Cabinet conclusions regarding the future of the Free Territory of Trieste, dated 22 March 1948

Conclusions

[…]

Trieste

5. *The Foreign Secretary* informed the Cabinet of the circumstances leading to the joint approach made by the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and France on 20th March to the Governments of the Soviet Union and Italy proposing that the Peace Treaty with Italy should be modified by an additional protocol placing the Free Territory of Trieste under Italian sovereignty. This proposal was justified by practical experience of the difficulties into operation the special arrangements for administering Trieste which had been prescribed in the Peace Treaty. Discussions in the Security Council had shown that it would be impossible to reach agreement on the selection of a Governor of the Free Territory; and, until a Governor had been appointed, the regime envisaged by the Treaty could not be effectively introduced. In particular, it would be impossible to bring to an end the Allied military occupation of the Territory; and we could not contemplate keeping British troops in the area indefinitely. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav Zone of the Territory had been virtually incorporated in Yugoslavia by procedures inconsistent with the spirit of the Treaty. The three Governments had therefore decided to recommend the return of the Free Territory to Italian sovereignty as the solution most likely to meet the democratic aspirations of the inhabitants and to facilitate the re-establishment of peace and stability in the area.

 There had been special reasons for making this proposal public without delay. The forthcoming elections in Italy might determine whether a Union of Western Europe could include Italy, and the prospects of the moderate Parties in those elections were uncertain. The Soviet Government had recently declared their intention to support the return of the Italian Colonies to Italy, and there was reason to believe that they had also intended to declare themselves in favour of restoring the City of Trieste to Italian sovereignty. These declarations were doubtless intended to strengthen the hands of the Italian Communists in the forthcoming elections. Communism seemed to be gaining some ground in Italy. While the efforts of the Italian Government to counter it had been concentrated mainly in the north, it seemed to have made some progress among the peasants in the south by exploiting their grievances against the landowners. In these circumstances it had seemed desirable that early publicity should be given to the proposal that Trieste should be placed under Italian sovereignty, with a view to strengthening the position of the moderate Parties in the forthcoming elections.

 The Cabinet-

 Took note with approval of the declaration favouring the return to Italy of the Free Territory of Trieste.

[TNA, CAB 128/12/24]

Keywords: Italy, Yugoslavia, great power relations