

Italian unification

Action point

Make your own notes on the words highlighted in bold in the text.

"It was only when the Austrian cat was distracted that the Italian mice could play"

Check the net

Look at 'windows on Italy' at www.mi.cnr/WOI/woindex.html

Checkpoint 1

Why was the rest of Europe no longer prepared to support Austria's role in Italy?

The term '**Risorgimento**' was first used in the 18th century. Literally it means 'rebirth', but historians use it to describe the growing national consciousness after 1815 – the desire to see Italy unified as one country. The Vienna settlement of 1815 placed the Italian peninsula under the control of the Habsburg Empire.

Up to 1848, various groups and individuals tried to unify the different states of Italy into one nation. However, these efforts all ended in failure. Italy was finally unified between 1860 and 1870 under Victor Emmanuel II, king of Piedmont.

Why did unification fail between 1815 and 1848?

There are three key reasons to explain this:

- The role of Austria. Northern Italy was part of its empire, and a strong Austria was regarded as important by most of Europe as a barrier against France. Austria used its troops in 1820, 1831 and 1848 to crush nationalist uprisings.
- Lack of cooperation between revolutionaries. Uprisings were directed against the rulers of individual states rather than coordinated across the peninsula as a whole. There was little agreement on the form that a united Italy would take – monarchy, republic or a federation under the Pope. To what extent would a united Italy be democratic?
- The lack of popular support. To the peasantry of rural Italy the concept of a united Italy was completely meaningless.

Cavour and Piedmont

Cavour became prime minister of Piedmont in 1852 and had a crucial role in the eventual unification of Italy. Cavour had not set out to unify Italy but was clearly interested in extending the rule of Piedmont in northern and central Italy. In 1858 Cavour negotiated the **Plombières agreement** with **Napoleon III** of France.

The Piedmontese territories of Nice and Savoy would be ceded to France, and in return France would aid Piedmont in pushing the Austrians out of Lombardy and Venetia.

After provoking Austria into war the combined armies of France and Piedmont quickly pushed the Habsburg armies out of most of Lombardy (July 1859). Simultaneously, revolts broke out in the central states of Tuscany, Parma, Modena and the Romagna, the rebels aiming for union with Piedmont. Napoleon III, now worried about a Piedmont far stronger than he had envisaged at Plombières, signed the **Treaty of Villafranca** with Franz Josef, the Austrian emperor. Cavour resigned in disgust but returned to power in January 1860. Plebiscites were held in the central states, which voted in favour of union with Piedmont. In an attempt to appease the French, Piedmont ceded Nice and Savoy.

Garibaldi and the 'thousand'

Giuseppe Garibaldi was a passionate supporter of Italian unification. Heavily influenced by **Mazzini**, Garibaldi had been involved in several of the earlier revolutions in the Italian states.

Garibaldi now hoped to take advantage of what Cavour had achieved in the north in order to complete the unification process. In April 1860, with his volunteer army, the 'thousand', he left Genoa and first conquered Sicily and then the kingdom of Naples. This was a very worrying development for Cavour, deeply suspicious as he was of Garibaldi's republican and democratic views. He now took the view that if Italy was going to be united it would be on Piedmont's terms.

By September 1860, Piedmontese troops were occupying the Papal States. Garibaldi surrendered his conquests to Victor Emmanuel, and the kingdom of Italy (excluding Rome and Venetia) was proclaimed in March 1861.

Unification completed

Taking advantage of the Austro-Prussian War, Italy was able to add Venetia to the kingdom in 1866. Similarly, when Napoleon was forced to withdraw his troops from Rome in 1870 (because of the war with Prussia) Italy was able to acquire its modern-day capital.

Summary

There are several crucial factors that help us to understand the unification of Italy:

- Cavour – no unification was possible without the removal of Austria from the peninsula. Cavour's negotiation of the Plombières agreement was crucial in achieving this. His intervention in the south in the autumn of 1860 ensured that Italy was unified under the king of Piedmont.
- Garibaldi – his intervention in the south forced Cavour to complete the unification process.
- The role of other European powers. The direct intervention of France was crucial. With the obvious exception of Austria, the rest of Europe was either in favour or at the very least adopted a neutral attitude towards Italian unification

Exam questions

answers: page 102

- 1 Was Italian unification primarily the result of foreign intervention? (45 min)
- 2 'His only concern was the glory of his state.' Is this a fair assessment of Cavour? (45 min)
- 3 Why did Austria lose its primacy in Europe? (45 min)

Checkpoint 2

What were Garibaldi's qualities as a military leader? Why did he suppress the peasant uprising on Sicily, which he had earlier supported?

Checkpoint 3

How important was national feeling in the unification of Italy?

Examiner's secrets

In Q1, don't forget the importance of foreign non-intervention.