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Stefan Laffin

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Gaining a Foothold in the Weimar Republic: Giuseppe Renzetti's Activities in the years 1925-1927

STEFAN LAFFIN

Bielefeld Univ., Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology

The article studies Giuseppe Renzetti's activities in the Weimar Republic in the mid-1920s. Besides adding to Renzetti's colorful yet often opaque biographical picture, this article seeks to contribute to studies on the dissemination and propaganda of Fascism abroad and to the political culture of the Weimar Republic. Likewise, actors such as the fasci italiani all'estero, the German Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) or German newspapers can be highlighted. Based on a thorough analysis of Renzetti's personal papers and documents today stored at the Auswärtiges Amt, the article stresses how equally bustling and inauspicious Renzetti's activities were, revealing the process which led to Renzetti's designation as political intermediary.

Introduction

On 10 December 1925, the «*Tägliche Rundschau*» ran an article which would evoke strong responses both in German journalistic and political circles. Under the title *Italienisches Faschistenhaus in Berlin?* [*An Italian house of Fascists in Berlin?*], the liberal newspaper published information concerning the intended creation which was meant to accommodate the Italian chamber of commerce, an Italian consulate, the central of-

office of the *fasci italiani all'estero* and a travel agency¹. The central figure behind this project was the Fascist Giuseppe Renzetti, who was by 1925 already a well-known figure among the German journalist and political elite. The Italian planned to pool his widespread interests in this place as he was involved in all the above mentioned institutions to the end of advertising Fascism in the Weimar Republic. The plan of the Italian Fascist house thereby marks a first, albeit not final point of culmination for his activities. It can hence serve as a narrative reference to correlate the numerous ventures Renzetti pursued.

Giuseppe Renzetti has been first introduced to historiography by Renzo de Felice who shed light on the Italian's acting as a go-between for Nazism and Fascism² [De Felice 1971]. Moreover, Federico Niglia examined Renzetti's actions in the connections between Berlin and Rome [Niglia 2002]. Wolfgang Schieder addressed the unique role of Renzetti, thereby making the precise distinction that he had already been acting in the role of an intermediary by the late 1920s and – even more so – for the whole German Right and not only for the Nazi Party [Schieder 2005]³.

In the following pages, the interpretative framework of microhistory combined with the biographical approach focusing on Giuseppe Renzetti will be applied [Renders 2013]. Tracing Renzetti's activities between 1925 and 1927, the article contributes to our knowledge of

¹ *Italienisches Faschistenhaus in Berlin* (1925), «Tägliche Rundschau», December 10. The overall argument of the article is based on my MA-thesis. See Laffin 2013. All quotes were initially in German or Italian and have been translated by me for the purpose of this article. For comments and general remarks I would like to thank Kristoffer Klammer, Cleovi Mosuela, and Daniel Siemens.

² When speaking of Fascism in this article, I mean Italian Fascism. This should not be understood as an interpretation or contribution to debates on typology or theory of Fascism but only serves the readability.

³ Relevant information is also in Cannistraro 1982, 452, De Felice 1974, De Felice 1975 (especially chapter 7), Woller 1993, Woller 2001. An Italian translation of Schieder's article is Schieder 2006; it also got republished in 2008.

the relations between the German Right and Fascism. However, I will deal not so much with relational and transfer aspects between the German Right and Fascism, but would like to point out the terms and conditions which make examining those aspects possible after all. For this purpose, it scrutinizes the prelude to the formal establishment of the contacts nourished by one of its most crucial protagonists. It was during this period when Renzetti tried maneuvering his political activities in the Weimar Republic to find an appropriate role for himself in the socio-political landscape. Much of these endeavors provided the basis for his later function which Wolfgang Schieder rightly described as that of being a «shadow ambassador» for the German Right [Schieder 2005, 29].

Highlighting the years 1925-1927 illuminates his accomplishments as much as his failures and avoids ascribing the historical actor a rationality which presupposes a logical sequence of events and deliberate decisions [Levi 2013, 91-93]. This is not to diminish his importance in the subsequent years in which Giuseppe Renzetti gained his (infamous) relevance. Yet I will argue that it was precisely in this earlier period that he laid the ground for his later relevance and fame. Thereby it can also contribute to more general fields of research. The spotlight hence also turns to the *Auswärtiges Amt* (the German Foreign Office) or the *fasci italiani all'estero*, thus not changing, but potentially modifying some established historical narratives [Ginzburg, Poni 1991; Renders 2013, 197-200].

While Giuseppe Renzetti was not nearly as important as leading Fascists in Rome or the protagonists of the German Right, he was far and away the most relevant intermediary between Fascism and the German Right and later solely Nazism. In addition to that, we are in a fortunate situation to have available his personal papers stored at the German Federal Archive in Koblenz, including the reports Renzetti furnished to his Italian contacts and his memoirs. Repeatedly started over again but never completed, the handwritten memoirs pose a major obstacle

as Renzetti usually did not indicate which of the many versions of the same incident the most recent one was. Then again, the memoirs are heavily permeated by an apologetic whitewash which is why in this article I focus more on the source material available in the Political Archive of the German Foreign Office and the reports Renzetti drafted. Based on these sources, the main focus of this article is to examine Giuseppe Renzetti's activities in the years 1925-1927 while linking them to the overall socio-political context to avoid that the biographical narrowing turns into arbitrary storytelling⁴. In many respects, Giuseppe Renzetti also resembles a concept which Roger Griffin elaborated for a collective volume to describe persons of the Right in Central and Eastern Europe. In the introduction to this volume, Griffin lays out criteria for «personalities» and hence theorizes individual persons and how they succeeded in becoming efficacious in certain milieus [Griffin 2011]. Eventually, this was what Renzetti had in mind: to become successful to the point of gaining «influence within activist circles or movements pursuing particular political goals» [Griffin 2011, 21f.]. I will first address the biographical background of Giuseppe Renzetti, highlighting why he would find himself living in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s and provide context on his later role as political intermediary. I will then give a closer look to how he navigated his activities in the mid-1920s, thereby stressing the Italian chamber of commerce, the consulate in Leipzig and his role as representative for the *fasci italiani all'estero* in Germany. In this latter aspect, a particular close treatment of the establishment of the *fascio* in Leipzig will be included as it is possible here to trace how the policy of establishing fascist groups in foreign countries (*fasci*) worked. I will then proceed to demonstrate what circumstances enabled him to advertise Fascism, highlighting the alleged relevance of Germany for any Italian foreign policy and the decision

⁴ Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu has spoken of the biographical illusion in that context. See Bourdieu 1986, 69-72.

to propagate Fascism abroad more enthusiastically. By means of the integrative bracket of the Italian fascist house, I will conclude this article with a brief interpretation of Renzetti's undertakings, emphasizing the peculiarities and dynamics which made his remarkable development towards becoming a political intermediary possible.

Giuseppe Renzetti, a Biographical sketch

Renzetti was born on 4 November 1891 in Ascoli Piceno. After entering the Italian army, he participated in the Italian war in Libya in 1912. Four years later, he was deployed in Vlora, Albania where he remained until 1920 as a member of the Italian occupation forces⁵. Following a brief return to Italy, Renzetti then became a member of the Military Inter-Allied Commission of Control for Upper Silesia [Schieder 2005, 30] where he rose to the rank of police commander [Renzetti 1930]. He also met Susanne Kochmann in Gliwice, whom he would marry in 1927. She was the daughter of the Jew Arthur Kochmann, a long-standing member of the city council and honorary citizen of Gliwice [Birnbaum 1981, 62]⁶.

When his activity in the control commission came to an end, Renzetti decided to stay in Germany and was thus confronted with the task of making a living. The extent to which his dissemination of Fascism was a means to an end to gain a comfortable income or whether the financial reason was ancillary to the ideological one must remain speculative. In any case, Renzetti attended to the purpose of advertising Fascism

⁵ See Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BArch/K) NL 1235/16, Renzetti memoirs. The documents in the personal papers of Renzetti carry no specific title, so that I indicated the information in English. As for other archives, I left the titles in either German or Italian.

⁶ Arthur Kochmann was deported to Auschwitz on 28 December 1943 and was murdered there.

in Germany. What makes this truly remarkable is that he, after all that we know, took the initiative without any sort of official order.

For his role as an intermediary it first needs to be investigated precisely at what time Renzetti was acknowledged by the Roman authorities. Renzetti was seen as Mussolini's liaison in Berlin already in 1926 as the reports in the *Auswärtiges Amt* and the journalistic coverage of the time make clear; yet only the September 1930 Reichstag elections, in which Renzetti predicted the huge increase in number of seats for the Nazi Party, gave rise to this position⁷. Renzetti was summoned to Rome where Mussolini effectively appointed him a special emissary for Germany⁸. This led to a further increase in prestige for Renzetti among his German contacts; in a sense, the glory Mussolini radiated in the German Right transferred onto Renzetti himself⁹. Even before winning Mussolini's favor, Italian diplomats protected Renzetti. Despite being at daggers drawn with them, his political network was too unique for discounting him. This protection was very much in the self-interest of the diplomats since at times it bred ill blood when it came to light that the embassy was cultivating contacts with the German Right. By contrast, Renzetti was at an advantage as he was not belonging to the diplomatic corps and therefore his actions could always be repudiated since he was «not a member of the embassy but a free citizen»¹⁰.

It can be safely assumed that by 1929 Renzetti devoted most of his time to act as go-between for the German Right and Italian Fascists. Interestingly enough, up until this point Renzetti paid above all attention to

⁷ See BArch/K NL 1235/9, Report Renzetti. Unfortunately the exact date cannot be read.

⁸ See BArch/K NL 1235/2, Report Renzetti, 27 September 1930.

⁹ See the first entry concerning Renzetti by Joseph Goebbels: «Late in the evening I have to go to Major Renzetti, Mussolini's representative in Berlin», Fröhlich 2005, 302 (11 December 1930).

¹⁰ Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (hereafter DDI), Serie 7, Vol. X, No. 101, Baroni a Grandi, 2 March 1931, 158.

the *Stahlhelm*, the paramilitary veteran's organization. People like the regional leader for Brandenburg, Elhald von Morosowicz, or Vicco von Bülow-Schwante introduced him to the leadership of the veteran's association and thereby enlarged his political network¹¹. Even after the Nazis took power in 1933, Bülow remained a weighty advocate for Renzetti due to his position as a leading diplomat in the *Auswärtiges Amt*. The narrative of an interpenetrative correlation between Nazism and Fascism, which is an interpretation too much thought from the perspective of how it eventually played out, can also be called into question by focusing on Renzetti in this story.

Thanks to Hermann Göring, Renzetti got also in touch with the Nazi Party. Göring's affinity for Italy and Renzetti's military career surely played a part in the friendship between the two. Göring emphasized the «manifold relations» between Fascism and Nazism and tried to make himself out to be an expert for Italian affairs¹². After having organized a visit to Rome in May 1930 for Göring and Joseph Goebbels to «study Fascism there», the former presented Renzetti to basically the whole Nazi leadership¹³.

The Harzburg Front then marked pinnacle and disillusionment all at once for Renzetti; on the one hand he reported in solemn fashion that «the Harzburg Front originated in my house»¹⁴. Renzetti, through or-

¹¹ For the *Stahlhelm* see the study by Berghahn 1966, still the book of reference on the group's organizational aspects or, more recent, Hoffstadt 2013. Susanne Renzetti mentioned von Morosowicz years later as a good friend of her husband; information by Wolfgang Schieder in a personal conversation with the author in July 2012. For information on von Bülow see Conze 2010, 43ff.

¹² See the three articles written by Göring 1926abc, the quote is in Göring 1926b.

¹³ BArch/K NL 1235/2, Report Renzetti, presumably May 1930.

¹⁴ BArch/K NL 1235/12, Report Renzetti, 31 January 1933. The Harzburg Front was a political alliance of right-wing political forces, including the NSDAP, DNVP (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*), and the Stahlhelm, to confront the Brüning government. The meeting in Bad Harzburg was the only meeting of this kind as ruptures among the different parties soon became apparent.

ganizations like the *Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* which he helped founding [Wichmann 2013], envisaged the institutionalization of the unification of the German Right, or in other words: the stabilization of singular events like the meeting in Bad Harzburg. On the other hand, the immediate aftermath of the Front simultaneously provided reason to be disenchanted as especially the NSDAP reneged on any agreement¹⁵. Their political independence became blatantly obvious soon after. The show of force which the SA rally in Braunschweig on October 17 and 18 – and thus only one week after Bad Harzburg – accomplished, seemed to convince Renzetti to bank on the Nazis to achieve power [Woller 1993, 54]¹⁶. He left Braunschweig together with Goebbels with whom he would drive back to Berlin¹⁷. Likewise, Renzetti followed an invitation by Hitler to the Obersalzberg and spent two days in June 1931 there¹⁸. Sure enough the ingratiating on the part of the Nazi leadership, for which Renzetti thanked Hitler just one day later in a personal letter, certainly helped swaying Renzetti to favor the Nazi party in their quest for power¹⁹.

To some extent, this marks the Nazi advent to power a personal triumph of Renzetti, too. Equally symbolic – insofar as it was an affront to the diplomacy – and testifying to the personal esteem, Renzetti was called to the Reich Chancellery one day after Hitler's appointment to

¹⁵ Soon after, the NSDAP resumed its policy of disturbing assemblages of the DNVP and attack the party in their newspaper «Der Angriff». See Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (hereafter GSta PK), 1. HA Rep 77 Ministerium des Innern. Tit. 4043, n. 302.

¹⁶ Renzetti was formally invited to the SA rally. See BArch/K NL 1235/3, invitation from 14 October 1931.

¹⁷ See Fröhlich 2005, 128, 19 October 1931.

¹⁸ See BArch/K NL 1235/10, Report Renzetti, 10 June 1931; see also the table listing the meetings between Hitler and Renzetti in Schieder 2005, 42-45.

¹⁹ See BArch/K NL 1235/4, Renzetti to Hitler, 19 October 1931.

the office²⁰. Yet the function Renzetti assumed in the years leading up to the 30 January 1933 was no longer needed. Since the official diplomacy could now have open contacts with the Nazi party, Renzetti only surfaced on special occasions, whenever German-Italian relations got testy such as when the Nazis demanded the dismissal of Italian ambassador Vittorio Cerruti in 1935 [Petersen 1969].

What is also true, however, is that after all those years acting as an Italian shadow ambassador to the German Right, Renzetti was now increasingly perceived as the shadow ambassador of the German Right. This was never more obvious than in June 1934 during the incidents surrounding the «Night of the Long Knives». Renzetti openly blamed Goebbels to be the driving force behind the purge, probably to protect his friend Göring²¹. This view contrasted severely with the reports by the Italian embassy. On occasions like these, it became apparent that Renzetti's value in providing information went astray. All this led to Renzetti's redeployment as a General Consul in San Francisco²².

The time in the US did not last long. Roughly a year later, in October 1936, Renzetti returned to Berlin at the urging of his German contacts²³. Certainly, this did little to assuage Renzetti's careerist ambition; as general consul he was now part of the strict institutional setting which he so long did compete with successfully. Renzetti, being sidelined, stuck to mostly representative work and received various honors from the Nazi regime²⁴. All this frustrated Renzetti greatly. His anger

²⁰ See BArch/K NL 1235/12, Report Renzetti, 31 January 1933.

²¹ See Archivio Centrale dello Stato (hereafter ACS), Ministero Cultura Popolare. Fascicolo Report m. 20 Giuseppe Renzetti. Report Renzetti, 14 July 1934.

²² See BArch/K NL 1235/7, unknown author (presumably von Bülow) to Renzetti, 7 January 1936.

²³ BArch/K NL 1235/6, Göring to Renzetti, 16 May 1936.

²⁴ Renzetti received the Order of the German Eagle on 7 September 1937.

erupted in a direct face-off with Ciano in the spring of 1941²⁵. As an immediate consequence, Renzetti was redeployed once again, this time as an envoy to Sweden²⁶. There he served as a diplomat until 1944; secluded from World War II and the fall of Fascism, Renzetti's relevance was diminishing to the point of him being absolutely marginalized. In this situation, he sided with the Badoglio government after Mussolini was dismissed by the Italian Grand Council of Fascism, which led to a rift with his former German contacts [Scarano 1996, 527]. Disappointed personal career expectations and mental and geographic remoteness of the Fascist policy played its part in that decision. After the war had ended, Renzetti and his wife returned to Italy where he died impoverished in 1953. Oddly enough, this was the first time since 1920 that Renzetti came back to his home country for a longer term. In this sense, he perceived Fascism as much from the outside as his German contacts, for which he served as an informal advisor and shadow ambassador, a role which would establish his historical significance in the end.

The Italian Chamber of Commerce

Basically until Renzetti's first leave from Germany in 1935, the chamber of commerce served as institutional basis for his later activities. It was founded in 1923 and thus rather quickly after his time in the control commission had ended²⁷. Even before, Renzetti played a part

²⁵ See Fröhlich 1998, 546 (21 March 1941).

²⁶ The exequatur as general consul ceased on 26 March 1941, see Renzetti's personal file in Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (hereafter PA AA), R 119836.

²⁷ See PA AA, R 30285b, report about the statements made by Dalmo Carnevali, 18 October 1924.

in the preceding organization²⁸. At the same time, Renzetti envisaged the foundation of another chamber of commerce in Munich, not least because of the status of Munich as one of the centers of the German Right. This fell through initially before it worked out in 1926²⁹. Renzetti would be the president of the *Vereinigung der italienischen Handelskammern in Deutschland* – a superior position towards other chambers of commerce.

Having founded the chamber did not provide an immediate financial remedy however. To this end, Renzetti published the Italian newspaper «*La Cultura*» for which he received financial support through the Italian embassy [Schieder 2005, 31]; moreover, the newspaper «*Il Gagliardetto*» was supported by the Italian Foreign Office with 300 Lire monthly³⁰. In addition to that, he could resort to his army days. As a major of the Italian Army, he received a so-called waiting pay which could be paid to army personnel which was expected to return to military service at some future time. This waiting period expired for Renzetti in June 1925 as the maximum duration of three years would end then³¹. Therefore Renzetti was faced with the decision to either return to military service or to forgo these earnings. By all indications, one of Renzetti's confidants in Rome – presumably Italo Balbo – intervened and helped extend this period. This finally ended in late 1928 when Renzetti would also formally quit military service³². The revenue generated from

²⁸ See PA AA, R 30285b, Preußisches Innenministerium an Auswärtiges Amt, 24 December 1924. Both the *Deutsch-Italienische-Handels-Aktien-Gesellschaft*, founded in 1920, and the later chamber of commerce were located in the Markgrafenstraße 55 in Berlin.

²⁹ See PA AA, R 72963, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 30 December 1926.

³⁰ see BArch/K NL 1235/1, Renzetti to the Italian Embassy, 22 April 1926.

³¹ See PA AA, R 30285b, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 23 April 1925.

³² See BArch/K NL 1235/1, War Ministry to military air attaché in Berlin Camillo Rossi, 30 November 1928.

his editing work as well as from his military service was not sufficient enough by any means though. This might explain why Renzetti occasionally tried to use the chamber of commerce for his own profit which in turn led to grievances:

I approached the Italian chamber of commerce [for my personal business] and they promised me the greatest success. Such a success failed to materialize though. On the contrary, RENZETTO [sic!] and de MORI, who apparently work hand in hand, prompted me to take over the sale of Italian local products, and to further [...] share the profits with them³³.

While it should serve the need to offset Renzetti's living costs, perhaps most remarkable, this grievance allows us to keep track of Renzetti's Italian network. Said de Mori was among the leading figures in the Fascist propaganda in Munich. Apparently the two shared some sort of business before as well³⁴. In addition to this dubious business conduct, Renzetti constantly tried to plead his case for financial support to Italian authorities. By October 1925 Renzetti did not have to plead for money any more. After all, the chamber of commerce received 12.000 Lire for representational purposes as the official letter stated³⁵.

The position as the president of the chamber of commerce was more than just camouflage for Fascist activities however. Renzetti conceived himself as an expert on economic issues. For example, in 1926 Renzetti ran various articles in the Italian newspaper «*Il Sole*» that were concerned with distinct economic matters and made a point of giving Italians an understanding of the German economy³⁶. Many presenta-

³³ See PA AA, R 30285b, Hans von Schütz an das Deutsche Generalkonsulat Mailand, 3 April 1925. Emphasis in Original.

³⁴ See PA AA, R 72961, Polizeidirektion München an Staatsministerium des Äußeren, 13 October 1925.

³⁵ See BArch/K NL 1235/1, commercial attaché of the Italian embassy A. Riccardi to Renzetti, 18 October 1925.

³⁶ See Renzetti G. 1926a, *Gli sforzi per la restaurazione economica tedesca*, «*Il Sole*», 27

tions on economic questions³⁷ and book publications lend further credence to that³⁸. Beyond, Renzetti was called upon for his participation in committees such as that of the *Istituto Nazionale per L'Esportazione* to provide his expertise on the export of Italian fruits and vegetables³⁹. The Berlin police nevertheless openly described the chamber of commerce as a «fascist organization» and assumed many of the employees to be former members of the control commission⁴⁰. Whether or not this could hold true, the chamber gained a doubtful reputation among German authorities. This was not least due to the report by Dalmo Carnevali, an anti-fascist informant, in which he informed the Foreign Office about activities undertaken by the chamber of commerce⁴¹. An intelligence service which Renzetti would operate collected relevant data which was pivotal both to economic and military espionage. Besides these clear illegal actions, official inquiries made by the chamber were also perceived as espionage⁴².

While this episode bears no great relevance in principle, two ramifications are noteworthy. It can first show how well-connected Renzetti

May; Renzetti G. 1926b, *La situazione economica tedesca*, «Il Sole», 17 July; Renzetti G. 1926c, *L'industria automobilistica tedesca*, «Il Sole», 24 August; Renzetti G. 1926d, *La situazione commerciale e il mercato dei valori e del lavoro*, «Il Sole», 5 September; Renzetti G. 1926e, *L'economia tedesca*, «Il Sole», 16 September.

³⁷ Renzetti gave lectures at the *Deutsche Herrenklub*, the *Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus*, or the Milan chamber of commerce, for instance.

³⁸ See for instance Renzetti 1934a, 1934b, 1934c.

³⁹ See BArch/K NL 1235/1, Letter from the President of said Institute to Renzetti, 26 August 1926.

⁴⁰ See PA AA, R72962, Polizeipräsident Berlin Albert Grzesinski an den preußischen Innenminister Carl Severing, 19 January 1926.

⁴¹ See PA AA, R 30285b, Report about the statements made by Dalmo Carnevali, 18 October 1924. Carnevali himself apparently later turned to Fascism, too; a report by the *SS-Gruppe Ost* mentioned that in November 1932, see BArch/K NL 1235/4.

⁴² See PA AA, R 242193, Verlagsanstalt des Messeamts Leipzig an Auswärtiges Amt, 13 April 1926.

already was by the mid-1920s and moreover it supports the conjecture that German state authorities dealt (or rather, not dealt) with him in an odd manner. In his reply, Renzetti not only denied any such espionage activity but assured that neither he nor any of his staff members would concern themselves with politics and would consider it an «obligation of honor (*Ehrenpflicht*) not to interfere in the internal affairs of the country, which has taken us in as guests and which we esteem so highly.»⁴³ While Renzetti's actual activities ridiculed this statement, more important is the way Renzetti introduced his letter: «It has come to my knowledge that a certain Dalmo Carnevali, an Italian living in Berlin, made the following statements.» Certainly enough, the *Auswärtiges Amt* had no intention that Renzetti would learn of the report made by Carnevali. Either his network of former companions from the control commission or another source must have informed him about that. Perhaps not surprisingly, the investigations made by the Foreign Office lead nowhere⁴⁴.

Making this episode even more astounding, one year later Renzetti was appointed responsible for Italian fairs in Leipzig in 1926. This position was a fitting offer for Renzetti and combined his main objectives again: it was a welcome opportunity to extend his network, promote Italian products and help draw a more positive image of Italy all the while happening in a field in which he was clearly an expert. The economic expertise must have led to his excellent reputation among German authorities, too. Despite the report made by Carnevali, despite the suspicion of the espionage activity, despite the opinion that the chamber of commerce was a Fascist organization, Renzetti was in good repute even in the *Auswärtiges Amt*. Otherwise it is difficult to

⁴³ See PA AA, R 30285b, Renzetti an Legationssekretär Thomsen, Italienische Abteilung, Auswärtiges Amt, 10 November 1924.

⁴⁴ See PA AA, R 30285b, 28 November 1924 where it was stated that «Renzetti must have somehow learned about the fact that German authorities have taken notice of him».

explain why Renzetti could assume the post at the Leipzig fair and organize Italian exhibitions. The general secretary of the *Fiera di Milano*, Fabio Majnoni, reached out to the *Legationsrat* in the *Auswärtiges Amt*, Paul Schwarz, to discuss the possibility to anoint a responsible for fairs (*Messekommissar*)⁴⁵. But Majnoni was also aware of the fact that Renzetti had gained a dubious reputation; apparently word reached him that Renzetti would at times «get carried away». Schwarz gathered information from both the *Auswärtiges Amt* and the Leipzig *Messeamt*. Neither raised any doubts which amazes insofar as it were these institutions that discussed his alleged espionage activities. Instead of advising Schwarz of that, now it was reported that Renzetti would «safeguard the German-Italian matters in a satisfying manner»⁴⁶. Oddly enough, *Legationsrat* Oster, who was responsible for furnishing the particulars about Renzetti's reputation in the *Auswärtiges Amt*, was the very same who would ponder the question on how to justify the refusal of his diplomatic status as a consul in Leipzig some months earlier.

Ultimately, the chamber of commerce served as the stage for Giuseppe Renzetti's diverse political and propagandistic interests. By the same token, this should not imply that it was only a cover for subversive ventures. Such a description would neither live up to the numerous economic articles and speeches by Renzetti nor to his collaboration in committees. It is nonetheless true that the commitment to the Fascist propaganda led to his withdrawal from the everyday operations in the chamber of commerce which was instead conducted by one his associates, Marchettini⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ See PA AA, R 241478, Maass an Schwarz, 23 October 1925. The following quote can also be found there.

⁴⁶ See PA AA, R 72962, Aufzeichnungen des Legationsrat Oster im Auswärtigen Amt, 8 January 1926.

⁴⁷ Like many others, Marchettini was already part of the Interallied Control Commission. See PA AA, R 72962, Polizeipräsident Albert Grzesinski an den preußischen Innenminister Carl Severing, 19 January 1926.

Consul in Leipzig?

His reduced involvement in the daily business in Berlin was mostly due to his activism in Leipzig. Again without having been instructed to do so, Renzetti opened a consulate there in March 1925, from which followed that he was neither officially acknowledged by the German authorities nor by the Italian diplomacy. The official usage in correspondence indicated that as he was described as administrator (*Verweser*) of the consulate. Therefore he was not paid by the Italian Foreign Ministry⁴⁸. In fact, opening the consulate initially threatened Renzetti's earnings even more as the Italian war ministry took the view that it would not have to account for the waiting pay any longer⁴⁹. Strikingly enough, Renzetti remained in the position of *Verweser* of the consulate until 1927. It is therefore also conjectural that his function – while not officially sanctioned by Rome – was not contravening the Italian wishes all too much.

In the meantime, the refusal of the exequatur for Renzetti posed major difficulties for the *Auswärtiges Amt*. Albeit not in close touch with Mussolini at that time, Renzetti was regarded as a personal confidant of the Fascist leader. Because of that, it was especially important that the refusal was not to be perceived as a way «to harm the leader of the Italian Fascist organizations in Germany and the confidant of Mussolini» as the aforementioned *Legationsrat* Oster put it⁵⁰. In order to not strain the political relations with Italy, it was therefore important to avoid the impression of a mere vexatious scheme. The explosive nature resided in Renzetti's reputation as a fascist propagandist which was not

⁴⁸ Renzetti demanded to get paid 700 Lira per month. See BArch/K NL 1235/1, Promemoria Renzetti, 16 August 1925.

⁴⁹ See PA AA, R 30285b, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 23 April 1925. Eventually, the settlement remained untouched.

⁵⁰ PA AA, R 72962, Aufzeichnungen des Legationsrat Oster im Auswärtigen Amt, 8 January 1926. The following quotes are also there.

easy to reconcile with the position of a consul. Eventually it was decided to approach the issue dilatorily and to increase the monitoring of Renzetti: «Both the circles affiliated with the *Vorwärts* and the German police will turn their attention [...] to Mister Renzetti. If in the process material against Renzetti comes about, the refusal of the exequatur [...] could be unassailable justified by the illegitimate political activity of a foreign representative». In these words past dealings with Renzetti reverberated even though the episode with the alleged espionage activity did not seem to suffice for the *Auswärtiges Amt* to refuse the exequatur on these grounds. Exacerbating the situation, the intended surveillance of Renzetti only started now, after ten months of Renzetti posing as a consul went by. This made any refusal more noteworthy which in turn required a more persuasive explanation.

It also needed careful reasoning as the German press put Renzetti in the cross hairs. The «*Vorwärts*» steadily reported about the Italian's activities, not failing to mention his self-appointment as consul and the lack of effort by the *Auswärtiges Amt* to deal with that matter⁵¹. Eventually, the report furnished by the Berlin chief of police convinced the *Auswärtiges Amt* to finally act and refuse this very exequatur⁵². Notwithstanding that the report could not prove any direct link between Renzetti and German political circles, it otherwise shattered the impression Renzetti had conveyed that he would not concern himself with political matters⁵³. Remarkably enough, Renzetti seemed unfazed; he just continued carrying on with the consulate after all.

The loss of both prestige and scope of action was nevertheless palpable.

⁵¹ See *Faschistenskandale überall* (1925), «*Vorwärts*», May 26; *Major Renzetti, der «Deutschenfreund»*. *Faschistische Ausreden* (1925), «*Vorwärts*», December 27; *Faschistentreiben in Berlin* (1926), «*Vorwärts*», September 2.

⁵² See PA AA, R 72962, Grzesinski an Severing, 19 January 1926.

⁵³ See *Das italienische Haus* (1925), «*Tägliche Rundschau*», December 25; PA AA, R 30285b, Renzetti an Legationssekretär Thomsen, Italienische Abteilung, *Auswärtiges Amt*, 10 November 1924.

In April 1926, and hence two months after the official refusal of the exequatur, Renzetti got into conflict with Alfred Friedrich Baß, a publisher based in Leipzig who had both founded the nationalist *Deutschen Marken-Kunst-Verlag* and the *Bund der Sprachinselfreunde*. Baß issued a stamp commenting upon one of the more sensitive matters in the German-Italian relations. The imprint – «Germans! Avoid Italy! Visit South Tyrol» – drove the point about his intention home⁵⁴. Again, Renzetti was well informed as he learned of this stamp despite the fact that it was never distributed. He wrote to the Saxon administrative bodies, expecting them to put a stop to Baß's activities. While the authorities took action, they refused any further official commerce with Renzetti «as long as he would not be at least provisionally authorized as a consul». For the Saxon authorities, Renzetti was little else than an Italian Fascist living in Germany. Further correspondence stated that even more explicit. When Renzetti wrote again to the administrative bodies to catch up on the steps taken, the Leipzig chief of police intervened, stating that the superior Italian authority would be informed about the proceedings⁵⁵. His intervention therefore resulted in a reprimand, further revealing how unsuccessful his tenure as a self-appointed consul was as the missing exequatur prevented him from gaining any scope. Renzetti, realizing this too, therefore reorganized. In the same months, in which the exequatur was refused, he tried to gain support for his nomination as a consul general in Berlin⁵⁶. The previous officeholder Anselmi was recalled as part of the dismissal of ambassador Alessandro de Bosdari. According to the «*Vorwärts*», a letter circulated in the Italian community in which Renzetti asked his compatriots to sign. As this

⁵⁴ See PA AA, R 72872, Bericht von Oberkriminalrat Junghans, April 1926. The following quote is also there.

⁵⁵ See PA AA, R 72872, Auswärtiges Amt an Ministerium der auswärtigen Angelegenheiten des Freistaates Sachsen, 6 May 1926.

⁵⁶ See *Was plant der Faschismus in Deutschland?* (1926), «*Vorwärts*», March 2.

did not materialize either, Renzetti settled for the consulate in Leipzig until its final closure upon Dino Grandi's request in early 1927. The undersecretary in the foreign ministry, opposing the *fasci italiani all'estero*, disliked Renzetti's bustling activities for a long time. He did not hide that fact in his conversation with the embassy counselor in Rome, Friedrich von Prittwitz und Gaffron:

[U]ndersecretary Grandi disclosed privately to me that the administrator of the Italian consulate in Leipzig, Mister Renzetti, has retired from the service of the foreign ministry. Renzetti had tried to thwart his envisaged relocation to Cardiff and has made an effort during the recent stay of undersecretary Balbo in Berlin, to enforce his further official assignment in Germany. Renzetti was a meddler [*Wichtigtuier*] and tries to push himself to the fore at every opportunity. He asked us to take note of the fact that the Italian government considers Renzetti a mere private citizen who is responsible for his own doings⁵⁷.

The statement made by Grandi is worth closer consideration. Taken literally, we learn that Renzetti had to close the consulate and dropped out from the diplomatic service. With Italo Balbo, he again tried to activate his personal network to reach his goal – in this case, his further use in Germany. Besides this immanent reading, there is also a second level to it: the conversation between Grandi and von Prittwitz und Gaffron took place in October 1927. The consulate was already closed by then. What we know is that at that point Renzetti was recommended by the new general secretary of the *fasci italiani all'estero* in Rome, Cornelio di Marzio, to the chief of the political police, Arturo Bocchini, as a secret agent [Schieder 2005, 29]. Set against this backdrop, it seems to suggest itself that Grandi wanted to take Renzetti out of the spotlight. Emphasizing that Renzetti was a «mere private citizen who is responsible for his own doings», Grandi anticipated potential frictions that Renzetti's acting as a go-between could provoke. From this

⁵⁷ PA AA, R 119836, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 18 October 1927.

perspective, Renzetti's relocation to Cardiff was a mere red herring, an impression which is corroborated by the fact that other than in this report there is no mention of a potential relocation to Wales. One way or another, the characterization of Renzetti as a «meddler» was likely Grandi's personal view. It can hold true for Renzetti's reputation as a private diplomat in the Italian foreign ministry.

His activities in Leipzig basically ended with the closure of the consulate. Although Renzetti tried to organize the daily affairs similar to those in Berlin – the consulate was led by the secretary Savario Pasquael – the personal gain for Renzetti remained negligible. For some years Leipzig became one of the centers of Fascist activity in Germany as local *fasci italiani all'estero*-representatives met once a month at the premises of the consulate⁵⁸. Once again a fusion of Renzetti's activities could be observed. These meetings further on had to back up the concerns shared by the *Auswärtiges Amt* and seemed to confirm the refusal of the exequatur retroactively again. In this sense, Renzetti was not an isolated case as consulates were more strictly observed since German authorities had the impression that staff members of consulates were involved in espionage⁵⁹.

Fasci Italiani all'Estero / Fascio di Lipsia

Coinciding with his time as a consul in Leipzig was his office as representative (*fiduciario*) of the *fasci italiani all'estero* [De Caprariis 2000; Mantelli 2003; Pretelli 2008; Pretelli 2010; Santarelli 1971] for Ger-

⁵⁸ See PA AA, R 72963, Sächsische Ministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten an Auswärtiges Amt, 3 March 1927.

⁵⁹ See GStA PK, 1. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern. Tit. 4043, n. 111. Preußisches Innenministerium an Auswärtiges Amt, 15 July 1927. At this point, Renzetti was not consul anymore.

many⁶⁰. At least since October 1925 Renzetti held this post because he was participating in that function in the first (and only) *fasci*-congress in Rome⁶¹. The subordination of the *fasci italiani all'estero* under the traditional diplomacy which was made all but certain at this congress was hence also known to Renzetti⁶². In that function he also met for the first times with Mussolini, first in December 1925 at the congress and in December 1926 along with the *fiducari* from China and Japan to discuss the achievements in the respective countries⁶³. Therefore we are well informed about the organization of Fascist groups in Germany at that time. According to Renzetti, *fasci* existed in Berlin, Duisburg, Düsseldorf, Essen, Hamburg, Cologne and Munich. Fascist groups – meaning those that were not yet fully consolidated – were found in Breslau, Dresden, Elberfeld, Leipzig, Oberhausen, Siegen and Wanne. For Chemnitz, Frankfurt on the Main and Wiesbaden similar groups were sought to be established. Unfortunately further information pertaining to the *fasci* and what criteria they had to meet in order to be acknowledged as a proper *fascio* are searched for in vain. Those groups undoubtedly had a mere symbolic character however.

The methodical approach to the Fascist course of action can also be deduced from the high degree of organization. The German State territory was split into five zones – either by Renzetti himself or a higher authority in Rome. In turn, these zones were put under the control of one representative so that Renzetti delegated his tasks as represen-

⁶⁰ For the writings of the heads of the organization: Bastianini 1939; Di Marzio 1923; Parini 1929.

⁶¹ See PA AA, R 72961, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 23 December 1925. The report by Carnevali in 1924 did not mention this function. Had Carnevali known about this, he surely would have raised this subject. So Renzetti must have assumed the office between October 1924 and October 1925.

⁶² See *I comandamenti del Duce ai Fascisti italiani all'estero* (1925), «Il Legionario», November 7; *Alcuni compiti dei Fasci all'estero* (1925), «Gerarchia», October 4.

⁶³ See PA AA, R 72963, Deutsche Botschaft Rom an Auswärtiges Amt, 30 December 1926.

tative. For Munich, Guido Albarelli was responsible, for the North of Germany Dr. Turi, for the Rhineland and Westphalia Mario Rognoni, for Saxony a certain Isandoro, and for Silesia Dr. Vittorio Chiusano. While Southern and Northern Germany only saw the founding of *fasci* in the respective metropolis – Munich and Hamburg –, in Western and Eastern Germany the dissemination was more widespread though it entailed problems as well.

The *fascio* in Essen, for instance, had to be dissolved as the group was not on good terms with the consulate in Duisburg. As if this dualism in institutions – which Mussolini had so emphatically advised against at the *fasci italiani all'estero*-congress a year earlier – was not enough, the consul in Duisburg was also Mario Rognoni, the representative for the Rhineland and Westphalia. At the core of the issue was the question who disposed of greater competences; in practice this was all about whether the consulate in Duisburg could issue instructions to the *fascio* in Essen⁶⁴. So while in one way Rognoni argued with himself, it displays that he predominantly considered himself a consul. As the *fascio* in Essen incessantly negated the leadership claim by the consulate, the *fascio* was unsurprisingly dissolved. The statements made by leading Fascists at the congress in 1925 left little for imagination; too obvious was the subordination of the *fasci* under the consulates for this quarrel over competences could have been concluded in any other way. The *fasci* remained relevant nevertheless as Rognoni was instructed to re-establish – presumably by Renzetti – a *fascio* in Essen. The peculiar constellation remained nevertheless intact. On the level of the *fasci italiani all'estero* Renzetti was the superior of Rognoni, yet at the diplomatic level Renzetti had no authority, especially since Rognoni was a legitimate consul.

Due to his position in the *fasci italiani all'estero* and the attention that

⁶⁴ See PA AA, R 72963, Polizeipräsident Essen an Preußisches Innenministerium, 12 February 1927.

Renzetti attracted in German government and journalistic circles, we can also reconstruct the founding of a particular *fascio*. The *Fascio Italiano di Lipsia* was established in October 1926 at the behest of Renzetti⁶⁵. Chairman of the *fascio* in Leipzig was the local merchant Serafino Carriere who was only insofar predestined as he was a convinced Fascist. The establishment of the *fascio* in Leipzig seemingly encroached on Renzetti's time. As early as October 1925 – and hence a year before – Renzetti announced his intention to constitute it⁶⁶. Attracting Italian citizens in Leipzig to join the *fascio* also proved to be arduous. The group's membership consisted mainly of shopkeepers and merchants: «Only after intense recruitment and campaigning of the consul Renzetti it succeeded that of the over 100 Italians living in Leipzig, 30 merchants and tradesmen could be organized to form the fascist group.»⁶⁷ The powerful position Renzetti occupied as president of the chamber of commerce and as official for the fairs in Leipzig basically compelled local merchants to align themselves with the *fascio* if they did not want to be at risk that a non-membership would entail disadvantages. In quite many ways, exerting this economic pressure was the only option to coerce these people to affiliate with Fascism, as they were not dependent on any privileges or material profits that an endorsement of Fascism could have potentially involved otherwise. Beyond, members such as Carriere or Francesco Mignani were owners of fruit import businesses. When we remember that Renzetti was appointed a member of a committee that dealt with the im- and export of fruits and vegetables two months before the foundation described here, it seems consequential to conjecture that he could sanction these people as long

⁶⁵ See PA AA, R 72963, Sächsische Ministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten an Auswärtiges Amt, 3 March 1927. The following quote is also there.

⁶⁶ See PA AA, R 72961, Polizeidirektion München an Staatsministerium des Äußeren, 13 October 1925.

⁶⁷ See PA AA, R 72963, Sächsisches Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten an Auswärtiges Amt, 3 March 1927.

as they were not willing to actively cooperate in the *fascio*. The remainder were also prompted to join as the «*Welt am Abend*» noted: «Renzetti sent a request to the local Italians to fill out the Fascist membership cards under threat of – in case of refusal – stripping the IDs and to sanction the relatives living in Italy»⁶⁸. Even though the reference to the punishment of those relatives living in Italy was perhaps owed more to the journalistic press polemic, this approach showed two different things. First, Renzetti applied considerable pressure since joining the *fascio* was not considered very popular. Second, it must have even had a more disappointing effect that the response was still so meager and Renzetti hence had to realize that his intimidation was exposed as mere rhetoric. Membership in the *fascio* in Leipzig, so this seems to suggest, arose not from political opinion or belief but rather involved mostly those who were at Renzetti's mercy. The members usually gathered in the Leipzig consulate, a further evidence for the interplay between consulate and *fascio*.

At the time of the founding of the Leipzig *fascio*, Renzetti also dealt with the Fascist group in Munich which he wanted to organize anew together with Fernando Gramaccini⁶⁹. Renzetti tried to vitalize former contacts for that and as such it was an endeavor which yet again was based upon his personal network⁷⁰. Similarly, a *fascio* in Berlin was founded in July 1926; in a familiar pattern the foundation was carried out at the premises of the chamber of commerce [Schieder 2005, 37].

⁶⁸ *Mussolini oder Deutschland? Die Rolle des Gesandten Aldrovandi – Bespitzelung der Landsleute – Ueberall [!] faschistische Organisationen* (1927), «Die Welt am Abend», March 7.

⁶⁹ The *Fascio di Monaco* was dissolved in 1923 due to various irregularities. See PA AA, R 72961, Polizeidirektion München an Staatsministerium des Äußeren, 13 October 1925. Gramaccini was responsible for the Fascist organization in Munich and reported to the General Secretary of the Fascist Party in Rome, Roberto Farinacci. Gramaccini and Renzetti knew each other from World War I; information by Wolfgang Schieder in a personal conversation with the author in July 2012.

⁷⁰ PA AA, R 72961, Renzetti an Gramaccini, 5 October 1925.

Meanwhile, the pivotal figure in the Berlin *fascio* was Alfredo Stendardo who caught the eye in another function: as correspondent for the «*Giornale d'Italia*» in Berlin whose benevolent reporting about Hitler annoyed German authorities⁷¹. In addition, he was secretary of the *fascio* in Berlin. Furthermore, he was an employee of the chamber of commerce and was regarded as «ear and eye of the fascists» who would attend meetings and events of rightist parties and organizations⁷². Even more curious, Stendardo was likewise employed by the Italian Consulate General in Berlin⁷³. In light of this bundled activities, it can be again displayed how much the various activities of Renzetti were interconnected.

As much as Renzetti was personally involved in the establishment of various *fasci*, the role of being the representative for the *fasci italiani all'estero* in Germany fell short of his expectations. Much like those responsible for the *fasci* in Rome, at the sharp end its first head Giuseppe Bastianini, Renzetti envisaged his involvement in the organization to be a springboard for a diplomatic career. While generally speaking the *fasci italiani all'estero* intended to substitute the traditional diplomats in foreign countries through an ideologization of the foreign policy in the long run [Duranti 2014], those plans essentially were shelved by Mussolini at the already mentioned congress in October 1925. This was especially pivotal as the organization had not much other backing: initially not institutionalized and in 1923 directly subordinated to Mussolini, the organization was dealt a heavy blow when in March 1926 one of its greatest advocates, Roberto Farinacci, resigned [De Caprariis 2000, 154f.]. Giuseppe Bastianini made a last attempt to regain relevan-

⁷¹ See DDI, Serie 7, Vol. X, No. 132, 208. Baroni a Grandi, 15 March 1931.

⁷² GStA PK, 1. HA Rep. 77 Ministerium des Innern. Tit. 4043, No. 295a, 10 February 1931.

⁷³ See *Südtirols Henker kontrolliert Goebbels* (1930), «Die rote Fahne», September 2.

ce by urging Mussolini to send decisive fascists as consuls to Germany⁷⁴. He did not fail to mention that those prospective consuls should demonstrate a positive stance towards the actions taken by *fasci*-representatives. This plea did not resonate with Mussolini and Bastianini followed suit by resigning in late 1926.

This was above all the admission to have lost the struggle for power within the Fascist party and the struggle over the power to represent Fascism abroad. In other words: the traditional diplomacy representing the State won over the ideological party's foreign policy, at least when speaking of the first decade of Fascism. Aggravating this problem was the impression the *fasci italiani all'estero* made on the respective host governments so that Mussolini basically settled for a compromise which foresaw that diplomats needed to be Fascist believers and members of the PNF; the *fasci* now were only seen as an «organization of private citizens» who were not supposed to «interfere in the slightest in the sphere of responsibility of the consulates»⁷⁵. This policy – the *fascistizzazione* of the foreign policy – saw 120 new consuls coming into office in 1927 [Gentile 2003, 155f.]. The *fasci italiani all'estero* which from their inception on tried to help shape this very *fascistizzazione* were a mere onlooker to that development at this point. When Piero Parini took over the role of head of the organization, he was basically assigned their liquidation as the *fasci* would come under the authority of the foreign office in 1928. Yet Renzetti came out this deadlock even more strengthened. Despite numerous attempts on part of the traditional diplomats, most prominently Italian ambassador Alessandro de Boscari who urged to eschew sending “unofficial agents” – an ill-concealed reference to people like Renzetti – on missions to Germany, Italian diplomats in Rome

⁷⁴ See DDI, Serie 7, Vol. IV, No. 426, Bastianini a Mussolini, 15 September 1926, 329.

⁷⁵ DDI, Serie 7, Vol. IV, No. 389, Mussolini al Console a Melbourne, Grossardi, 10 August 1926, 301.

espoused Renzetti's role⁷⁶. Amedeo Fani, State secretary in the Italian foreign ministry, instructed the embassy in Berlin that «relations to the [German Right] were only to be maintained by Major Renzetti» who hence essentially monopolized his rank in the process⁷⁷. Throughout the *fascistizzazione* of the foreign policy, the position of delegates was abolished. At that time Renzetti – who as representative for Germany also would have to vacate his office – already saw the writing on the wall and turned his attention to recommend himself as a shadow ambassador to the German Right.

The German Place in Italian Foreign Policy and discussions about Fascist Universalism

While the manifold activities of Giuseppe Renzetti were based on his own initiative and pursued the objective to establish himself in the Weimar Republic as much for financial motives as for ideological ones, the socio-political context of the years contemplated here can further elucidate these activities. Even though in hindsight only the chamber of commerce led to a satisfying result, the decisions to try to set up a consulate and to live up to his role of a *fasci*-representative need to be seen against the backdrop of the mid-1920s when there were indeed signs pointing to those endeavors having a great strategic impact. First of all, this context concerns the overall quality, or rather: the German relevance for the Italian foreign policy. Whereas the Germans nourished a quite sentimental attitude towards Italy [Schieder 1996] which figured prominently especially in the Nazi discourse, no similar observation can be made for the Italian side. If at all, the place Germany occupied in the Fascist imagination in the early 1920s was negatively

⁷⁶ DDI, Serie 7, Vol. III, No. 188. De Bosdari to Mussolini, 13 May 1924, 117.

⁷⁷ DDI, Serie 7, Vol. VIII, No. 478, Fani a Baroni, 9 April 1930, 585.

connoted which is quite consistent with the fact that anti-German resentments were still circulating following World War I. Yet the «analogue revisionist rise» had to lead to a special orientation towards Germany [Ara 1984, 137]. In order to amend, if not to flat-out reverse, certain terms of the Treaty of Versailles which was still surrounded by an aura of a perceived defeat in the collective fascist imagination (albeit most clauses classified Italy as a winner), countries which likewise had an interest in amending the Treaty naturally figured greatly in the foreign policy. This led to an enhanced steering towards the German Right⁷⁸. For establishing and maintaining contacts, semi-official persons were occasionally sent to Germany which more often than not provoked irate responses from the German government which is why by the late 1920s Giuseppe Renzetti was installed as a shadow ambassador to the German Right.

The orientation towards Germany also made sense if set against another backdrop: as the Italian zones of influence were imagined to be Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, this policy had to fall foul of French interests [Rodogno 2003, 71-80]. In a lot of ways it was hence not a positive attitude but rather geopolitical concerns which led to a rapprochement with Germany. Since the Stresemann policy which was designed to reapproach France was *bête noire* for the Fascists, this turn to German politics consequentially meant to focus more on the political right than on the government [Marsico 1988, 21f.]. The relevance of the German Right increased as the disgruntlement over German-French relations grew so that «the relations between Rome and Berlin in those years [mid-1920s] were for the most part a manifestation of the respective relation to France» [Petersen 1973, 19].

Those years also saw a more noticeable approach with regard to the propaganda for Fascism. After the consolidation of the Fascist regime and overcoming the Matteotti-crisis, the dictatorship was well established

⁷⁸ Jens Petersen speaks of the «revisionism without revision»: Petersen 1973, 139ff.

[Lyttelton 1973]. With the internal consolidation, the emphasis shifted to propagate Fascism abroad more enthusiastically [Collotti 2000; Cuzzi 2006, Fioravanzo 2010; Ledeen 1972]. This does not mean to speak of a stringent export of Fascist ideology whose institutionalized pillars were the *fasci italiani all'estero*. While in the long run failing, by the mid-1920s Fascist universalism was a topic much discussed. This too secured the German Right a prominent place in Fascist conceptions. This Fascist universalism could convince people like Giuseppe Renzetti that their efforts were in line with overall goals in Rome.

Ever since the March on Rome, leading Fascists such as Italo Balbo or Roberto Farinacci pressed for the internationalization of Fascism. People like Giuseppe Bastianini urged the creation of a structure akin to a Fascist international [Gentile 2003, 148]. An article written by Roberto Forges Davanzati, a Fascist journalist and member of the Grand Council of Fascism, may be considered emblematic. The article, appearing in the nationalist «*L'Idea Nazionale*», basically trialed the discussion concerning the universalization of Fascism⁷⁹. Nevertheless, in light of intense stricture upon this article, the whole discussion was terminated and hence lost steam. Mussolini refrained from joining the debate or stoking it up again, not least to avert damage from Italy's foreign-policy relations. This discussion framed for instance Renzetti's unauthorized founding of the consulate in Leipzig. It does not seem to be too far-fetched to assume that it encouraged Renzetti to proceed with his activities. After all, in 1925 both the German relevance in Fascist Italy's conception and the exporting of the Fascist idea carried weight so that people like Renzetti had reasonable expectations linked to their endeavors.

⁷⁹ Forges Davanzati R. 1925, *Fascismo ed internazionalismo*, «*L'Idea Nazionale*», February 11. Forges Davanzati was one of four PNF secretaries between 1924 and 1925.

Conclusion

The historical relevance Giuseppe Renzetti occupies is due to his later role as a middleman between the German Right and Italian Fascism. For a profound understanding of this, it is however necessary to point out the process and conditions leading up to his appointment as that middleman. Renzetti's edge was to have been acting in that role from a secured institutional platform which was the chamber of commerce. Gaining financial support from Rome for the Italian chamber of commerce combined with his earnings from his position as a representative for the *fasci italiani all'estero* allowed him to dedicate his attention to German political affairs. Already back in this time, even though he was not yet in contact with *Stahlhelm* or Nazi leaders, Renzetti was eager to disseminate his knowledge about Fascism and especially the economic policies it entailed.

Highlighting Renzetti's endeavors between 1925 and 1927 could also show how well linked all these at first glance diverse activities had been. Institutionally bundled, for instance when the various *fasci* met in Leipzig, this also found its expression in the staff. Alfredo Stendardo might just be, except for Renzetti himself of course, the most remarkable example. In general, German government circles assumed that employees of the chamber of commerce and leaders of the *fasci italiani all'estero* were per se former members of the control commission. This would be one field where future research could investigate whether the Fascist propaganda networks were somehow based upon personal contacts already acquired in the control commission. Focusing on Renzetti seems to corroborate this hypothesis after all. Interestingly enough, all these contacts and the Italian network of Renzetti cannot be found anymore after he assumed the role of an intermediary around 1929/1930. With this new role, a decisive break with the here described past came about; only the presidency of the chamber of commerce and his expertise on economic matters persisted. While in hindsight Renzetti hence succeeded to establish himself in the political discourse,

highlighting the mid-1920s makes also visible how much this hinged on contingency and the dynamics of events such as getting to know *Stahlhelm* leaders or Göring. More than anything else, this was the pivotal breakthrough for Renzetti. It was also necessary inasmuch as the chamber of commerce was a personal success for the Italian Fascist, the other endeavors were certainly not. Both his time as self-appointed consul and as representative for the *fasci italiani all'estero* proved a failure. This became never more emblematic than with the envisaged project of the Italian Fascist house which served as the opening for this article.

When word got out about the intention to establish such a house, it was met with a divided response. The news went particularly viral in the German newspapers once it became known that the place should also house the central office of the *fasci italiani all'estero*. Renzetti had good reason to conceal this initially to not further amplify the impression that this house could be regarded as the headquarters for Fascism in Germany. The coverage would ultimately reach such a level that Renzetti felt constrained to publish a denial of those allegations⁸⁰. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was only the reporting by the newspapers that induced the *Auswärtiges Amt* to gather more information about Renzetti. Journalists seemed to be better informed than the officials in government circles. Eventually this project, perhaps even discussed with Mussolini in the December 1925 audience of Renzetti, failed as German authorities did not want to correlate the diplomatic immunity of a consulate with the Fascist activities housed in the very same place. The debate backfired even more when we recall that the refusal of the *exequatur* for Renzetti happened in the same period. A connection to the polemics surrounding the Italian Fascist house seems apparent particularly in view of the fact that the «*Vorwärts*» reiterated time and time

⁸⁰ The issue reverberated even in the British press. See *Fascist Surveillance in Germany. An 'Italian House' - Mussolini's Espionage in Berlin (1925)*, «Manchester Guardian», December 11.

again that Renzetti was still allowed to act as a consul in Leipzig. The failure here – together with the overall frustration regarding the outlook of the *fasci italiani all'estero* – could not satisfy Renzetti's ambitions. Above all, he was too well connected to not realize the sidelining of the *fasci italiani all'estero* as an organization in Rome. When their new head di Marzio eventually opened an Italian house in Berlin in October 1927, Renzetti was not even present any more⁸¹. He now wanted to put himself forward for the role as Fascist secret agent, acting as go-between for the German Right and Fascism [Schieder 2005, 39]. The thought leading to this, however, remained that Renzetti realized that the failure of the *fasci italiani all'estero* was in sight and that his other ventures did not lead to success. The role of the go-between seemed all the more promising. Surprisingly, the name Giuseppe Renzetti came up in October 1943 again, though in a totally different context: in the course of the Allied occupation of Southern Italy in World War II, the Allies were seeking Italian government officials who could be entrusted with political tasks in the Italian administrative apparatus⁸². Giuseppe Renzetti's name was also part of the discussion, that is until the first report about him came in. When he was described as «one of the most outstanding cases of success due solely to the influence of Fascism [and] Nazism» who had «strong personal connections with the Nazi party», it was obvious that Renzetti was to be left out of any political responsibility. Indeed, the characterization was – especially considering it was only 1943 when the report was furnished – quite precise. The «born opportunist» surely left his marks on the Nazi-Fascist relations and had a profound historical impact, something he always longed for. This impact was short-lived, however, and came with a heavy price.

⁸¹ The house itself had little left of Renzetti's ideas. See PA AA, R 72964, Legationsrat Thomsen an Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 28 October 1927.

⁸² National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, Record Group 331, 10263-115-20 (2/2), Box 5220. Report by Major Stephen J. Spingarn, 22 October 1943. The quotes can also be found there.

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