

## Address given by Giovanni Gronchi (31 July 1947)

**Caption:** On 31 July 1947, addressing the Constituent Assembly, Giovanni Gronchi, MP and Leader of the Christian Democrats in the Italian Parliament, outlines the implications of the adoption of the peace treaty between the Allies and Italy.

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## Address by Giovanni Gronchi (31 July 1947)

**Draft law: Approval of the Peace Treaty between the Allied and Associated Powers and Italy, signed in Paris on 10 February 1947**

*(Constituent Assembly, session of 31 July 1947)*

**PRESIDENT:** The majority spokesman, Mr Gronchi, has permission to speak.

**GRONCHI, majority spokesman:** Gentlemen, there is certainly a strange atmosphere in this Assembly.

An event with such grave implications for the present and above all for the future of our country has given rise to quarrelsome divisions in this chamber rather than harmonious and impartial judgements, and finds the representatives of the Italian people more concerned with their own political positions than with the position of Italy at this time. So much so that even the voices that have echoed our sufferings as men, citizens and fathers, seem to be inspired by conventional rhetoric rather than being an expression of deep feeling.

I hope that the decision we are about to take may unite us in a higher vision of our duty and our responsibility.

At this time and during this discussion, there have been repeated allusions to the advisability of postponements, of delays, which, by enabling us to put off the final decision, might better express this sense of responsibility.

I want to recall an historical precedent, without presuming to draw a strict analogy between two such different times. Neither in the history of a people nor in that of humanity are any two times quite the same. But there are analogies and links on which it is worthwhile to reflect.

On 6 August 1849, the Peace Treaty was signed in Milan after the disastrous campaign that culminated at Novara. On 24 September, Cesare Balbo, in his capacity as President of the Commission that reported on the terms of the Peace Treaty, proposed to the chamber that the Treaty be approved without debate, in silent protest. Some were vigorously against the Treaty; others were in favour of postponement for various different reasons, as various as the reasons given now to call for, justify and sustain postponement.

For a time, therefore, partly because of a ministerial crisis, there was no further discussion of the Peace Treaty in the Piedmontese parliament.

On 13 November, the debate was resumed. Then Balbo again urged the chamber to vote, protesting in silence against the severity and iniquity of the Treaty.

But the new motion for postponement was opposed by the man who represented in that historical age all the faith, the hope and the desire for resurrection that Italy possessed: Camillo Cavour.

‘I believe’, he said, ‘that this discussion holds our minds and hearts in anguish and suspense. I am convinced that the complex work of parliament cannot proceed with regularity, or with desirable speed, until this vital matter is resolved.

‘This is for domestic consideration.

‘As for foreign affairs, I believe that suspending discussion of the Treaty may be seriously harmful, and that taking the state of Europe as it is and not as we might wish it to be, one cannot deny that this extreme difficulty, which from various sides opposes the adoption of the Treaty, this continual deferment can only have fatal results for our diplomacy and our international relations.’ And he concluded: ‘This is not a matter between the Government and us. The matter of the Treaty is a matter between us and our fate, and even if this Government ceased to exist and another took its place, from whatever side of the chamber it might be chosen, we would be no less constrained to acknowledge this fatal law. Much is spoken of honour and

dignity. For my part, I do not believe that our dignity and honour stand to gain much by further protraction of this discussion, because we are all equally convinced that words, even the noblest of words, that we speak here can in no way change this grievous situation.'

I believe that you too, gentlemen, will be struck by the notable analogy with the present time, and that all parts of the Assembly will echo and answer my call to forget the domestic situation that has come about and to take on this tremendous and grievous responsibility to our country. And it is strange that every part of the Assembly should reach quite opposite conclusions, after starting from the viewpoint of a commonly recognised requirement, namely that of keeping intact, I should say, pristine the independence, the autonomy, and the moral and political integrity of our country.

On this point the position of those who align themselves in principle against the Treaty is more understandable than the position of those who favour postponement. At least, not everyone's position is so clear, except that of the Socialist and Communist members, for whom the motives for dissent are evident and undeniable: ideological motives determined by the fact that Russia has not yet ratified the Treaty, and internal motives determined by the current composition of the Government.

Yet all the sound reasons are for not ratifying the Treaty on principle. Not one sound reason, pardon me gentlemen, do I find for postponing the discussion on the ratification of the Treaty. Even Mr Orlando — and I regret not seeing him among us now — who has spoken so passionately of dignity and the defence of our honour, who has complained so vigorously and also in large part inopportunistically that this approach smacks of a 'lust for servility', even Mr Orlando has returned to this concept of independence. Yet the dissent is not about this point, on which, as I was saying, a certain necessity is unanimously acknowledged; it is about the way in which our independence is to be preserved. It is fair to pose the question, even to him, whether the protest that involuntarily — I say this without any disrespect for either his past or his advanced age — assumes at times the somewhat theatrical ring of affected rhetoric, whether this approach might not by chance have cost our country dear in the past (*approval from the centre*); whether I should not recall an act that he would describe as an act of courage against servility — the Parisian protest against that same kind of approach at the Versailles Conference — which led to his return to Italy to a rapturous and triumphal reception, and wonder if that protest did not deprive Italy of all the mandates on all its colonies and did not leave the Allies unsympathetic to that most noble manifestation of protest and, on the contrary, intent and bent on the selfish realism of interests that were at that time being determined and resolved. (*Applause from the centre.*)

And when I hear that he himself, to justify the convenience and advisability of ratification, speaks of the excuse of necessity, I say that we are more steadfast, courageous and imbued with a sense of responsibility, we who make no excuses for our approach and who feel ready to assume with courage, pride and conviction, before the people and before Europe, our responsibility to propose to you, gentlemen, the ratification of the Treaty.

Even Mr Russo Perez, who has assembled a series of reasons on this debate, has done so rather for the Treaty itself than for postponement. Some of these reasons cast light on his point of view which is, I think, somewhat different from that of his senior colleague, Mr Giannini. He has said: 'The UN is of no concern to us. There is no sign of a Christian revival. Gronchi has the optimism of Candide when he writes in his report that the world is heading towards new concepts under the dual impetus of the idealism of the working classes and traditional Christian idealism.'

Admittedly, they are reasons that militate against ratification of the Treaty, not against the timing of the ratification, and I do not begrudge Russo Perez those reasons. A world in which there is no hope of a better civilisation, which cannot be formed and consolidated on a balance of interests, but only on the greater depth in the collective consciousness of ideal and spiritual reasons, is a world in which we should despair of seeing those terrible blood baths, wars, diminish, let alone disappear. (*Applause from the centre.*)

We want to believe this and we say that we should think that we had failed in our mission if we did not insist on propagating this view.

Socialist and Communist members, you who in the past have had a far more vivid sense of internationalism than today (for today we are witnessing a strange regression on your part), you who have discerned the uselessness or the inefficiency of the various Internationals, from the First to the Fourth, and have seen that they have not prevented any war — or rather, I do not say that they have not prevented war, but that they have not averted it, that they have not created within countries any barrier to any war, because each one of those organisations has in the end felt itself to be more steeped in a sense that is not national, but nationalistic, rather than in the superior sense of universal and international solidarity — Socialist and Communist members, you should heighten, in this your hour, your sense of international and European solidarity, and you should be at our side, in different fields but working towards a common end, because if there is no popular force to create barriers to resurgent nationalism, there will be no intellectual class, bourgeois or otherwise, to create the atmosphere of a new civilisation. (*Applause from the centre.*)

The reasons against the timing of the ratification of the Treaty are invalidated, in my opinion, by this consideration: not one among those who today speak against the timing of ratification spoke against our participation in the Paris Conference.

Now, gentlemen, if there is a unilateral act, an act that can demonstrate that we are supporters of a European bloc as compared with another bloc, that act is surely our participation in the Paris Conference, because we have before us not a Russia that refuses to recognise the Conference, but only a Russia that has itself not yet carried out that act.

At the Paris Conference, we have a nation that has demonstrated its resolute opposition. How is it, gentlemen, that you recognise our presence at Paris as opportune, necessary and indispensable, and do not feel that it was precisely there that the danger would arise of two blocs squaring off and that you ought to have opposed our presence at the time without this danger being recognised in our ratification, as we are asking you for today?

Even Mr Valiani, who has also made a substantial speech on this subject, has based all his arguments on the necessity of our adopting a neutral position, or at least one superior to the dispute between nations. But here too the problem is not so much the timing of ratification, which no longer has influence, but, perhaps contrary to his own thinking, the act of ratification itself. (*Interruption by Leo Valiani.*)

Mr Togliatti is also smitten by uncertainty. What are the hidden reasons that determine the necessity of such a hurried ratification? What are the reasons for the U-turn of the Christian Democratic Party, which, with an ease that everyone recognises, turned around some time ago and set off in the opposite direction?

Either argument, Communist members, may have polemical value in the dialectic of your senior colleague, but they certainly have no concrete basis in reality, as I believe one can say that the reasons for the current proposal for ratification should be clear now that Count Sforza has spoken, now that Mr De Gasperi has spoken, and after I have appended some modest additional arguments of my own.

As for our party's mysterious U-turn, do you want to hold us, through the succession of so many different events, to a stable and consolidated position, and to regard as contradictory — or worse, speculative — every move to adapt our approach to reality? I recently re-read a book by Clemenceau, *Grandeur et misère d'une victoire*, which — and Clemenceau should know, being the admirable and tenacious architect of the greatness of France that he was — contains this observation: 'Is there perhaps one man on earth who is capable of producing a recommendation or a plan for foreign policy, not — I say — for all time, but even just for six months or a year?'

And it is natural, gentlemen. When we made our first demonstration against the acceptance of the Peace Treaty, we actually withdrew from its final formulation but we still hoped that we could influence parliament and public opinion in the various countries so that the terms dictated by the Big Four in New York could be modified. In that hope, we were duty-bound to highlight our opposition, and we neither deny nor withdraw that opposition now but merely superimpose a realistic vision of certain necessities that have

arisen in the meantime.

And it is no wonder if we, at that time, halted at that first point and said that we would not feel disposed in the current circumstances to assume responsibility for proposing acceptance of the Treaty. Many things have happened since, and because history goes on despite the parties, their systems, their calculations and their electoral speculations, history has confronted us with a situation from which we have acquired the conviction that we need to find a way out.

It is therefore a matter of such complexity and such depth that we feel a little like men who run a company, one branch of which has performed so disastrously that it has jeopardised the viability of the whole concern, and we have reasoned thus, as wise administrators do: all this is lost, though through no fault of ours, and now we must start all over again, just so long as — if you will pardon the somewhat trite comparison — so long as the company survives.

So long as Italy survives, so long as Italy resumes her place among the nations, we offer them the sacrifice of this humiliation.

Yet Mr Nenni says there may finally be some chance — perhaps one in a million — that this Treaty will be modified and, if so, we must take it into account, however slim it is considered to be. Gentlemen, imagination can play some dirty tricks and we should be playing them on ourselves if we thought there might be a possibility for improvement by this route. For us, the route of more radical review of the Treaty, which is already beginning to take effect, is a route that does not escape this dilemma: either force, which is capable of imposing it, or the establishment of international relations, which gradually make it possible. (*Approval from the centre.*)

None of us can imagine today that force can be the instrument of our review, because for a long time hence we shall be a militarily weak nation, unlikely to inspire awe in the great powers, which have either atomic bombs or a biological warfare capability. Yet we can, here and now — and there is no time to lose, gentlemen — we can and we must establish international relations which will give us the chance to create the conditions for a review as quickly as possible. That is why we feel obliged to close this chapter, to seize our liberty and our autonomy, to establish new relations on an equal footing and to pave the way for this review. (*Applause from the centre.*)

Now, whoever refuses to accept ratification or the timing of ratification certainly pleads his case with sound reasons based on legal arguments, but compromises seriously — if not irremediably — the political side of the matter, because this is what it is all about.

Yet it is said that ratification is an act of implicit acceptance; rather, many sides insist on the state of necessity which must be clear, most evident and undeniable; a state of ineluctability, because otherwise how — it has been said — will the Italian people judge us? With angry threats?

The government has tried to find a formula that meets the desires of various parts of the Assembly. We, of the majority of the Commission, and I personally, should not be so concerned about demonstrating this state of ineluctability or necessity, because in our opinion ratification is not acceptance; and it is not acceptance because — and I do not know here, to be honest, whether I am expressing the thoughts of many or my own personal thoughts in a matter so open to question and thus so controversial — in my opinion, ratification is not an element of validity for the Treaty. We have not played any decisive part in the formulation of the Treaty. Our interventions have therefore lacked any legal effect, and it is as if they have been merely admitted and tolerated. Therefore, ratification — if you read Article 89 — is only the means by which we and the other former axis powers become part of the Treaty. That is to say, we are admitted to enjoy the so-called — God preserve us! — benefits of the Treaty. So one can say that ratification does not prejudice any judgement on the Treaty but is merely one of the conditions for peace, because it is the condition on which the Treaty can enter into force with regard to us.

**Gennaro PATRICOLO:** It is not an essential condition!

**GRONCHI, majority spokesman:** Yes, it is. It is essential, in so far as we should not enjoy the advantages if we did not ratify it. Therefore, at least as far as the active side is concerned, ratification is essential for us, and, I repeat, not implying any judgement on the Treaty, it does not imply, nor does it prejudice any free acceptance of the Treaty, and it is to be considered purely and simply as compliance with one of the clauses or conditions.

If this is true, fulfilment of such a condition becomes a purely political problem, that is, the problem of choosing the moment at which to fulfil it, because it is legitimate for us to seek from such fulfilment the greatest number of benefits to our country. Therefore, every legal judgement, in our humble opinion, must yield to a broader political judgement.

Is this the moment? This is the question we must answer and on which we must mainly concentrate our attention. Is this the most favourable moment for Italy to fulfil this condition of peace? I answer yes; and it should not seem to be a paradox if I answer yes precisely because of this state of latent tension that exists among the great powers of contemporary history. What if these powers had found the lowest common denominator on which to vent their worries or their mutual distrust, on which to build up the hope of some years of shared activity? We should have little to do, poor and disarmed as we are. We should have nothing to do but make angry and resonant protests, which might please some of us, or else submit to the irresistible will of the greater powers.

Yet it is precisely because this situation does not exist, precisely because there exists instead this tension that could (and this is neither vain nor affected pessimism) become dangerous, this is the moment in which Italy can, by joining the international assembly on an equal footing, perform one of its decisive functions.

And the Marshall Plan itself is a response to a parallel requirement in a field, which, although narrower, is subject to the same laws and demands.

Yet how does this position square with the position that I declared to be the universally held view? The need for autonomy and independence. And who wants and needs autonomy and independence more than we do?

Take care, and not only for reasons of material interest. I have heard our friend Nenni say sound and true things about the complementary nature of the economies of south-eastern Europe, of the necessity of our expansion towards those countries, and of the necessity of not creating barriers. But these sound and well-founded reasons are not sufficient. Nenni, you my friend, who sought in those facts irrefutable evidence of the current value of historical materialism and determinism, admit that in this case you side with the logic of capitalism, because you take only material interests as the operative force in the history of nations. Yes, material interests also matter, but woe betide us when they predominate, when they alone determine the future course of nations! (*Applause from the centre.*)

So we need autonomy and independence. And I did not wait for this debate to say so. The members who were kind enough to listen to me when I made those outrageous statements on the occasion of the last vote of confidence in the government will remember that I also touched on this point. Defining the much abused and slandered centre position of our party, I broadened my scope for a moment, though just briefly, to raise the international question over and above the domestic question. I said that, just as in domestic policy we interpreted our function as being to attract the so-called revolutionary parties, that is, the parties which, ideologically at least, would prefer non-liberating violence to the slower and naturally less popular progressivism of democracy, which only gradually achieves the advancement of the popular masses in its various forms, so too in the international arena we felt that there would be no balance in Europe unless we succeed in bringing Russia back into the European fold, respecting her ideology and her ways but making her feel this inevitable, ineluctable solidarity, one that is not merely material but which answers to a higher concept of human co-existence that is identified with civilisation. You may imagine the consequences if this nation does not resume such a state of co-existence with Europe, if we think about making the Iron Curtain yet more substantial, if we think that beyond Stettin and Trieste 'here be dragons', as the ancient geographers said of uncharted territory.



The Marshall Plan presents certain great dangers and that is why our presence is timely and necessary and why anything that can be done to make our presence effective is timely and necessary.

I do not believe that the American people have any great desire for domination. As for the British, although they are above all British first and Labour second — and I say so without irony, for a nation has the collective psychology that its traditions create for it — the British have had an important influence on the world stage and on the imperial stage for a long time, and so their long experience has settled more or less obscurely in the collective consciousness and has established a certain moral and intellectual orientation.

Yet this is tempered today by a fervent social and Socialist conception, and so you should not fear that Ernest Bevin's presence at the Conference might be identified as the presence of a cunning predator who exploits the poverty and difficulty of others.

Yet even the American people, I said, have some idealistic fervour, which does not exclude an attention to — and a vigilant defence of — material interests. I won't tell you that if you have time — for unfortunately we have precious little of that — you should read the delightful literature and novels of recent times. You have felt in those manifestations the fervour for something new. And usually literature reveals new forms of thought, acting as herald of the great trends which transform the collective spirit of a people. But there is nothing about the Marshall Plan that could arouse suspicions of an absolute desire for domination, even if it is examined with the extreme sense of objectivity applied to its formulation, as Marshall himself supposed it would be in his now famous speech. He said: 'It would be neither fitting nor efficacious for this government to undertake to draw up unilaterally a programme designed to place Europe on its feet economically. This is the business of the Europeans. The initiative, I think, must come from Europe. The role of this country should consist of friendly aid, etc.'

If you will observe, 22 nations were invited to the Paris Conference (excuse me for this statistical reference, which has significance for me) and of those 22, eight belong to the red constellation: Albania, Finland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia and Hungary; three are neutral states that have never been especially fond of the English world: Switzerland, Sweden and Norway; and if you add Russia, you have the majority of the states invited to the Paris Conference. The value of this is relative, naturally, but it means that none was concerned with creating for itself a predetermined majority to impress on the Conference a fixed and decisive stance. It means that the talk of leaving an 'open door' for the others was not just a phrase but a possibility from which all could profit, and if any breakdown has occurred, it has occurred on grounds of suspicion or on ideological grounds. Naturally, each country pursues its own policies and looks after what it believes to be its own interests. There is no harm in that. But I believe that those countries that participated in the Paris Conference would have served their interests better by discussing the actual details of the programme and the specific guidelines required to put the programme into effect. Only if there were found to be actual differences on these guidelines could a break, a split, have happened and been justified. That is why our presence is necessary, our presence with that spirit of which I spoke to you and which no one has the right to doubt at this time. But if the aim is to direct suspicion towards American policy which, it is alleged, is intent for hegemonic reasons on ruining I know not what sector of our industry, heavy or light, iron and steel or textiles, by means of trade agreements, if that is the aim, what do you say, Nenni, my friend, about the fact that this trade agreement is being brokered by one of your very own, by our friend Ivan Matteo Lombardo? Various people were highly critical of the President of the Council for sending Lombardo, since they considered — not on account of his personal qualities, which are beyond reproach, but because of his political affiliations — that he was not the best person to negotiate an agreement with the Americans in their present frame of mind.

Now our position is clear then. Those who think that we have cynically supported the immediate ratification of the Treaty to serve these national aims must think that they attribute to us either recklessness or a kind of excessive urge to make sacrifices for an immature infatuation, because all will agree that our position could hardly be more uncomfortable. The elections are not far off. We are not among those, Mr Giannini, who scorn the spiritual and moral factors in the life of a nation. We respect them highly, and I do not just mean the religious factors, but broader factors for the life of the spirit and for love of one's country. We feel the

immense importance of these things for the life of a nation. Even if we were not convinced, the experience of fascism at its birth should give us the most irrefutable demonstration. Let us remember how fascism worked on the myth of a stolen victory and how early fascism gained a foothold by building on this mindset of naive devotion to our country, on this sense of humiliation that invoked a sense of justice and provoked a legitimate spiritual reaction, to assert the dignity of the combatants, of those who, wearing blue campaign ribbons — I hope it won't displease you, but it happened to me — felt as though we were being spat at behind our backs, harried by the cry: "You're stained with blood!" It worked on a state of reaction that a large section of public opinion recognised, as interpreted by nascent fascism. We forget this at our peril.

**GIANNINI:** True, true, but why are you telling *me* this?

**GRONCHI, majority spokesman:** No, you are right.

**Tommaso TONELLO:** You were a Minister. I survived.

**GRONCHI, majority spokesman:** Don't talk nonsense, otherwise I will identify in your ranks some of the fascists of 1937 to 1938, not collaborators from 1922. (*Comments.*)

We do not forget these values and that is why our position as supporters of the ratification of the Treaty is not the most comfortable, nor is it the most productive from an electoral standpoint.

We know that we will also be misunderstood. We know — pardon me — that, with their lack of good faith, some of our adversaries will exploit this situation and will perhaps cause us considerable harm, but at least respect the position of men who, knowing the difficulty of this situation, feel that they must put personal and party interests second in order to serve what they genuinely believe to be the interests of the country. This is the only testimony that we care about. And, to conclude, let me say that in this heated discussion we are trying to strike a note of moderation, balance and consciousness. The Italian people are among those who are easily fired with sudden bursts of enthusiasm and just as easily sink into immediate depression. Today we have heard on some lips a note of heroic or romantic rebellion that cannot be identified with dignity and honour, because dignity and honour are still the prerogative of those who do not listen to such talk or speak in such terms. Let us try, because this is our duty, to give our people a clear sense of the moment and of its requirements.

If we want to keep faith with democracy, we must turn directly to the spirit of the people, not only with emotionally charged words, but with a cold consideration of the facts, with that realism which, as Sforza put it so well, does not consist of idealistic visions, but with that realism that makes us apply ourselves to the problems and see them as they are, over and above every form of partisan distortion.

This is our position, which I do not ask you to share if your persuasion is different, but to respect. And respecting it, we will elevate our debate to such a height as will show truly how, first among all, the representatives of the Italian people in this Assembly realise that here there is no paltry matter of domestic policy or of electoral or party politics. There is only, if anything, a diverse, but equally respectable appraisal of the interests of the country. (*Loud applause from the centre and right. Many words of congratulation.*)