

ВОЙНЫ В ИСТОРИИ

ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ ДОКУМЕНТЫ И АКТУАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ АРХЕОГРАФИИ, АРХИВОВЕДЕНИЯ И ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЯ, РОССИЙСКОЙ И ВСЕОБЩЕЙ ИСТОРИИ НОВОГО И НОВЕЙШЕГО ВРЕМЕНИ

*Сборник материалов
Десятой международной конференции
молодых ученых и специалистов*

Оlic  2020



РОССПЭН
Москва
2020

УДК 930
ББК 63
В65

*Издание осуществлено при поддержке
Фонда «История Отечества»*



РОССИЙСКОЕ
ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ
ОБЩЕСТВО

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Войны в истории. Исторические документы и актуальные проблемы археографии, архивоведения и источниковедения, российской и всеобщей истории нового и новейшего времени : Сборник материалов Десятой международной конференции молодых ученых и специалистов «Слио-2020» / [отв. ред. А. К. Сорокин]. – М. : Политическая энциклопедия, 2020. – 406 с.
ISBN 978-5-8243-2325-2

В сборник включены тезисы докладов участников Десятой международной конференции молодых ученых и специалистов «Клио», которая ежегодно проводится в Российском государственном архиве социально-политической истории начиная с 2011 года. Доклады посвящены актуальным историко-архивным проблемам, важным сюжетам археографии, источниковедения, российской и всеобщей истории нового и новейшего времени. В 2020 году отмечается 75 лет со дня Победы в Великой Отечественной войне и завершения Второй мировой войны. В связи с этим основной темой 10-й юбилейной конференции «Клио» стали дискуссионные проблемы и новейшие исследования по истории Второй мировой войны.

На конференции состоялось обсуждение методических подходов к анализу и конструированию памяти о Второй мировой войне и существующих в России и зарубежных странах практик воспоминания о ней и связанных событиях: боевых действиях, подвигах и преступлениях, стратегических и тактических планах командования, экономических, социальных и геополитических аспектах. Специальное внимание было уделено таким институтам памяти о войне, как архив, музей, мемориал, медиа, а также формам сохранения памяти и трансляции дискурса.

В работе конференции приняли участие более ста молодых ученых из России, Азербайджана, Беларуси, Казахстана, Узбекистана, Австрии, Великобритании, Германии, Исландии, Италии, Франции.

УДК 930
ББК 63

ISBN 978-5-8243-2325-2

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A DIPLOMAT AND A SPY. LIFE AND ACTIVITIES OF L.B. HELFAND IN ROME ON THE EVE OF OPERATION BARBAROSSA

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This paper aims to cast light on the case of Lev Helfand, a Soviet diplomat who operated in Italy between 1933 and 1940 mostly remembered for his defection to the United States and his involvement in espionage. Curiously, little attention has been given to his diplomatic action and his role in the evolution of European political alliances in a crucial historical moment.

Little is known about Helfand's past, except for references difficult to verify. According to the resume that he himself drew up, he was born in 1900 in Poltava, Ukraine. Educated in Kiev and Moscow, a *Sous-Commandant* of the Russian Army during the Civil War, after the Bolshevik victory he stayed in Russia and joined the Foreign Service in 1925. After a first assignment in France, he returned to Moscow in 1927, where as deputy political director of the *Narkomindel* he dealt with the affairs related to France, Italy and Anglo-Saxon countries¹. This office gave Helfand the opportunity to strengthen his relations with Maksim Litvinov, the man that in 1930 became the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. Helfand actively pursued Litvinov's foreign policy, devoted to establish solid relations with the Western countries as a way of normalizing and securing the existence of the Soviet Union, threatened by German and Japanese growing militarism.

Helfand in Rome

Originally, Italy was included in Litvinov's anti-German containment scheme, since he firmly believed that, despite their propaganda, Italy and Germany were divided by an inner antagonism². Probably due to his knowledge of Western countries' politics, Helfand was instructed to prepare the ground

¹ On Helfand/Gel'fand, *R. Maffei*, Il caso Helfand. La defezione nel 1940 del diplomatico sovietico a Roma nei documenti americani / "Nuova Storia Contemporanea", n. 5/2014, pp. 49–74; *B.R. Sullivan*, Soviet penetration of the Italian intelligence services in the 1930s / Storia dello spionaggio, *T. Vialardi di Sandigliano-V. Ilari*, 2006. P. 83–104.

² Dokumenty vneshnej politiki SSSR (DVP), Gospolitizdat-Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenija, M., Vol. 21, Doc. 96.

for drawing away from Germany the Italian government, as part of the work already resulted in the Pact of Friendship, Neutrality and Non-aggression³.

Helfand arrived in Rome in late 1933 as first secretary of the Soviet Embassy, and in 1935 became counsellor to the newly appointed ambassador, Boris Štein. Since the latter was often absent, Helfand ended up playing a leading role in implementing Soviet policy towards Italy. This made him the subject of a constant surveillance by the Italian political police, soon joined by the Italian secret service. Several reports were drawn up about Helfand and his wife, the actress Sofija Shatzov. Naturally, rumours about Helfand's alleged activities as an agent of the GPU and the NKVD in Paris and Rome did not escape the attention of the Italian police, although no definitive evidence could be found⁴. Instead, it is proved that as a diplomat Helfand was well integrated in the Italian political society and that he gave an actual contribution to the development of Soviet-Italian relations. From late 1938 until his defection, in fact, he held the position of *Chargé d'affaires*, heading the Soviet diplomatic mission in Rome throughout meaningful years.

Helfand's Contribution to Italo-Soviet Relations

The German moves towards Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938–1939 sharply altered the political and territorial structure of post-war Europe. As for Italy, by this time the Stresa Front had not passed the test of the Italo-Ethiopian war. Facing Anglo-French refusal to meet Italy's wishes, Mussolini resorted to reaching out to Germany, using Italo-Germany axis to gain diplomatic leverage. The shift in Italy's foreign policy undermined Litvinov's efforts to isolate Germany in Europe but did not compromise entirely the Italian-Soviet relations. The bilateral trade agreements remained in force, and Rome and Moscow kept working together on sensitive issues, such as the release of the sailors of the ship "Komsomol" taken prisoner by the Spanish Nationalist Government for exchange against Italian citizens arrested in the USSR⁵.

Helfand's friendly relations with the Italian political milieu facilitated such close collaboration. The Soviet diplomat had indeed befriended his peer Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian ministry of Foreign Affairs and son-in-law of Mussolini. As reported in Helfand's dispatches and in the pages of Ciano's diary, they had frequent contacts, especially in the *lido* of Castel Fusano, the favourite destination for Italian leading officials, where Helfand bought the beach cabin next to Ciano's. Over the years Helfand became "very intimate" not only with Ciano, but also with his long-time friend and closest adviser,

³ *Khormach I.A.* SSSR–Italija 1924–1939 gg. Diplomaticheskie i ekonomicheskie otnoshenija, Moskva, IRI RAN, 1995; Moskva-Rim: politika i diplomatija Kremlja 1920–1939, Moskva: Nauka, 2002; *J.C. Clarke*, Russia and Italy against Hitler, the bolshevik-fascist rapprochement of the 1930s, NY, 1991.

⁴ *Maffei R.* Op. cit. P. 51–52. *Nieddu L.* L'ombra di Mosca sulla tomba di Gramsci e il quaderno della Quisisiana, Le lettere, 2014, pp. 190–191.

⁵ DVP SSSR, Vol. 22.1, Doc. 258, 310.

Filippo Anfuso. Even the British ambassador in Rome, Eric Drummond, noticed the striking closeness and familiarity between Helfand and Ciano, reporting that the Soviet diplomat was “astonishingly well-informed”⁶.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the most detailed information on matters of great concern for the USSR came to Moscow via Helfand. In the spring of 1939, Ciano constantly informed him on the developing dispute between Germany and Poland over Gdansk⁷. It is also thanks to their intimate relations that Helfand had the chance to inform his government of the imminent signing of the *Pact of Steel*. In a two-hour conversation with Helfand, not only did Ciano reveal that he was about to leave for Berlin, where he would sign a political and military alliance with Germany, but, prompted by Helfand’s smart questions and observations, he even disclosed the content of the treaty and excerpts from his own diary⁸. From further conversations with Ciano, Helfand could also draw the right conclusion that Mussolini planned a military action in the Balkans. Mussolini later changed his plans, however Helfand well interpreted at the time the reasons behind the actions of the Italian government, assessing they were due to the fear of a further German penetration in the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea⁹. Conversing with Ciano, Helfand could grasp the complexity of the relations among the Axis powers, which allowed him to understand the growing Italian discontent at the Soviet-German rapprochement in the summer of 1939¹⁰. Even if Ciano tried not to let on about it, Helfand understood that Italy feared to fall behind its ally and to be left out of further agreements on the partition of Europe¹¹.

Hence, at the worsening of Italo-Soviet relations in the aftermath of the German and Soviet operations in Poland, Helfand engaged himself in their recovery¹², proposing personally to Ciano and Anfuso to reach a mutual understanding between Moscow and Rome¹³. Possibly remembering Litvinov’s idea of the competing nature of Italo-German relationship, Helfand never lost sight of the possibility that eventually Italy would change sides, wishing for the Soviet Union to be prepared¹⁴. His personal effort was not successful in the short term, since mutual distrust persisted between the two governments¹⁵, and Ciano was disliked in Moscow. Molotov and Potemkin let

⁶ *Sullivan B.R.* Soviet penetration of the Italian intelligence services in the 30s, cit., p. 89.

⁷ DVP SSSR. Vol. 22.1. Doc. 249, 258; God krizisa (GK) 1938–1939. Dokumenty I materialy. M.: Politizdat, 1990. Vol. I. Doc. 354.

⁸ GK. Vol. 1. Doc. 354.

⁹ DVP SSSR. Vol. 22.1. Doc. 345.

¹⁰ Ivi. Vol. 22.1. Doc. 345, 348, 407, 439, 510.

¹¹ Ivi. Vol. 22.1. Doc. 510. Ivi. Vol. 22.2. Doc. 617, 690. See also Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (DDI), MAECI, Serie IX. Vol. 1, n. 796; Vol. 2. Doc. 207, 759.

¹² Ivi. Vol. 22.2. Doc. 872.

¹³ DDI, Serie IX. Vol. 2. Doc. 646.

¹⁴ DVP SSSR. Vol. 22.2. Doc. 866, 872.

¹⁵ DDI, Serie IX. Vol. 3. Doc. 33, 132.

know that Helfand's initiative was "not appropriate" and commanded to stop visiting Ciano¹⁶.

Moreover, after Litvinov's departure Helfand's position in the *Narkomindel* had become more isolated. When he was called back to Moscow in July 1940, fearing for his own life and for that of his family, he decided not to return. He then turned to Ciano for help, finding his compassion¹⁷. Furthermore, American documentation shows that Ciano even provided Helfand the plane by which he flew with his family to the US, giving him careful suggestions on how to cover his departure. Finally, it was only through Ciano's offices that the US ambassador in Rome was able to persuade the State Department to admit Helfand in the country under a diplomatic passport¹⁸.

¹⁶ Ivi. Vol. 23.1. Doc. 7, 138.

¹⁷ *Ciano G.* Diario. Vol. I. Rizzoli, Roma, 1946. P. 293.

¹⁸ *Maffei R.* Il caso Helfand, cit., pp. 61–65.