interest of various relief committees but so far nothing has come to my attention. Many of them are missing: berets, jackets, trousers, handkerchiefs, sweaters, socks, neck

¹¹ Renata Broggin, *Terra d'asilo. I rifugiati italiani in Svizzera 1943-1945* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993), 19.

¹² Patrizia Audenino and Maddalena Tirabassi, *Migrazioni italiane. Storia e storie dall' Ancien régime a oggi* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2008), 119.

¹³ (Broggin, *Terra d'asilo*, 21).

¹⁴ SSZ, Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.2.a, *Rifugiati nella circoscrizione consolare del regio consolato generale di Zurigo*, 1944.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

scarves, berets, shirts, underwear, pullovers, shoes (43-42-44) and many toiletries.

I value your commitments, but I do not doubt you will help me to alleviate the sad conditions of my companions¹⁶.

As far as possible, aid from the Italian side came from the Italian Assistance Committee, established in Zurich on 4 August 1944¹⁷, and from the various Swiss solidarity chains. Once the vital issues were settled, especially clothing, the requests that came to the Committee were of various kinds. For the time, however, these were vital issues, as the commander of the Val d'Ossola Division stationed in Rohrbach underlined in a letter dated 21 December 1944.

With regard to the cigarettes you are talking about, please remember us at the upcoming festivities. Everything you send will be appreciated by 500 of my men, true Italians who are with me, and who deserve all the help they have generously given¹⁸.

As already mentioned, in that period, there were not only the military that fell the regime and fled across the border, but also a group of partisans of the Garibaldi Division, waiting to return to Italy when the conflict was over. The *Colonia Libera* of Baden, one of the main centres of the anti-fascist network present in Switzerland for years, bears witness to this.

The *Colonia Libera* of Baden brings to the knowledge that there are about 100 partisans (Garibaldi Division) in Baden-Wettingen. These young people are found without clothing and shoes. We will certainly do our best to satisfy them, giving as much as can be given, but our forces cannot satisfy such a great desire, especially in shoes¹⁹.

The collapse of the regime and the chaos, into which Italy fell, liberated in the South and still occupied in the Centre-North, also had repercussions among the Italian community in Switzerland.

¹⁶ SSZ (Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zurich), Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.1.a, *Lettera di Elio Consigli dall'Arbeitslager di Nussbaumen all'Assistenza italiana di Zurigo, Nussbaumen (Thurgau)*, 15 dicembre 1944.

¹⁷ SSZ, Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.2.b, *Relazione di gestione dell'Assistenza Italiana di Zurigo dal 2 agosto 1944 al 15 gennaio 1945*.

¹⁸ SSZ, Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.1.b, *Lettera del comandante della Divisione Val d'Ossola Col. D. Superati al Comitato Assistenza Italiana Zurigo, Rohrbach*, 21 dicembre 1944.

¹⁹ SSZ, Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.2.c, "Libera Stampa", 17 agosto 1943.

The Italian *Colonia* in Switzerland was certainly surprised by the events of July 1943 in Italy. It was more or less aware of the unfavourable military situation in its country, but for the majority of Italian immigrants, who had been the subject of fascist propaganda until the last hour, the abrupt fall of the regime was unexpected. However, they did not delay in drawing the consequences of Italy's new political orientation and generally gave outside observers the impression that they were doing so without great repugnance. The party's badges disappeared, and the fascist salute was no longer seen. The majority of Italians later had a passive attitude, waiting to see what would happen in Italy²⁰.

The anti-fascist forces, on the other hand, had a clearer vision. They included many political refugees who had never ceased to maintain contact with the opponents of the regime who remained in Italy. The anti-fascists, in fact, immediately took the initiative to find a Federation that would bring together all the emigrants' associations, both workers and political refugees, with the aim of supporting resistance to Nazifascism and assisting Italian workers and refugees in Switzerland. They were also driven by the firm belief that they would participate in the reconstruction of a new Italy, which would be born after twenty years of dictatorship.

Constitution of the anti-fascist resistance in Switzerland

The foundation of simple *Colonie* would not have been new, nor would the foundation of mutual aid societies for refugees. At this stage, it was necessary to restore normality after Mussolini's laws on emigration had influenced every organisation abroad, politically characterising even those of a welfare, recreational or religious nature²¹.

The press, indirectly linked to the Italian diplomatic legations in Switzerland, was affected by the phenomenon of fascistization.

Letter of inquiry with respect to the newspaper "Squilla Italica" as to whether or not it's an official legation press.

²⁰ Claude Cantini, "Per una storia del fascismo italiano a Losanna," *Italia contemporanea*. No 119 (1975): 55.

²¹ Aldo Garosci, *Storia dei fuorusciti* (Bari: Laterza, 1953); Leonardo Rapone, "Emigrazione italiana e antifascismo in esilio," *Archivio storico dell'emigrazione italiana*. No 1 (2008): 53-67; Rosita Fibbi, "Les associations italiennes en Suisse en phase de transition," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*. Vol. I/I (1985): 37-47; Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, (edited by), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2003).

[...] Finally, we would like to know if you think it tolerable that the paper bears the subtitle of “Giornale degli Italiani in Svizzera” and that its editing is still entrusted to men who bear the direct and serious responsibility of the past regime, whose residents are now subject to martial law²².

Mussolini’s arrest in July 1943 was followed by a period of systemic chaos in the country, with immediate repercussions also among Italian communities abroad. Italian anti-fascists in Switzerland immediately inserted themselves in this struggle with the triple aim of establishing contact with the migrant masses, which had been influenced by fascist and religious propaganda, to remove them from the ambiguous politics of the consular representatives and to orient them towards generic ideals of democracy and freedom.

In the vacuum left by fascist organisations in the face of the ambiguity of diplomatic circles, the active and politicised minorities of anti-fascism decided to take the initiative to involve the politically uncertain and disoriented masses of emigration in a decisive choice of camp and prevent the crisis that was troubling the country, a prerequisite for the future democratic renaissance, from being managed in Switzerland in a bureaucratic and top-down manner²³.

The idea to federate the *Colonie*, which had multiplied in the previous decade, started from Fernando Schiavetti. He came from Paris, via Marseille, and was responsible for the relaunch of the *Scuola libera* and the *Colonia* of Zurich. According to Schiavetti, the *Colonie Libere* were to be a formative experience, education for freedom and democracy, with a distinctly popular physiognomy and a declaredly mass character. Furthermore, they had to be marked by a strictly censorious and selective attitude, through which the effect would be to discourage or drive away those who had been fascists out of necessity or conformism and, above all, the majority of the *a-fascists*, who had passively suffered the regime’s propaganda without allowing or disagreeing. Finally, it was not an instrumental and merely organisational operation: rather, it was the enterprise of instrumentally innovating Italian anti-fascism. The *elitist citadels* were transformed, during the twenty years strenuously defended by a patrol of faithful, into mass popular organisations, capable, at that

²² SSZ, Circolari alle sezioni 1943-1949, Ar. 40.20.2.a, *Lettera al Ministro d’Italia in Berna*, Zurigo 3 novembre 1943.

²³ Elisa Signori, *La Svizzera e i fuoriusciti italiani. Aspetti e problemi dell’emigrazione politica 1943-1945* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1983), 225.

moment of crisis and disorientation, of functioning as a pole of aggregation for all Italians of the so-called permanent emigration.

On 21 November, a *Federazione delle Colonie Italiane in Svizzera* was established in Zurich. Its aim is to defend the interests of Italian emigration to Switzerland and to coordinate, whenever useful and necessary, the activities and attitudes of the federated colonies. [...] In the circles of free Italian emigration, the need has long been felt for a body that would be the unitary representation of all Italians living in Switzerland and remaining faithful to the great traditions of freedom and humanity that run through the entire history of Italy, from the medieval communes to Garibaldi's epic. The new Federation wishes to remain absolutely extraneous to the influence of any party but cannot and does not want to be insensitive to the ideal needs that have irresistibly affirmed themselves in recent Italian events²⁴.

The formal act of establishing the FCLIS was therefore completed. The reasons were linked to the need for *unified representation of all Italians* and the need to coordinate the work to be done. Since the advent of Fascism in Italy, "it was the duty of every free compatriot to help save the country by fighting for the restoration of democracy within it"²⁵. This principle was at the basis of the constitution of purely Italian free associations in the Confederation.

After 8 September 1943, the tasks that awaited the *Colonie Libere* were demanding both because of the attitude of the Swiss authorities and the large number of Italians arriving in Switzerland. Its headquarters soon became the location for meetings, debates, and cultural, political, and social events. The FCLIS was the first truly democratic laboratory for Italian migration, looking hopefully to a new Italy modelled on the anti-fascist Resistance²⁶.

It was not limited to conferences and discussions, but mainly worked on concrete projects. First of all, the *Federazione* had to be strengthened, new *Colonie* had to be founded and support for the Resistance had to be reorganised, also through aid to refugees. Within the *Colonie*, rescue committees for civilian and military refugees (*Comitati di soccorso ai rifugiati civili e militari*) were established, which between 1943 and 1945

²⁴ (Ricciardi, *Associazionismo ed emigrazione*, 23).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ricciardi, Toni and Cattacin, Sandro. "Migrant Associations: Political Opportunities and Structural Ambivalences. The Case of the Federation of Free Italian Colonies in Switzerland". In *Switzerland and Migration*, ed. Barbara Lüthi and Damir Skenderovic (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 191-208.

carried out a fruitful work in favour of the thousands of Italians.

Moreover, by the end of 1944 FCLIS had already expanded rapidly: there were more than twenty federated *Colonie*, including the *Unione Donne Italiane di Zurigo* (Italian Women's Union of Zurich), and each had its own statute. The principles of these statutes were incorporated into that of the *Federazione* itself, approved on 28 May 1944 by the Federal Conference in Zurich²⁷. Beyond the reconciliation and the union of all the groups and associations born in emigration, with the clear intention of opposing Fascism, FCLIS immediately relaunched its action in favour of emigrants towards the future Italian governments. Such as, for example, the question of the representation of Italians abroad, which was then translated into two specific speeches presented by Fernando Schiavetti to the Constituent Assembly, with the aim of creating a *Consiglio degli emigrati* (Council of Emigrants).

By the end of the war, FCLIS had formed and its configuration began to take shape in a structured manner. At the end of the conflict, the most qualified cadres and, more generally, the exiles, those who had years of struggle against the regime returned to Italy²⁸.

After 1945 Italy, devastated by the war, had to face the choice of its geopolitical position and the institutional transition from the monarchy, accused of having been an accomplice of Fascism, to the Republic. The *Colonie* found themselves playing a complex game on several fronts. The 1948 recruitment agreement between Switzerland and Italy marked a milestone for the following decades. While this was nothing new for Italy, having inaugurated the *golden season of emigration agreements* with Belgium as early as 1946, for Switzerland it marked the debut of the recruitment agreement season, which subsequently affected several countries. However, despite the fact that Egidio Reale, a man from the *Colonie*²⁹, was negotiating for Italy, the position of the organisation was totally contrary. The *Colonie* accused the Italian government policy of selling out their migrants.

The action in the first post-war decade of FCLIS was substantially characterised by activities of reception and protection of emigration which, already in 1946, was beginning to be mass towards Switzerland again³⁰.

²⁷ (Ricciardi, *Associazionismo ed emigrazione*, 140).

²⁸ SSZ, Circolari alle sezioni 1943-1949, Ar. 40.20.2.b, Circolare alle sezioni della Federazione delle Colonie Libere in Svizzera, Zurigo maggio 1945.

²⁹ Sonia Castro, *Egidio Reale tra Italia, Svizzera e Europa* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2011).

³⁰ Toni Ricciardi, *Breve storia dell'emigrazione italiani in Svizzera. Dall'esodo di massa alle nuove mobilità* (Roma: Donzelli, 2018).

As we have seen, the first instrument with which FCLIS was equipped was the Assistance Committee, which later became the *Assistenza Italiana di Zurigo* (Italian Assistance of Zurich) and which operated until 1975. After the Second World War, when financial resources were consolidated in collaboration with the Italian consular delegations in the area, the assistance was mainly of an economic nature in the field of health care and support for destitute families. Managed by the then historical president of FCLIS, Giovanni Medri, it soon became a sort of parallel employment office for the many job seekers from Italy.

Conclusions

As seen, from the anti-fascist network that was formed organically in November 1943, a structure was born that still today represents a *unicum* of its kind among migrating associations. To complete this reconstruction, it is necessary to briefly mention the foundations that led to its birth, which, once again, saw the exiles stationed in Zurich as protagonists. This *Colonia Libera*, founded in 1930, soon crossed the borders of the city and the canton of the same name, building contacts and links with Italian anti-fascists in other federal territories and with Swiss opponents of the fascist regime. His activities are mainly related to the *Scuola Libera di Zurigo*, fundraising for anti-fascist activities in Italy and abroad, the organisation of anti-fascist movements in Switzerland, the continuous promotion of information conferences and debates aimed at raising awareness and protecting Italian emigration in the Confederation. Moreover, what will have the greatest impact on the future birth of the *Federazione* will be the capacity to build and spread the anti-fascist network to support Italian emigration in Switzerland.

During the 1930s, other *Colonie Libere* were to be established throughout Switzerland, though mainly in German-speaking Switzerland. Examples are the *Colonia* of Schaffhausen, Kreuzlingen, St. Gallen, Arbon, Kradolf, Baden, Basel and Grenchen. On the French-speaking side, in 1925-'27 associations were already active in Geneva, the first *Colonia* ever to be founded in Switzerland, and Lausanne. As far as Ticino is concerned, there will be a significant membership of the *Colonia Proletaria Italiana* with sections in Lugano, Bellinzona, Locarno and Mendrisio, which will later form others in Chiasso, Giornico, Lavorgo and Osogna³¹. So, between the end of the 1930s and the early 1940s, associations and *Colonie* were spreading considerably: to many of the exiles and anti-

³¹ (Ricciardi, *Associazionismo ed emigrazione*, 19).

fascists in Switzerland it was clear that the regime was crumbling. Ultimately, the idea of the creation of the *Colonie* became established in the nucleus of Zurich and the promoter was Schiavetti himself, who organised the way the project was conceived and implemented, thanks also to close and continuous contact with Reale and Chiostergi who worked on Geneva. In order to fully understand the level of collaboration between the two points of reference of anti-fascism in Switzerland and to have an exhaustive picture of the positions and, also, of the contrasts within the organisation, it is significant the testimony of Schiavetti himself a few years later:

One of the periods of activity of Italian emigration to Switzerland in which the value of Egidio Reale's collaboration and influence was particularly felt was that of the constitution and the contrasting affirmation of the *Colonie Libere Italiane*. When, in July 1943, with the dismissal and arrest of Mussolini, the first collapse of the dictatorship took place and a conflict between Fascism and the official bodies of the monarchic state was determined, the problem that the Italian anti-fascists in Switzerland had to face was that of being able to enter immediately into this quarrel with the triple aim of coming into contact with the emigrated masses, influenced until that moment by the very active fascist and clerical propaganda, to take them away from the ambiguous politics of our consular representations and to direct them towards generic ideals of democracy and freedom. This attitude of ours, on the opportunity of which the most representative personalities of anti-fascist emigration belonging to the Republican, Socialist, Communist and Action Party, [...] Chiostergi, De Logu, Reale, Sancisi, Gorni, Silone, and others [...] found a strong opposition among some elements of the old emigration that enjoyed, for their past and for their fidelity to the ideals of democracy, a lively and deserved prestige among Italians. They could not admit that relations of any kind had been established with the consular authorities – [...] which, with a few worthy exceptions, had in fact made themselves odious because of the provocative and police zeal with which they had served the regime [...] – and that it was extremely painful for us to come into contact with them, even if it was to disperse them and neutralise their work. In Zurich, the initiative to organise a public and official meeting with the Consul General at the "Casa degli Italiani", until then fascist, [...] during which we obliged him to listen to our strict declaration on the responsibility of the regime and its representations abroad [...], and the simultaneous foundation, at my suggestion, of the *Colonie Libere Italiane*, aimed at attracting the largest possible number of Italians to the Resistance and anti-fascism, cost us the break-up, fortunately transitory, of old and dear friendships which had been our comfort and pride during the heavy and painful years of exile³².

³² SSZ, Letteratura, Ar. 40.20.19, «Quaderni di Agorà», marzo 1994.

Following the example of Zurich, all the *Colonie* established relations with the local consulates, not only with a lack of criticism, but also with the commitment to cooperate and to bind them to the observance of a new democratic style. Although it was the core of the future *Federazione*, however, the *Colonia di Zurigo* was slow to set in motion due to internal conflicts. In fact, in August 1943, it was the headquarters in Geneva that laid the foundations for a first founding nucleus of the *Federazione* movement, thanks to the work of Egidio Reale. The news was thus reported on 17 August 1943 in the columns of “*Libera Stampa*”, of the Ticino Socialist Party:

The *Colonia Libera di Ginevra* [...] has only one hope and one ambition: that one day not far away it may become purely and simply the *Colonia Italiana di Ginevra*, so that, while each maintaining his or her own opinions and preserving his or her faith, there will no longer be among the Italians of Geneva nor men who do not feel free, who do not love freedom, nor men who need to declare themselves free, to oppose servants and admirers of servitude³³.

As previously pointed out, in the aftermath of 8 September 1943, the tasks that awaited the *Colonie Libere* became burdensome both because of the attitude that the Swiss authorities maintained in those years and because of the large number of Italians arriving in Switzerland. During the war the Swiss government maintained a neutral attitude, so that the newcomers were unable to carry out public political activity. The 20,000 or so Italians³⁴ who found asylum in the Confederation were in fact displaced almost entirely in camps, with the exception of those who had families in the country willing to host them.

In the end, FCLIS became “a centre of autonomous political and cultural life, destined first and foremost – in that last period of war – to strengthen and extend the material assistance of the many refugees received in the Confederation”³⁵.

³³ SSZ, Rifugiati, Ar. 40.30.1.c, *Lettera della CLI di Baden al Comitato Assistenza Italiana Zurigo*, Baden 14 aprile 1945.

³⁴ Vittorio Briani, *Il lavoro italiano in Europa. Ieri e oggi* (Roma: MAE, 1972), 97.

³⁵ Francesco Scomazzon, “La Svizzera, gli emigrati italiani e l’associazionismo laico: storia della Federazione delle Colonie Libere Italiane (1943-1973),” *Studi Emigrazione*, No. 180 (2010): 831.