

Austria and the Papal States in the Context of the Italian Liberal-national Movement, 1838–1848¹

*Daniel Martínek**

The aim of the study is to analyse Austro-papal relations in the period 1838–1848 in the context of the Italian liberal-national movement. The reactionary, backward, absolutist regime of the papal government had often been the cause of the crises in the Papal States in the pre-March period, with the most significant one being in 1831, when it was only through Austrian military intervention that the papal regime survived. The papal government was unwilling to change the course of its internal policy and transform the Papal States for the sake of both its subjects and its government. Therefore, when it came to reforming the papal regime, Metternich's lifelong advising of the Pope was like beating a dead horse. Austria's readiness to intervene militarily whenever requested by the Pope was the most important part of Metternich's diplomatic passivity within his papal policy during the 1840s, although none of the local uprisings in this period required the intervention of Austrian troops. The change in the Austrian chancellor's approach to Rome emerged because of the reform course of Pius IX, who was elected Pope in the summer of 1846. The Pope's utter disinterest and opposition to Austria after 1846 eventually resulted in the ultimate fall of Metternich's papal policy.

[Austria; Papal States; Metternich; 19th Century; Papacy; Pius IX; Risorgimento]

Introduction

The reactionary, backward, absolutist regime of the papal government was often the cause of crises in the Papal States in the period 1815–1848. This central Italian state was administered only by ecclesiastical representatives without the participation of laymen; subordination to the Church

¹ This study was conducted within the project SGS-2018-018, which the author carried out at the Department of Historical Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of West Bohemia in Pilsen.

* Department of Historical Sciences, Faculty of Arts, University of West Bohemia, Sedláčkova 38, 306 14, Plzeň, Czech Republic; daniel17@khv.zcu.cz.

concerned the whole society. This fact created a social climate in which the higher classes, to which a certain degree of decision-making had been granted under French rule before 1815, often tried to gain a share in the state administration and to improve the conditions of their and other papal subjects. The greatest endeavour of this kind before 1848 was the revolution in 1831, which was only suppressed by Austrian military intervention. Not even this major political crisis forced the papal government to change the course of its internal policy and introduce reforms that would transform the Papal States for the sake of its subjects.

The internal stability of the Papal States had been an important element of Austrian foreign policy, on account of either the Italian provinces of the Austrian Empire or Austria's dominance over the peninsula. Therefore, the Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister, Klemens Wenzel Nepomuk Lothar, Prince von Metternich-Winnerburg, made a lot of efforts to persuade Rome to introduce apolitical reforms that would satisfy the population and thus prevent revolution. His entire thirty-year effort, however, was completely useless, for reactionary thinking among the Roman cardinals was too strong. Until the death of Gregory XVI in 1846, the papal government remained a symbol of reaction, backwardness and non-compliance with the spirit of the times. This perception changed with the advent of Pius IX and the introduction of moderate reforms. However, these reforms went far beyond what Metternich had been recommending all along. The reform measures he proposed were simply insufficient and outdated, and thus irrelevant to Italian society in the 1840s. This nonconformity was one of the reasons why Austrian influence declined significantly after 1846, and why Metternich's papal policy was finally doomed.

Austro-papal relations in the period 1809–1838 were excellently analyzed by the American historian Alan J. Reinerman in his two-volume book: *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich. Between Conflict and Cooperation 1809–1830* and *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich. Revolution and Reaction 1830–1838*. Unfortunately, an analysis of relations between Rome and Vienna for the period 1838–1848 is still missing. The aim of the study is therefore to fill in this gap, although it is more of a brief outline, as the scope and complexity of the topic require more space than the limits of this article. For the same reason, it must also be said that the focus remains only on events in the Papal States in the context of the liberal-national movement.

Austro-papal Relations until 1838

Throughout the whole pre-March period (the era from the Congress of Vienna in 1815 to the revolutionary year of 1848), Austro-papal relations had always been characterized by, among other things, one particular aspect: the persistent efforts of the Austrian Chancellor and Foreign Minister of the Austrian Empire, Klemens von Metternich, to urge the Roman government to reform the papal regime.² For Metternich, the existence and stability of the papal government was an important feature of his overall Italian policy, as well as a vital element in maintaining the Austrian Empire among the Great Powers, given the fact that Lombardy-Venetia – since 1815 an integral part of Austria – was one of the cornerstones of the Habsburg Empire’s superpower status at that time. Any change of the political status quo on the Apennine Peninsula could threaten the superpower status of Austria, while revolutions had the greatest potential for changing the political order. As they were less politically and socially developed areas of Europe, the Italian states were particularly vulnerable to revolutionary waves, and the dissatisfaction of the Italian population with inefficient governments was persistent.³ The Papal States in particular, which at that time was probably the most backward state with the most absolutist regime on the peninsula, had to face several revolts in the first half of the 19th century.⁴ The Austrian chancellor was aware of the threat of potential revolutions in neighbouring Italian states, believing that – in the case of the papal administration – only the introduction of appropriate non-political reforms could minimize dissatisfaction among the subjects and thus eliminate the danger of future revolutions.⁵

Unfortunately, not only for the chancellor himself but also for the papal government, when it came to reforming the papal regime, Metternich’s

² Alan J. Reinerman, an American historian, devoted his lifelong research and excellent works to Austro-papal relations, especially in the pre-March period. For his article on Metternich’s efforts to reform the papal regime, see A. J. REINERMAN, *Metternich and Reform: The Case of the Papal State 1814–1848*, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, 42, 1970, 4, pp. 524–548.

³ M. MERIGGI, *State and Society in Post-Napoleonic Italy*, in: D. LAVEN – L. RIALI (eds.), *Napoleon’s Legacy: Problems of Government in Restoration Europe*, Oxford, New York 2000, pp. 57–60; L. RIALI, *Risorgimento. The History of Italy from Napoleon to the Nation-State*, London 2009, pp. 53–67.

⁴ G. F.-H. BERKELEY, *Italy in the Making: 1815 to 1846*, Cambridge 1932, p. xviii; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich: Between Conflict and Cooperation 1809–1830*, Washington, D.C. 1979, pp. 127–128, 147–148.

⁵ REINERMAN, *Metternich and Reform*, pp. 526–527.

lifelong advising was like beating a dead horse. The reactionary wing of the Roman government, the so-called *Zelanti*, was so unwilling to dispose of their traditional rights, privileges and influence in the 1815–1846 period, that they did not allow the introduction of any reforms, which they saw as a danger to the Pope's temporal power. However, it was the reactionary policy of the Roman government that was grist to the mill for liberal and democratic intellectuals, who could take advantage of the bad tempers in society and thereby provoke an anti-regime uprising. This was the case with the local riots in the years following the Congress of Vienna and during the 1820s, as well as in the 1831 revolution and the disorders of the following months.⁶

As for the revolution of 1831 and the turbulent developments in the following months in the Papal States, these events were no surprise to Metternich. Having failed in all his efforts to modernize the papal administration, he was aware that any slight impulse would ignite a revolutionary fire. This stimulus came in July 1830, when a political coup took place in Paris, and the more liberal government of Louis Philippe was established. At that time, Metternich was prepared to help the Pope not only politically, but also militarily, if necessary. After all, the preservation of the political status quo in all neighbouring states was an important factor in maintaining Austrian rule in Lombardy-Venetia and her dominance on the Apennine Peninsula.⁷

And so it also happened a few weeks after the outbreak of revolution in the northern provinces of the Papal States, the so-called Legations, in early February 1831, that a nearly two-month-long conclave created a political vacuum that was used by liberal groups to take control in the provinces. Within a few days, Legations were excluded from the Pope's power, and a central provisional government was established in Bologna, one which was not even afraid to go one step further and promulgate a preliminary constitution.⁸ The Roman government was unable to resolve the situation on its own – the papal troops were small in number,

⁶ Ibid., pp. 547–548.

⁷ For Austrian hegemony, though weak, on the Apennine Peninsula, see M. ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System: Metternich, Italy and European Diplomacy*, London, New York 2018, pp. 145–169.

⁸ L. PÁSZTOR – P. PIRRI (ed.), *L'archivio dei governi provvisori di Bologna e delle Provincie Unite del 1831*, Città del Vaticano 1956, pp. 323–328; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy in the Age of Metternich. Revolution and Reaction 1830–1838*, Washington, D.C. 1989, pp. 10–21.

as most of the soldiers joined the rebels – and so, after a brief diplomatic sounding, the Pope decided to ask the Austrian Emperor for military intervention.⁹ For Metternich, for whom the outbreak of revolution was no big surprise, as he was well informed of the riots that had been occurring in the Papal States even in broad daylight since the summer of 1830, the Pope's official request for Austrian military assistance was all he needed to make the intervention a reality. In fact, in the autumn of 1830 he had already expressed to the Pope the readiness of the Austrian Empire to intervene, if required, in the Papal States.¹⁰ The Pope's invitation letter to Francis I was, for Metternich, the legal basis for the Austrian military action in central Italy in March 1831.

Following the successful suppression of revolution by Austrian troops, an informal diplomatic conference was convened in Rome, which was to determine the further development of the Papal States. In particular, three main issues were about to be discussed: the evacuation of Austrian troops, an amnesty for the rebels, and the reform of the papal regime.¹¹ This diplomatic meeting of the representatives of the five great powers – the “European Concert” – was the first occasion in European history for discussion on the so-called Roman Question, the question of the temporal power of the popes as rulers of a civil territory.¹² Unfortunately for Metternich, given the current dramatic situation in the Papal States, the conference did not bring the results he had wished for. The evacuation of Austrian troops became the main agenda of the conference; this was a success for the French ambassador, since the government in Paris fundamentally refused any increase in Austria's influence in Rome.¹³ After all, the centuries-long struggle between Austria and France for influence in the Italian states is a story that resumed soon after the Congress of Vienna,

⁹ F. ENGEL-JANOSI, *Die politische Korrespondenz der Päpste mit den Österreichischen Kaisern 1804–1918*, Wien, München 1964, pp. 199–200; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 21–34.

¹⁰ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 24. 11. 1830, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (henceforth: OeStA), Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (henceforth: HHStA), Staatskanzlei (henceforth: StK), Rom 38.

¹¹ N. NADA, *L'Austria e la questione romana dalla Rivoluzione di Luglio alla fine della Conferenza diplomatica romana. Agosto 1830–luglio 1831*, Torino 1953, pp. 90–103; A. J. REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 21–34; A. J. REINERMAN, The Concert Baffled. The Roman Conference of 1831 and the Reforms of the Papal State, in: *The International History Review* 5, 1983, 1, pp. 20–38.

¹² REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, p. 48.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

and especially since the early 1830s. With the advent of the more assertive foreign policy of the July Monarchy, the Apennine Peninsula became an arena for the geopolitical interests of these two powers.¹⁴

After a few weeks of negotiations, a memorandum was finally drawn up which took into account some of the rebels' demands and attempted to reorganize the administration of the Papal States.¹⁵ Both Pope Gregory XVI and his Secretary of State, Tommaso Bernetti, agreed to implement the reforms, but their activity in this respect was insufficient, and in the coming months the liberals in the provinces were again expressing their dissatisfaction. During the following six months, although the northern provinces were under the nominal rule of the Pope, the reality was different. Those who had joined the rebels in February were now in leading positions in the administration and army. At the end of the year, the situation was so intolerable for the government in Rome that the Austrian troops, who had to leave the Legations under pressure from the French government in mid-July 1831, re-entered the Papal States once again at the request of Gregory XVI in January 1832.¹⁶

This time, however, the French government did not assume the role of passive bystander and took military action. The French occupation of the papal port city of Ancona occurred at the end of February 1832. With this move, the French government wanted to counter Austrian influence in the Papal States, even though it did so without the consent of the Pope and thus completely illegally.¹⁷ Despite the Pope's disagreement, the dual occupation of the Papal States lasted until 1838, when the Austrian troops left Bologna and the French did the same in Ancona.¹⁸ Due to the presence of foreign troops in the period 1832–1838, liberal-national groups had little chance to organize any hostilities against the papal government. In an environment where the Roman government did not have to be concerned about the potential outbreak of riots, Metternich

¹⁴ ŠEDIVÝ, pp. 12, 94, 250.

¹⁵ BERKELEY, pp. 103–108; F. J. COPPA, *The Origins of the Italian Wars of Independence*, London, New York 1992, p. 17; REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁶ Gregory XVI to Francis I, Rome, 2. 1. 1832, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 47; ENGEL-JANOSI, pp. 208–210.

¹⁷ REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 109–128; M. ŠEDIVÝ, Francouzská okupace Ancony v roce 1832 a její ohlas v Evropě, in: *Moderní dějiny*, 24, 2016, 2, pp. 74–88.

¹⁸ M. GAVELLI – O. SANGIORGI, *L'aquila su San Petronio. Esercito austriaco e società bolognese 1814–1859*, Bologna 1995, pp. 14–15; REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, p. 323; F. WOLFRAM, *Besetzung und Räumung Ankonas durch Frankreich 1832–1838*, unpublished dissertation, Universität Wien 1930, pp. 152–153.

restarted his persistent efforts to force the papal government to introduce reforms.

His greatest attempt to secure reforms in the Papal States was the deployment of Lombard official Giuseppe Maria Sebegondi, the Delegate of Mantua and an experienced administrator in the service of Austria, whose task was to support the Roman government in finding suitable non-political reforms and assisting the government in their implementation. Although Sebegondi spent more than three years in Rome, his mission completely failed, for the resistance to any reforms within the Roman government was too strong. After Sebegondi's failure, Metternich slowly lost hope that the papal government could be saved and that it was safe to withdraw Austrian troops from the Legations, thereby making the French leave Ancona.¹⁹

Metternich's advice was not heard throughout the 1830s, and the situation was no different even with a new Secretary of State in 1836, when Luigi Lambruschini, a former Papal Nuncio in Paris, became the Pope's "prime minister". Lambruschini was ranked among the reactionary cardinals of *Zelanti* and his ultraconservative positions were well known in diplomatic circles; after all, the vigorous defence of the Church against *Orleanism* had cost him his place at the nunciature in Paris. He considered Austria to be Rome's closest ally, but that did not change his policy of not following the chancellor's instructions. On the contrary, not only did he pursue an entirely independent internal policy unaffected by foreign powers, he also advocated the acceleration of the evacuation of foreign troops from papal territory.²⁰ In any case, the election of Lambruschini as the Secretary of State was a significant blow to Metternich's papal reform policy. During the years leading up to 1846, as Lambruschini left the office and the new Pope was elected, the Austrian chancellor maintained the position of a rather passive observer, without trying to influence the Roman government and perhaps only occasionally commenting on events taking place in the papal provinces.

Austro-papal Relations in 1838–1848

After 1838, it took some time for liberal-national groups in the provinces of the Papal States to remobilize. The presence of Austrian troops in the

¹⁹ N. NADA, *Metternich e le riforme nello Stato Pontificio. La missione Sebegondi a Roma (1832–1836)*, Torino 1957; REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 178–200.

²⁰ REINERMAN, *Austria and the Papacy II*, pp. 300–325.

Legations led to the repression of the activities of Young Italy and other secret societies, with only minor street disturbances occurring during this period. After the departure of the Austrians, political and conspiracy activities began to gain momentum again, and the contacts of liberal-national groups were being re-established between Bologna, Romagna, and Marche. However, it took several years for them to resort to open resistance to the papal regime, and in August 1843, in the town of Savigno, in the Apennines about 25 kilometres from Bologna, the gendarmes and papal volunteers were attacked by the local rebels led by the brothers Pasquale and Saverio Muratori. The armed clash ended with the defeat of the papal troops, some of whom were killed (among them the captain of the unit himself) and others taken prisoner. But when the insurgents learned of the arrival of regular troops, they decided to escape through the hills of the Apennines. Chased by papal troops, they were eventually captured and the majority of them were arrested after a short fight.²¹ Some of them succeeded in fleeing abroad, passing Tuscany to Livorno and from there to France, as in the case of Pasquale Muratori. A special military commission was set up to judge the detainees in Bologna; some of them were sentenced to death, while others were put into prison.²²

The riots in Savigno were not the only anti-regime activities of liberal-national groups in 1843. At the end of July, a conspiracy involving the members of Young Italy, who planned to provoke a revolt against local papal representatives, was discovered in Bologna. In early September, a group of more than 150 Bolognese insurgents marched towards Castel Bolognese near Imola, with the intention of capturing three high papal representatives who were holding negotiations there: Luigi Amat, Legate of Ravenna, Chiarissimo Falconieri, Archbishop of Ravenna, and Giovanni Mastai Ferretti, bishop of Imola and future Pope Pius IX. However, the papal officials had been warned in time and were able to take refuge in Imola, and the rebels found only an abandoned building upon their arrival.²³ The papal soldiers captured most of the rebels with the help of peasants loyal to the Pope, and the majority of them were sentenced

²¹ Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 22. 8. 1843, 26. 8. 1843, 28. 8. 1843, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, (henceforth: ASV) Rome, Archivio della nunziatura apostolica in Vienna (henceforth: Vienna) 281P.

²² Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 31. 1. 1844, ASV, Vienna 281Q; Ohms to Metternich 31. 8. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

²³ Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 18. 9. 1843, ASV, Vienna 281P; Ohms to Metternich 14. 9. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

to harsh punishments.²⁴ Nevertheless, as in the case of Savigno, some were able to flee into exile. Among the exiles was Luigi Carlo Farini, a young doctor from Russi, participant in the revolution of 1831 and future President of the Council of Ministers of the Kingdom of Italy.²⁵

These anti-regime endeavours in the summer of 1843 were neither a surprise to the papal government, nor anything that its local regular troops could not handle. In the weeks before the disturbances in Bologna at the end of July, the papal troops in the city were reinforced, measures were taken to improve the surveillance of the population, and some individuals were even arrested.²⁶ Yet Cardinal Ugo Pietro Spinola, a Legate of Bologna, asked for assurances from the commander of the Austrian troops in Lombardy-Venetia, Marshal Joseph Radetzky, about a possible military intervention, and these assurances were given to him.²⁷

The cardinals in Rome sought to associate the causes of the riots with the revolutionary storms that defined the Apennine Peninsula during these years. They thought that the rebels in the provinces were cooperating with their counterparts in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and that the territory of the Papal States served as a preparation ground for a large-scale uprising in this southern Italian country.²⁸ They also argued that from the standpoint of Rome, these occasional riots in the provinces could not be avoided, as the liberal-national groups represented a wide network interwoven with the whole peninsula: *“For the Papal government, all means are certainly used to paralyze the effects of the incessant manoeuvres of the factious to increasingly break their plots; to which the adopted system of doing political trials from time to time is very beneficial, from which the good of knowing largely the personnel of the factious, and their plans, was also observed, besides the aforementioned advantage of trimming sectarian plots. [...] But what good is it that a single government acts untiringly to prevent an evil that is general and*

²⁴ Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 31. 1. 1844, ASV, Vienna 281Q. On the composition of the papal troops, including mercenaries in the service of the Pope and to the Pope’s loyal subject, see A. J. REINERMAN, *The Failure of Popular Counter-Revolution in Risorgimento Italy: The Case of the Centurions, 1831–1847*, in: *Historical Journal*, 34, 1, 1991, pp. 21–41.

²⁵ U. MARCELLI, *Le vicende politiche*, in: M. GAVELLI – F. TAROZZI (eds.), *Negli anni della Restaurazione*, Bologna 2000, p. 21; U. MARCELLI, *Le vicende politiche dalla Restaurazione alle annessioni*, in: A. BERSELLI (ed.), *Storia della Emilia Romagna*, 3, Imola 1980, p. 84.

²⁶ Ohms to Metternich, Rome, 8. 8. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

²⁷ Altieri to Lambruschini, Vienna, 20. 8. 1843 and 8. 9. 43, ASV, Vienna 280F.

²⁸ Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 14. 10. 1843, ASV, Vienna 281P.

*has roots where its power does not extend?*²⁹ This is how Secretary of State Lambruschini expressed to the Papal Nuncio in Vienna, Lodovico Altieri, the powerlessness of the Roman government against the insurgents. He also believed that it was in the vital interests of the conservative powers to resolve the situation on the peninsula, and that Austria in particular should increase its influence and establish more surveillance in Tuscany – especially over the port of Livorno, which Lambruschini considered to be the main transshipment point of the correspondence of Italian liberals and nationalists. At the same time, however, he praised Austria’s energy in the fight against future “evils”.³⁰

Although the riots in the Papal States in the summer of 1843 were one of many anti-regime upheavals during the 1840s in Italy, the Austrian chancellor was entirely convinced about the roots of these events, namely that they were due to the inability of the papal government to manage its secular power and properly administer its territory.³¹ Aware of the worthlessness of providing further advice on the administration of the Papal States and the need for reforms, he only assured the government in Rome of the readiness of Austria and its troops in Lombardy-Venetia to intervene at any time on papal territory if necessary. He entrusted the Austrian Ambassador Rudolf von Lützow with the task of informing the Secretary of State of the need for increased vigilance on the part of the Austrian administration in Lombardy-Venetia, and recommended doing the same for local authorities in the papal provinces as well as for the Roman government, in order to provide them with all the means necessary to suppress revolutionary activities. Metternich did not want the past to repeat itself; he did not want Austrian military intervention to recur in the Papal States, as it would not be a welcome course on the European international scene for Austria. If Austrian intervention was about to take place, then it should only be with the consent of the Pope, as was the case in 1831–1832. In any case, Metternich’s view of intervention was constant throughout his diplomatic career, and it was reluctantly resorted to when, in his opinion, “*foreign aid is the last resource, which it reserves for the case where the other means are manifestly insufficient*”.³²

²⁹ Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 14. 10. 1843, ASV, Vienna 281P.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 25. 2. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

³² Metternich to Lützow, Königswart, 22. 8. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

For Austria, intervention would have been particularly dangerous given the situation at that time. If the events of 1831–1832 could be considered major crises, then Austrian intervention in the 1840s would have been a serious threat with the potential consequence of the outbreak of general war between Austria and France (since tense relations ruled between Paris and Vienna due to their influence in Italian affairs). When Metternich informed the government in Paris that he would not hesitate to provide assistance if any of the Italian rulers asked Austria to do so, the French Foreign Minister François Guizot replied that he believed that the intervention would not happen, and that he was convinced that the papal government could handle a few hundred insurgents without more foreign support.³³

In general, the most important issue for Metternich was that anti-regime activities do not cross the Austrian border, which would certainly threaten Austrian possessions on the peninsula, and that the political-social situation in Lombardy and Venetia remain calm. This was also one of the reasons why, when asked by the papal government, he refused to relocate some of the insurgents to Ferrara, where Austria had deployed its troops according to the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna from 1815. He feared not only the presence of rebels so close to Austrian territory, and the resulting danger of unrest, but also the risk that revolutionaries would use this act to promote even more anti-Austrian sentiment than already existed.³⁴

Serious maladministration of the Papal States continued in the years to come; in comparison to other (Italian) states the papal regime was cumbersome, unfair, repressive, and represented only by ecclesiastical dignitaries, not allowing the growing bourgeoisie to share in the state administration, let alone in the decision-making process.³⁵ That is why only two years went by before the liberal-nationalist groups once again sent a strong message to Rome about their dissatisfaction with the government. On the evening of 23rd September 1843, a group of men from Romagna, led by Pietro Renzi, decided to act by occupying several important government buildings in Rimini, disarming the city guards and

³³ Apponyi to Metternich, Paris, 2. 10. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, Staatenabteilungen (henceforth: StA), Frankreich 327.

³⁴ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 21. 10. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68; Lambruschini to Altieri, Rome, 26. 10. 1843, ASV, Vienna 281P.

³⁵ S. MATSUMOTO-BEST, *Britain and the Papacy in the Age of Revolution: 1846–1851*, Martlesham 2003, p. 24.

taking them hostage. In a short time, the whole city was under the control of the rebels, and a provisional government chaired by Renzi was established. This situation lasted only three days, when on 27th September, papal units reinforced by Swiss troops arrived in Rimini, and the liberals were forced to flee. Some of them took refuge in San Marino, others fled to Tuscany, where they stayed or continued on into France, and some managed to escape across the Adriatic Sea.³⁶

This short rebellion, which was isolated in the town of Rimini – though there were other minor uprisings in other parts of the province – could be compared to the riots in the summer of 1843. However, there are two significant differences between these two occasions: Firstly, Pietro Renzi printed and spread a work of Luigi Carlo Farini called *Manifesto delle popolazioni dello Stato Romano ai Principi ed ai popoli d'Europa* (*Manifesto of the Population of the Roman State to the Princes and Peoples of Europe*).³⁷ In this so-called *Manifesto di Rimini*, Farini advocates reforms in the Papal States, with explicit reference to the Memorandum of the Powers from 1831, while denouncing papal policy from the *Motu Proprio* of 1816 until his time – the politics of unfulfilled promises to improve bad governance and the state administration. In conclusion, he addressed twelve demands to the Pope, including full and general amnesty for all political prisoners, modern civil and criminal codes, establishment of municipal councils in the provinces, establishment of the Supreme Council of State in Rome, opening of all civil, military and judicial posts to the laity, departure of foreign troops, establishment of a civic guard, and more.³⁸

Secondly, this small uprising became a major event, with popularity both across the Italian peninsula and throughout Europe, as it was discussed in the work *Degli ultimi casi di Romagna* (*About the recent events in Romagna*) by Massimo d'Azeglio. He was a Piedmontese liberal who travelled through the northern part of the Papal States in September 1845, witnessed the events in Rimini and observed the true state of the papal administration.³⁹ Along with the publication of his work a year later, liberal activities, not only in the Papal States, were given a new dimension. From that point on, they ceased to be conspiratorial and

³⁶ Lambruschini to Viale-Prelá, Rome, 27. 9. 1845, 29. 9. 1845, 4. 10. 1845, ASV, Vienna 327 VIII.

³⁷ Lambruschini to Viale-Prelá, Rome, 20. 11. 1845, ASV, Vienna 327 VIII; F. J. COPPA, pp. 19–20.

³⁸ L. C. FARINI, *Lo stato romano dall'anno 1815 al 1850*, Rome 1851, pp. 126–129.

³⁹ M. D'AZEGLIO, *Degli ultimi casi di Romagna*, Lugano 1846.

became a completely public, widely known struggle against “tyrannical” governments. With d’Azeglio’s work and its publication in various foreign newspapers, the poor conditions of people in the Papal States were brought to the attention of all European intellectuals, as well as all diplomatic representatives and courts.

The response of the papal government was predictable, as the aging and reactionary Gregory XVI did not intend to change the direction of his policy, and most cardinals in Rome considered the events in Rimini as another common attempt to overthrow the central government. In a letter to the Papal Nuncio in Vienna, Secretary of State Lambruschini spoke of the *Manifesto of Rimini* as “full of insults and sarcasm against the Papal government”, equating the ideas of liberals with “perverse principles”.⁴⁰ For Metternich, who could still be regarded as the driving force of Austria’s foreign policy, the case of Rimini was different compared to previous uprisings in the State of the Church. The aspect that distinguished these riots from previous ones was, in the chancellor’s view, the nature of the rebels’ demands: they did not want to secede from the central government or depose the Pope. This time, he regarded the actors from Rimini as “reformers of the government”, who did not wish to destroy the Papacy but merely express their proposals for government and administrative reforms.⁴¹ As if for the first time in his Italian politics in the pre-March period, Metternich sympathized with the rebels, understood their demands and approved the means with which they wanted to achieve them. After the events in Rimini, he wrote to Lützow in Rome and mentioned reforms of the papal regime: “You know our opinion on this matter, Monsignor the Ambassador; You know that, in our opinion, major reforms in almost all branches of the public service are inevitable and desirable.”⁴²

Tired of thirty years of anti-reformist and, for him personally, unsuccessful developments in the Papal States, Metternich seemed to understand in a certain way the behaviour of the population. In his correspondence he even defended their actions, writing to Lützow: “They [the insurgents] have managed, to a certain extent, to maintain public peace. [...] they respected the particular properties; they have punished some opponents of their benign views of reform; in all that there is a background of respect for the public feeling.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Lambruschini to Viale-Prelá, Rome, 20. 11. 1845 and 11. 3. 1846, ASV, Vienna 327 VIII.

⁴¹ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 5. 10. 1845, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 72.

⁴² Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 25. 10. 1845, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 72.

⁴³ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 5. 10. 1845, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 72.

The chancellor also mentioned that the rebels had seized the government's coffers, but again, he considered this act understandable as, in his opinion, "*a reform also needs the nervus rerum*".⁴⁴ For him, two conclusions emerged from these actions: firstly, that the violent revolution was not successful in Italian conditions; and secondly, that these activities and the related reform program still did not have the necessary support among the population.⁴⁵

After this brief rebellion, the papal government asked Austria to send the Imperial Navy to observe the papal coast. This request for surveillance was granted by Austria, which also reinforced its garrison in Ferrara. Again, as two years ago, Metternich reassured the Roman government of Austrian military assistance if circumstances warranted it, and the Pope would officially asked for it.⁴⁶

It is difficult to predict in what direction Austro-papal relations would have tended in the years to come, had there been no major events in the years after 1845. If an ultraconservative Pope like Gregory XVI would have still occupied the Quirinal, then Metternich would probably have continued his course as a passive observer and guardian of papal sovereignty in times of crisis. However, the political constellation and social development of Europe in the mid-19th century suggested that it would be a different story. Metternich, of course, was well informed about the situation on the Apennine Peninsula in the second half of the 1840s, and was therefore also aware of the ongoing evolution of the Italian liberal-national movement, which transformed itself from the secret, radical activities of Young Italy to an official, moderate political agitation in the Italian states. As early as 1843, when Vincenzo Gioberti published his work *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani* (*On the Moral and Civil Primacy of the Italians*), in which this Piedmontese clergyman presented his ideas on the political structure of Italy in the form of a federation headed by the Pope, Metternich commented on the genesis of Italian moderate nationalism as follows: "*In my account, I do not look at Mazzini as the man that is the most to be feared; the Republic will find, I think, fewer partisans in the influential classes in Italy. The Federazione, which aims at a Monarchical and Constitutional Unit, has, in my opinion, more chances to stir people than Giovine Italia...*"⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 5. 10. 1845 and 9. 12. 1845, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 72.

⁴⁷ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 21. 10. 1843, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 68.

The Austrian Chancellor, who celebrated his 73rd birthday in 1846, marked the 1840s as a “transitional era”.⁴⁸ *“The world, dear Count, is a very ridiculous shop. There is everything, and the choice depends on the governments”* – thus did Metternich express his personal feelings in a letter to the Austrian ambassador in Rome at the end of 1845.⁴⁹ Indeed, various ideological struggles rocking Europe before 1848 shook the Italian peninsula as well, especially the political-social situation in the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Papal States. The Roman Government, represented by the ultraconservative Pope Gregory XVI and like-minded Secretary of State Lambruschini, responded unambiguously to political agendas that were new at that time, rejecting all liberal, democratic and nationalist ideas. Even in matters such as the construction of railways in the Papal States, the Pope strongly opposed their implementation, fearing that the expansion of trade associated with rail transportation would also bring about the dissemination of liberal ideas.⁵⁰ A total misunderstanding of the people’s needs in the mid-19th century (regarding the political, social and industrial developments) on the part of the papal government manifested itself in the population’s dissatisfaction, particularly in the northern provinces, and was the cause of tension and recurring unrest in society.

In the case of the Papal States, Metternich fully understood the discontent among papal subjects; he had put a tremendous amount of effort into defending the Papacy and its temporal power through, among other things, a lifelong search for reforms of the papal regime that would satisfy the population. Europe around 1845, however, was different from what he used to know. And, as already mentioned above, he was aware that the world was changing, perhaps not only awaiting the bright future that, according to liberals and nationalists, progress should bring. He shed more light on his opinion of these changes by writing to Lützow: *“The movement which agitates the world draws its cause from a struggle against the truth and the lie, between the rules of a consummated experience, and fantastic trials. Will the world perish because of the moral struggle in which it is engaged? [...] the risk that the social body runs is that of displacement in the moral and material sphere and of a return to the worst of barbarities, that which is covered by a false*

⁴⁸ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 29. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁴⁹ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 28. 12. 1845, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 72.

⁵⁰ Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 16. 11. 1844, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 69.

semblance of progress."⁵¹ He feared that history would repeat itself, and that in the name of progress, the horrors and terror of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, which he remembered from his youth, would reappear. His fears were confirmed when, in 1848, Europe was devoured by revolutions, and Austria entered a war with the Kingdom of Sardinia.⁵²

Before that, however, Austro-papal relations were to experience a turbulent development that Metternich himself could not have predicted. Gregory XVI died on 1st June 1846, and the cardinals gathered in Rome to elect a new head of the Church. They were aware of the unstable – without the Pope even dangerous – situation both in the Papal States and throughout the peninsula. Therefore, the conclave was conducted comparatively quickly (it lasted only two days) and, after only two weeks, on 16th June 1846, the new successor of St. Peter was elected: Giovanni Mastai Ferretti. As the bishop of Imola, he knew the conditions in the Legations; he had even been a target of the insurgents in 1843, and now he was becoming Pope Pius IX.⁵³ If Gregory XVI was considered a conservative Pope who prevented any progress, then his successor could be described as a "liberal" one, and therefore his election was a fatal blow to Austro-papal relations. The election of Mastai Ferretti as the new Pope was not only celebrated across the Papal States; the new Pontiff was also regarded by neoguelfists as a long-awaited ideal ruler, sparking the hope of fulfilling Gioberti's dreams of a unified Italy under the leadership of the Pope.⁵⁴

Following the Pope's nomination of new Secretary of State Tommaso Pasquale Gizzi, the Legate of Forli and a popular figure considered by the public to be a moderate reformist, it became clear that internal papal politics would not follow a conservative line, as in the preceding decades.⁵⁵ The new Pope did not disappoint the Italian liberals and proceeded quite briskly with his innovative political agenda. At the end of the first month of his reign he declared a general amnesty, giving virtually all political exiles the opportunity to return to their homeland. In the spring of the following year he established the Council of State, which was to be responsible for finance and administration, already foreseen in the Memorandum of the Powers of 1831. In early July 1847, Pius IX approved the creation of the Civic Guard, which represented truly Italian

⁵¹ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 29. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁵² COPPA, p. 37.

⁵³ Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 17. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 73.

⁵⁴ BERKELEY, p. 276; ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, p. 191.

⁵⁵ Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 25. 7. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 73.

militias, unlike the Popes' centuries-long practice of using the services of mercenary troops to defend their territory. Finally, in the wake of constitutional processes in other Italian states, the Pope also guaranteed his subjects a constitution in mid-March 1848.⁵⁶

Metternich was very pleased with the relatively prompt election of the new Pope, being aware of the risks posed by the interregnum, especially in the situation full of disorders that prevailed in the State of the Church.⁵⁷ He considered the election of Mastai Ferretti as the new Pope to be good news. In letters to the Austrian ambassador, he assessed his personality as appropriate for the leadership of the Catholic Church, as well as for the government of the Papal States: "*The most worthy advantages of the solicitude of good men are met with in him. The place of the first moral authority is once again filled by an individuality which gathers all the voices...*"⁵⁸ And he confirmed the acceptability of Pius IX for Austria by claiming that "*...what, only a few moments ago, had formed the object of our wishes, is accomplished*".⁵⁹ The chancellor's expectations were that Pius IX, considered to be a liberal, moderate reformist, would take the wind out of the sails of the political radicals and supporters of the unified Italian state.⁶⁰ At this time he had no idea how far the Roman government would be willing to go in its reform program to meet the demands of the liberals, and thus stabilize the political and social situation in the Papal States.

Metternich was convinced that the conservative course of papal policy could be maintained if the reforms he had been recommending for decades were implemented. At the same time, by continuing moderate politics, Rome would not make room for political agendas that were focused on destroying the political order.⁶¹ Moreover, given the relatively young age of Mastai Ferretti, Metternich assumed that his long papal career would allow a proper long-lasting government.⁶² However, it must be said that the Austrian chancellor himself, in his advanced age, ceased to be sensitive to the needs of the society at that time, and instead adhered

⁵⁶ ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, pp. 193, 201, 221.

⁵⁷ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 9. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74. Austria even reinforced its army in Lombardy-Venetia due to the turbulent situation in neighbouring Italian states, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 23. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 28. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 29. 6. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

to outdated principles that might have been appropriate twenty or thirty years earlier, but not in the political-social climate dominating the years before 1848.

Based on information from Lützow, who had his first audience with the new Pope in early July, Metternich had a good insight into what first steps Pius IX was going to take.⁶³ In response, he summed up for the Austrian ambassador, and for Pius IX, suggestions, which according to the Chancellor were “*the product of the progress of my [Metternich’s] mind and my experience in the conduct of public affairs*”.⁶⁴ These three well-known *aperçus* touched upon the issues of form of government, amnesty and concessions. Metternich emphasized that there is an essential difference between government and state administration; in his conservative opinion and in favour of absolutism, the government must always be exercised in the centre, whereas it is appropriate to hand over the state administration to different levels of the state structure. As for the amnesty that Pius IX had planned as his first act on the papal throne, the Chancellor clearly explained that “*any act of amnesty is an act of forgiveness and cannot be anything else*”, highlighting the true meaning of amnesty, which nullifies the consequences of a fault but not the fault itself. In the last part, he focused on the (non-)importance of concessions, which he considered an act of justice and prudence, and an act of a good government only if they are not made by the Throne to the governed, since they are processes of reason and duty. In Metternich’s view, a government that makes concessions is following a line of weakness, a line of renunciation of a right.⁶⁵

Not all his efforts, however, fell on fertile ground, when Pius IX declared a general amnesty in mid-July. Already at this point it was clear that the new Pope, unlike his predecessors, would not listen to the advice coming from Vienna. This was due not only to the Pope’s political attitude, but also to France’s increased and still increasing influence in Rome.⁶⁶ It was

⁶³ Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 3. 7. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 73.

⁶⁴ Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 12. 7. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁶⁵ Annex to Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 12. 7. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74; R. METTERNICH-WINNEBURG (ed.), *Aus Metternichs nachgelassenen Papieren*, Vol. 7, Wien 1883, pp. 246–252.

⁶⁶ France’s influence in Rome grew mainly because of the deployment of an Italian Pellegrino Rossi as the French ambassador to the Papal States in 1845; Pius IX favored most of his advice. F. ENGEL-JANOSI, French and Austrian Political Advice to Pius IX 1846–1848, in: *The Catholic Historical Review*, 38, 1, 1952, pp. 1–20; ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, p. 194.

understandable that the new Pope, in a situation of open opposition to Austria among the Italian population, including the subjects in the Papal States, would not follow instructions from Metternich. He himself wanted to rule as an independent sovereign, free of all foreign influence. When the Austrian ambassador Lützow felt himself isolated in Rome, the only thing the Austrian Chancellor could do at that moment was to take the position of observing bystander.⁶⁷

Over the next few months, Austro-papal relations cooled significantly, and the Roman Government followed a liberal reform course, listening to the government in Paris rather than the one in Vienna. Metternich closely followed the changing situation in the Papal States, both at the governmental level in Rome and regarding social conditions in the provinces. Once the amnesty was guaranteed, he wrote: *"It is remarkable that such general enthusiasm has manifested itself in Rome, where very few families will benefit from sovereign clemency; if the public joy is witnessed in proportion to the advantage which the populations find in this measure, this joy will have to be immoderate in the Legations and the Marches."*⁶⁸ The old statesman had no illusions that celebrations in the streets of the capital, as well as elsewhere, were not only the result of the Pope's liberal action, but were also a product of the more general climate dominating the Apennine Peninsula in those years. Metternich evaluated Pius' work clearly: *"Without doubt the administration of the State of the Church needs more than one improvement, but it is not these benefits that the spirits of St. Peter hold in view; they aim at pretending reforms which in reality are only works of perdition."*⁶⁹

Undoubtedly, Pius' actions went far beyond what Metternich had suggested in his aperçus or his reform programs during the previous decades. But the final blow to his papal politics was yet to come. If in the early 1840s resistance to Austria touched upon only a limited part of Italian society, then, after 1845, anti-Austrian sentiments were an integral part of Italian society, affecting virtually the entire population. In particular, Italian nationalists and patriots, who emphasized in their works the need to eliminate foreign influences on the peninsula if Italian unity was to be achieved, had the greatest credit for it.⁷⁰ A wave of anti-Austrian sentiment did not spare the Papal States, and Pius IX had no difficulty

⁶⁷ Lützow to Metternich, Rome, 29. 8. 1847, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 76.

⁶⁸ Metternich to Lützow, Königswart, 31. 7. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, p. 26.

in using anti-Austrian rhetoric. On the contrary, he himself used these conditions for his own benefit, in order to gain popularity among his subjects.⁷¹ In this respect, he had been successful from the very beginning of his pontificate, especially since the summer of 1847, when Marshal Radetzky had reinforced the Austrian garrison in the town of Ferrara on the border of Austria and the Papal States.⁷² Given the circumstances at that time – as Lützow’s assistant Ohms wrote from Rome in the fall of 1846: “*There reigns a real anarchy on several points of the Pontifical Provinces*”⁷³ – this was an understandable move, where the Austrian Marshal only protected his soldiers deployed in Ferrara from a possible attack by the Italians. The probability of a conflict between two foreign armies was high, especially after the creation of the Civic Guard.⁷⁴

However, this act was received with strong disapproval in Italian circles. The Pope issued an official protest claiming that this action was illegal, and demanded that Austria reduces its troop levels in Ferrara to their original number.⁷⁵ The fact that the reinforcement of the Austrian troops was in full compliance with the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna, and thus fully compatible with international law, had no significance for the whole affair.⁷⁶ Not only Italian nationalists, but also some Italian rulers considered this action to be a regular occupation and an attempt by Austria to increase its influence in the Papal States.⁷⁷ In the context of Austro-papal relations, this affair was the last nail in the coffin when it comes to relations between Rome and Vienna. From that moment on, the Austrian ambassador at the papal court was practically *persona non grata*, since he had only a few opportunities to meet the Pope before he left his office in May 1848.⁷⁸

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 191, 193, 195, 207.

⁷² A. SKED, Poor intelligence, flawed results. Metternich, Radetzky, and the crisis-management of Austria’s “occupation” of Ferrara in 1847, in: P. JACKSON – J. SIEGEL (eds.), *Intelligence and Statecraft. The Use and Limits of Intelligence in International Society*, Westport 2005, pp. 53–86.

⁷³ Ohms to Metternich, Rome, 28. 11. 1846, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 75.

⁷⁴ M. ŠEDIVÝ, The Austrian “occupation” of Ferrara in 1847. Its legal aspect between myth and reality, in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 23, 2, 2018, p. 142.

⁷⁵ Ferretti to Viale-Prelá, Rome, 21. 8. 1847, 18. 9. 1847, 25. 9. 1847 and 6. 11. 1847, ASV, Vienna 328IX; Metternich to Lützow, Vienna, 19. 8. 1847, OeStA, HHStA, StK Rom 82; ENGEL-JANOSI, *Die politische Korrespondenz*, pp. 224–225.

⁷⁶ ŠEDIVÝ, The Austrian “occupation” of Ferrara, pp. 139–155.

⁷⁷ ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, pp. 218–219.

⁷⁸ F. ENGEL-JANOSI, *Osterreich und der Vatikan 1846–1918*, Vol. 1, Graz, Wien, Köln, p. 39.

The so-called Austrian “occupation” of Ferrara not only had a chilling effect on Austro-papal relations, but also caused a strong upheaval in Austria’s already weak position on the Apennine Peninsula. This event was used by Italian nationalists and politicians in their struggle to expel the Austrians from the peninsula, even though they basically relied on false claims. All Italian newspapers, including the newly established, more nationalist-oriented ones, reported the event as an attack against the head of the Catholic Church and an independent sovereign.⁷⁹ By abolishing censorship of the press, the Pope also indirectly supported anti-Austrian sentiments in the Papal States; together with his role as an innocent victim, this made him even more popular. Metternich had no further influence on the development of Austro-papal relations when, in mid-March 1848, he himself became a victim of revolutionary forces in his own country and was forced to leave Vienna. A few months later, in November 1848, Pius IX met the same fate and had to flee from the angry crowds in the streets of Rome.⁸⁰ The two main figures of Austro-papal relations lost all their powers and the political order began to collapse, thus opening the path to a new war in Europe, not surprisingly in Italy.

Conclusion

For Metternich, the relations with the Papal States and the Pope as head of the Catholic Church had always been an important element of Austrian foreign policy. Until at least 1846, all the Popes were conservative to ultra-conservative, and the Austrian Chancellor could use this fact to promote conservatism both in Austria and throughout Europe, as well as count on the support of the Holy See in disputes between liberal and conservative states. The conservative nature of the papal government was also an efficient tool for Metternich in the fight against revolutions, as confirmed several times during revolutionary events on the Apennine Peninsula in the period 1815–1848. Therefore, the stability of the temporal power of the Pope, not only as a spiritual leader but also as a secular ruler of the second-largest Italian state, was of great importance to him. Last but not least, cooperation between Vienna and Rome was important to maintaining Austrian dominance on the Apennine Peninsula, either by

⁷⁹ The Austrian annexation of Krakow in 1846, which was a clear violation of international law, contributed significantly to the concerns of Italians, who feared that they would be caught by the same fate. ŠEDIVÝ, *The Decline of the Congress System*, pp. 6, 203–209.

⁸⁰ ENGEL-JANOSI, *Österreich und der Vatikan*, p. 41.

preserving the political status quo in the Austrian provinces of Lombardy and Venetia, by eliminating revolutionary threats in neighbouring states, or by suppressing French ambitions in Italy through Austrian influence in the Eternal City.

However, the conservative (for most of the period, ultra-conservative) papal regime threatened the political stability of the Papal States when it was the worst-administered country on the peninsula, with a backward government apparatus entirely under the control of the Church. The fundamental crisis in 1831, when the decentralization tendencies of the northern provinces were ended only through Austrian military intervention, changed nothing about this course of papal politics. When all Metternich's efforts – beginning after the Congress of Vienna – to introduce reforms in the Papal States were shown to be completely in vain at the end of the 1830s, he resorted to the position of mere observer for the 1840s, with no intention of putting any pressure on the papal government. Yet when the local uprisings of 1843 and 1845 occurred, he was always ready to aid Rome, and assured the Pope of military support should he ask for it.

The growing Italian nationalism and the desire for a unified state, which, of course, did not exclude the Papal States (on the contrary, together with Piedmont they were the hatcheries of Italian patriots), did not greatly concern the Austrian Chancellor, as he still believed these political programs had little support among the Italian population. This changed radically in 1846 with the election of the new Pope Pius IX, who, considered to be politically liberal, represented a saviour for the papal subjects and a unifier of the Italian states for the Italian nationalists. For Austro-papal relations, the election of Pius IX dealt a fatal blow, since the Pope did not heed the caution received from Vienna that they were too conservative, and, over time, completely fixated himself on the French guidelines supporting his liberal path within the papal regime. The reinforcement of Austrian troops in Ferrara in July 1847 – regarded by Italians as well as by the Pope himself as an illegal occupation – provided input to even more aggravation of Austro-papal relations. This contributed to an even greater spread of anti-Austrian sentiments in Italian society. The deterioration in Austro-papal relations was one aspect of the failure of Metternich's Italian policy and of the decline of Austrian dominance on the peninsula, leading ultimately to revolutionary storms and a declaration of war between the Kingdom of Sardinia and Austria.