

The politics of persuasion: foreign powers and the first Italian newspapers¹

Nina Lamal

NL-Lab, Humanities Cluster, The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

e-mail: nina.lamal@huc.knaw.nl

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7460-5163>

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Abstract. This article studies the involvement and the relationships between diplomats and the periodical press in Italian cities during the seventeenth century. Newspapers first appeared on the Italian peninsula in the early 1640s: 1639 in Genoa, 1640 in Milan and Florence, 1642 in Bologna and 1645 in Turin. A novelty on the Italian information market, foreign diplomats turned their attention towards influencing newspaper coverage immediately. News editors would often exchange news with ambassadors, but maintaining such relationships was a delicate balancing act for all the actors involved. On the one hand, the news editors own governments certainly not always welcomed too overtly friendly relationships with representatives of foreign powers. On the other hand, not maintaining relationships with these foreign representatives could be detrimental to their own news business as competitors might easily obtain better quality news. This article studies this difficult balance of power and argues that it is crucial to appreciate these dynamics to understand how diplomats address audiences. It seeks to demonstrate these men went much further than spreading printed material to promote their patrons or employers; physical threats and attacks could be equally part of an agent's tools to influence newspaper publishers to retract or not publish a certain piece of news.

Keywords: news writers; patronage; public diplomacy; Mazarin; Duchy of Modena

^{ES} La política de la persuasión: las potencias extranjeras y los primeros periódicos italianos

Resumen. Este artículo estudia la participación y las relaciones entre diplomáticos y prensa periódica en diversas ciudades italianas del siglo XVII. Como es sabido, en la península italiana los periódicos aparecieron, por primera vez, a principios de la década de 1640: en 1639 en Génova, en 1640 en Milán y Florencia, en 1642 en Bolonia y en 1645 en Turín. En tanto que novedad en el mercado de la información italiano, los diplomáticos extranjeros dirigieron inmediatamente su atención hacia ellos, tratando de influir en la cobertura periodística. A menudo, los editores de noticias intercambiaban el producto de su trabajo con embajadores, pero mantener tales relaciones constituía un acto de delicado equilibrio para todos los actores involucrados. Por un

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lado, los propios gobiernos de los editores no siempre acogían con entusiasmo la existencia de relaciones excesivamente amigables con los representantes de potencias extranjeras. Por otro, no mantener ningún tipo de relación con estos representantes podía ser perjudicial para su propio negocio puesto que los competidores podrían obtener más fácilmente noticias de mejor calidad. Este artículo estudia, precisamente, este difícil equilibrio de poder, sosteniendo que es crucial comprender estas dinámicas para entender cómo los diplomáticos se dirigen a la audiencia. Del mismo modo, pretende demostrar que estos hombres fueron mucho más allá de la difusión de material impreso para promover a sus patrocinadores o empleadores; las amenazas físicas y los ataques también podían formar parte de los instrumentos de los que disponía un agente para influir en los impresores de periódicos y lograr así que se retiraran o no se publicaran ciertas noticias.

Palabras clave: escritores de noticias; patronazgo; diplomacia pública; Mazarino; Ducado de Módena.

Contents: Introduction. 1. Genoa: a key battleground. 2. Tracing Spanish involvement. 3. Establishing a coordinated network of pro-French agents. 4. Changing fortunes. Conclusion. Bibliography.

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Introduction

On 15 January 1645, Pietro Antonio Socini obtained a five-year privilege to start printing the first newspaper in Turin, the capital city of the Duchy of Savoy². Just two weeks later, the first issue of this newspaper appeared³. In the opening lines, Socini wrote that now “it would be possible to let the world know the gentle and prudent ways Her Excellency rules and governs these people”⁴. From his statement, it is immediately clear that the main aim of this news venture was to shine a positive light on the actions of Christine, sister of Louis XIII and regent of the Duchy of Savoy. Christine needed good publicity: after four years of civil war in Piedmont (1639-1642), she only recently managed to keep control of her regency, not without the help of her brother⁵. Socini’s official newspaper was meant to capitalize on her success and to promote her

² For a brief introduction see Ugo Bellocchi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano*, vol. 3 (Bologna: Edinso, 1975), 46-51. There are only a few studies dedicated to this specific newspaper, one from the fascist era: Enrico Jovane, *Il primo giornalismo torinese* (Turin: Di Modica, 1938); and later Valerio Castronovo, «Storia del primo giornale degli stati sabaudi», *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino* 58 (1960): 64-115.

³ The only surviving copy of the first issue *Torino il primo Febbraio 1645* is kept in Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria Torino (BNUT), RIS 43/1. This specific collection once belonged to Marchese di Rivarolo. Based on this collection, researchers have wrongly claimed that this was the first newspaper on the Italian peninsula with a title as Socini provided a title page “*Successi del Mondo*” to his clients to collect and bound their newspapers on a yearly basis. Not a single separate issue appeared with a title. The titleless and numberless first Italian newspapers present researchers with significant difficulties to refer to these items correctly (and there are no established bibliographical rules). I transcribe the heading of the newspaper and the imprint information (if present) as it appears and include a reference to the archives or libraries where I have consulted the relevant copy or copies.

⁴ The original reads: “[...] si potranno pubblicare al mondo le maniere soavi, e prudenti, con che S.A.R. regge e governa questi popoli, e prevenire la curiosità ne i racconti di bellici successi, o massime oltramontani, che opportunamente pervengono in questa Reggia”. Translations into English are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Giuliano Ferretti, «La politique italienne de la France et le duché de Savoie au temps de Richelieu», *Dix-septième siècle* 262, n.° 1 (2014): 7-20; G. Ferretti, ed. *De Paris à Turin. Christine de France, Duchesse de Savoie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2014).

position. Her control of the domestic periodical press fits “the French model” in the literature on newspaper publishing: like her brother, the king of France, Christine influenced news reporting by sponsoring a privileged news editor⁶.

Thanks to this well-established narrative, researchers of the early press have not investigated how foreign powers reacted to seemingly tightly controlled “national” newspaper ventures. In the case of the Turin newspaper, the correspondence between members of the English ambassadorial corps offers some vital clues to address the question of foreign interference. On 4 February 1645, three days after the publication of the first issue, Peter Morton, the secretary to Basil Feilding, the English extraordinary ambassador in Turin, mentioned in a letter to Sir Richard Browne, the English ambassador in Paris, the following crucial bit of information:

Upon the first on this moneth was begun to be printed in Turin an Italian gazette, which was the same day suppressed by the French amb. order, under pretext, as I heare of Mons. De Plessis being stiled there Amb. Extr: though I believe its principally to show his authority that nothing of that nature shall be published here with his participation⁷.

Du Plessis, the French extraordinary ambassador in Turin, reportedly had complained that the newspaper gave him the wrong honorary title. Morton was quick to note that this incident demonstrated that the French ambassador was not going to let this occasion slip to demonstrate his influence. Diplomatic agents, such as Morton, stationed at the different European courts, monitored the actions of their colleagues closely and frequently reported on their attempts to manipulate the news.

This article investigates the more discrete tactics and practices diplomats deployed to influence newspapers on the Italian peninsula. It builds on a recent strand of scholarship which seeks to combine the history of media with that of diplomacy by exploring how ambassadors from different European states developed different strategies to communicate with foreign audiences⁸. Scholarship on early modern public diplomacy to date has focussed almost exclusively on England and the Dutch Republic with Jason Peacey exploring the working relationships English ambassadors maintained with Dutch gazetteers during the second half of the seventeenth century and Helmer Helmers highlighting that specific Republican structure of the Seven United Provinces created ideal conditions and its highly developed printing industry for ambassadors to influence both domestic and foreign audiences⁹. Meanwhile, other European states have remained under-explored. Combining surviving Italian newspapers with diplomatic correspondences scattered across European libraries and archives, this contribution seeks to address this imbalance by examining the foreign involvement in newspaper ventures in both the Republic of Genoa and the Duchy of Savoy in the 1640s. Looking at these two states during a time of shifting political

⁶ For France consult Stéphane Haffemayer, *L'information dans la France du XVII^e siècle. La Gazette de Renaudot de 1647 à 1663* (Paris: Champion, 2002). For more on the different interpretative models see Carmen Espejo, «European Communication Networks in the early modern age: a new framework of interpretation for the birth of journalism», *Media History* 17, n° 2 (2011): 189–202.

⁷ Letter by Peter Morton to Sir Richard Bowne, Turin, 4 February 1645, in The British Library (BL), Add. 78193, fol. 133v. In the first issue of the Turin newspaper dated 1 February 1645, the passage about Du Plessis “*con titoli di Ambasciatore straordinario à M.R.*” has been crossed out by an unidentified hand, potentially by Marchese di Rivarolo, who was the original owner of this collection in BNUT.

⁸ For an overview of the existing literature see Nina Lamal and Klaas van Gelder, «Addressing Audiences Abroad: cultural and public diplomacy in seventeenth-century Europe», *Seventeenth Century* 36, n.° 3 (2021): 367–387.

⁹ Jason Peacey, «‘My Friend the Gazetier’: Diplomacy and News in Seventeenth Century Europe», in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 420–443; Jason Peacey, «Managing Dutch Advices: Abraham Casteleyn and the English Government, 1660–1681», *Media History* 22, n.° 3–4 (2016): 421–437; Helmer Helmers, «Public Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe: Towards a New History of News», *Media History* 22, n.° 3–4 (2016): 401–420. Also see Jan Hennings and Edward Holberton, «Andrew Marvell in Russia: Secretaries, Rhetoric, and Public Diplomacy», *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 50, n.° 3 (2020): 565–586.

alliances on the Italian peninsula, allows us to investigate the question of whether a different form of government or state structure influenced approaches of public diplomacy.

These early newspaper ventures on the Italian peninsula are forgotten but provide crucial evidence to explore the relationship between foreign ambassadors and news editors. Uniquely, in a broader European context, a few of these Italian newspaper editors in Genoa and Turin have left considerable documentary evidence of their activities allowing us to untangle their complex patronage relationships and different roles. News writers were an essential part of the diplomatic ecosystem of political information, and crucially their involvement and motives to align themselves with a particular foreign power need to be studied more carefully¹⁰. For all the parties involved, it was a delicate balancing act. Both foreign ambassadors and local news editors could face difficulties with local authorities if their relationships were discovered. The politics of persuasion on the Italian peninsula was a dangerous game to play.

1. Genoa: a key battleground

On 23 September 1639 in Genoa, the patrician Giannettino Giustiniani penned a far shorter letter than usual to the Grand Ducal secretary of state in Florence¹¹. Giustiniani explained that from now on he would be more concise, as in Genoa the practice of printing news sheets had been recently introduced. Until this point, *avvisi*, handwritten newsletters, often compiled by professional scribes, had been the dominant medium for information on current events on the Italian peninsula. Different governments and rulers expected their ambassadors to send *avvisi* along in their weekly dispatches and received additional sheets from intelligencers and news writers in Rome and Venice. Stressing the similarities between the two forms of information, Mario Infelise has argued that the appearance of Italian newspapers was not a novelty¹². While these printed sheets closely resembled their handwritten counterparts, I argue that the fact that they were printed, and therefore, could be perceived to be state-sanctioned created a new dynamic in the market for information. The best place to observe this significant change is in the Genoese Republic where both foreign and local political brokerage influenced agency in the printing of news.

Genoa was becoming a key battleground between Spanish and French interests on the Italian peninsula. Genoa had longstanding and strong ties with Habsburg Spain¹³. Under Louis XIII's reign (1610-1643), the French monarchy had been proactively trying to gain influence in different Italian states. Richelieu, and his successor Mazarin, both considered Italy as the "*coeur du monde*"¹⁴. Following their intervention in the Mantuan succession crisis, France was able to obtain other political victories on the peninsula: in 1629, after more than a century without a resident ambassador in Genoa, a French resident was allowed in the city¹⁵. The Genoese Republic still did

¹⁰ Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80-85; Brendan Dooley touches on the partisan nature of reporting in his *The Social History of Skepticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

¹¹ Original quote: "*Giache V.S. Ill.ma dalli fogli d'avvisi che si sono introdotti di mandare alla stampa in questa nostra città la deve intendere quasi tutto ciò che vi arriva di nuovo, anderò io per l'avenire più ristretto, e conciso in annoiarla, per quanto non sii solito di vedere detti foglio, ma essendo la pratica delle nuova assai qui da noi generalmente comunicabile mi persuado che poco lascio indietro, quando la passione non gli facci alterare li fatti*", cited in Maria Augusta Morelli, «Gli inizi della stampa periodica a Firenze nella prima metà del XVII secolo», *Critica Storica: Bollettino dell'Associazione degli Storici Europei* 7 (1968): 308.

¹² Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali: alle origini della pubblica informazione, secoli XVI e XVII* (Rome: Laterza, 2002), 79-104.

¹³ For more on the relationship between Habsburg Spain and Genoa, consult Thomas A. Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic (1559-1684)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Steven Extentrink, *Le Coeur du monde. Frankreich und die norditalienischen Staaten (Mantua, Parma, Savoyen) im Zeitalter Richelieus 1624-1635* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1999); Anna Blum, *La diplomatie de la France en Italie du nord au temps de Richelieu et de Mazarin* (Paris: Garnier, 2014).

¹⁵ Barbara Marinelli, *Un corrispondente Genovese di Mazzarino: Giannettino Giustiniani* (Genoa: Quaderni di storia e Letteratura/Università di Genova, 2000).

not officially recognise their title and prerogatives to keep the Spanish ambassadors satisfied¹⁶. The difficulty surrounding the presence of a French resident already illustrates the tightrope Genoa was trying to walk: as the tensions between the Spanish-Habsburg monarchy and France rose, Genoa desperately tried to remain neutral.

With growing fears of foreign interventions, the Genoese state increasingly felt the need to control information. After the discovery of the Vacchero plot in 1628, supported by the Duke of Savoy, the Genoese Senate installed the *Inquisitori di Stato* to safeguard its security. The state inquisitors checked the mail and also tried to regulate the content of handwritten newsletters. In 1634, they launched their first attempt at controlling the newswriting business and ordered the sheets of news writers to be submitted to an auditor before being dispatched¹⁷. In this context of heightened surveillance, the state inquisitors also immediately reacted when a printed variant appeared on the scene without their approval. On 18 July 1639, they prohibited the printer Pier Giovanni Calenzani from printing news sheets¹⁸. Four days later, a news writer, named Michele Castelli, requested and obtained a three-year privilege to be able to print his news sheets. At the end of July, Castelli's first issue was printed by Calenzani¹⁹.

It is the first time Castelli's name appears in the context of news writing in Genoa²⁰. Unfortunately, we know very little about him: he was presumably born in Fivizzano, part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, bordering the Genoese state²¹. On the occasion of the election of Agostino Pallavicino as doge in 1637, we find the first reference of Michele Castelli in Genoa. He collected and printed the official oration together with several poetic compositions (including one of his own in Latin) celebrating this election in *Applausi della Liguria*²². Because Castelli dedicated his work to the new doge's brother Nicolo, an important Genoese patrician and banker, and an ally of the

¹⁶ Melchior, Count of Sabran, was the first representative in the city. See for instance the letter by Juan de Eraso to Philip IV of Spain, Cornigliano, 1 December 1641, in Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, leg. 3597, doc. 22, in which he protested regarding titles and privileges granted to the French ambassador before he was even received into city as new ambassador.

¹⁷ Based on the material in Archivio di Stato in Genoa, see Achille Neri, «Michele Castelli e le prime gazzette a Genova», *Rivista d'Italia* 16 (1913): 300.

¹⁸ Neri, «Michele Castelli», 300.

¹⁹ The first surviving copy of this newspaper *Di Genova li 29 luglio 1639* appeared without an imprint. It survives in a single copy in Biblioteca Universitaria di Genova (BUG), Rari XIII 17, Novellari Genoa. A few studies on the newspapers in Genoa were published at the start of the twentieth century: see Luigi Piccioni, «A proposito della più antica gazzetta a stampa genovese», *Rivista d'Italia* 16, n.°3 (1913): 477-480; Onorato Pastine, *La repubblica di Genova e le gazzette, vita politica ed attività giornalistica (sec XVII-XVIII)* (Genoa: Waser, 1923). For one of the more recent overviews of newspapers in Genoa, Roberto Beccaria, «Giornali e periodici nella Repubblica Aristocratica», in *Storia della cultura ligure* ed. by Dino Puncuh (Genoa: Società ligure di storia patria, 2005), 449-461.

²⁰ Giuseppe Gangemi, «Michele Castelli», in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani (DBI)*, vol. 21 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1978). Last accessed on September 28, 2023. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/michele-castelli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/michele-castelli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). The biography contains a few errors, which will be corrected in this article.

²¹ There are a few arguments in favour of Fivizzano: in 1628 a man named "*Michaelis Castelli Fivizanensis*" held two orations in Latin in Pisa: *Pro latina lingua* (Pisa: Zeffi, 1628) and *Michaelis Castelli Fivizanensis apud Pisanam iuventutem publico ciuitatis stipendio bonas literas profitentis in d. Catharinæ solemnibus* (Pisa: Zeffi, 1628). Crucially, Fulvio Testi who also received newspapers from Castelli in 1640, referred to him as a "*cognato*" of Fivizzano Sarteschi, a member of an important noble family from Fivizzano, in a letter from Castelnuovo di Garfagnana dated 3 November 1640. See the edition by Maria Luisa Doglio of Fulvio Testi's correspondence, *Lettere*, vol. 3 (Bari: Laterza, 1967), 189. For brief explanation on the family consult Vittorio Spreti, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana, Appendice*, vol. 2 (Milan: La Cislalpina, 1935), 570. See the letter by Michele Castelli to [Francesco I d'Este?], Genoa, 2 March 1641, in Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMo), Cancelleria, Estero, Ambasciatori Genova, filza 3. As the letters by Castelli in ASMo are unaddressed, the presumed addressee is written between brackets.

²² "*Venendomi dunque dato carico di partecipare à secoli con le stampe i componimenti onde i nobilissimi ingegni in quella occasione ne gl'honori di S. Serenità*", in *Applausi della Liguria nella reale incoronazione del serenissimo Agostino Pallavicino duce della Repubblica di Genova* (Genoa: Giuseppe Pavoni, 1638), no pagination.

Spanish-Habsburg government, some scholars have suggested that Castelli owed his printing privilege to his relationship with the powerful Pallavicino family²³.

Authorities in different Italian cities had repeatedly tried to regulate the news-writing profession from the 1570s but with limited success²⁴. The introduction of printing newsheets and the fierce competition which ensued between the news writers allowed the authorities to achieve control with far more success. Mostly thanks to the cooperation of the lucky newswriter who turned to the authorities to protect their product. Castelli profited tremendously from the state privilege, raising his profile as a trustworthy intelligencer. It allowed him to attract new and high-profile clients such as the Republic of Lucca and the Duke of Modena²⁵. Within a year of obtaining the privilege, Castelli was approached by Silvestro Grimaldi, the Modenese ambassador in Genoa, for his services²⁶. In his earliest surviving letter in the state archive of Modena written on 10 August 1640, Castelli set out the terms and conditions for his service²⁷. Claiming that “an honoured man must willingly adapt himself to the law of the land where he lives”, he would refrain from writing about the Genoese government as this was prohibited²⁸. Sending along a copy of his printed newspaper, he explained that they might observe “much respect and some dissimulation because I profess to want to correct the intemperance of the news writers who make it lawful to speak irrevocably of the great ones”²⁹. He thus indicated that he would conceal some information in his newspapers but added that in the supplement they would find “what is not right to be shared with the general public (*vulgo*)”³⁰. For a considerable sum of money, he would send his newspaper every week to Modena and offer additional services, such as providing more secretive information in separate sheets³¹.

As profitable as it was, the privilege also caused some problems for Castelli as it posed an immediate threat to the activities of other news writers who also had a wide client base for their weekly manuscript newsletters in and beyond the city. An anonymous and undated memorandum addressed to the Genoese Senate wanted to convince the senators not to renew Castelli’s privilege³². It is unclear who wrote the memorandum, but it is not unlikely that Castelli’s competitors

²³ Gangemi, «Michele Castelli», and repeated by Beccaria, «Giornali e periodici».

²⁴ For these efforts see Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*.

²⁵ He was paid 25-30 *scudi* for his service (based on material in the Archivio di Stato in Lucca), see Salvatore Bonghi, «Le prime gazette in Italia», *La Nuova Antologia* 10, n.° 6 (1896): 44-45.

²⁶ For more on Grimaldi family consult Diego Pizzorno, «Al servizio degli Este. I Grimaldi e la corte di Modena (1621-1643)», *Dimensioni e problemi della ricerca storica* 1 (2015): 183-205.

²⁷ Letter by Michele Castelli to [Francesco I d’Este?], Genoa, 10 August 1640, in ASMo, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3.

²⁸ “*Un huomo honorato si deve aggiustare volontieri alle leggi della terra dove vive*”. Letter by Michele Castelli to [Francesco I d’Este?], Genoa, 10 August 1640, in ASMo, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3. All subsequent quotations are from the same letter.

²⁹ “*Osservera VS. in quello molto rispetto e qualche dissimulatione perche professo di volere correggere l’intemperanza delli novelisti che si fanno lecito parlare irriverentemente delli grandi*”.

³⁰ “*Il supplemento di quello che non e ragione si partecipi al vulgo*”.

³¹ Already a few months in, he suggested to adopt another name, as well as the use of cipher, fearing that his “*lettere serrate*” may have been intercepted. It seems that these more secretive letters have not been archived. ASMo, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3: 20 October 1640 and in a letter dated 25 February 1641 he proposed as pseudonym “Marco Aurelio Frisli” and also requested a cipher. He was paid 100 *scudi* per year for his services. A large part of the Genoese newspapers (including some of the Florentine reprints) sent to Modena have been bound together in three volumes: ASMo, Biblioteca, Periodici, Fogli di Genova 1639-1648; Fogli di Genova 1641-1648; and Fogli di Genova 1649-1657. On the newspapers in ASMo, see Rosa Lupoli, «Il giornalismo delle origini. Le Gazzette di Ancien Regime nell’ Archivio di Stato di Modena», *Quaderni Estensi* 5 (2013): 157-180. Yet this collection does not represent all the newspapers present in the archive, sometimes the newspaper sent by Castelli is still attached to his letters in ASMo, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3.

³² The memorandum must have been written in 1642, around the time that the first privilege needed to be renewed. The newspaper issue *Genoua 26. Aprile 1642* (In Genova, per Pier Gio Calenzani) is the last time Calenzani’s name appears on the imprint and subsequent issues no longer have an imprint (consulted copy BUG, Rari XIII 17). The examination of these issues offers additional evidence to date the memorandum to 1642.

such as Boticelli were involved. The author(s) highlighted that the state-sanctioned nature was part of the problem with their accusations that the printer Calenzani was sending each week printed newspapers across Italy in favour of the Spanish raising suspicions that he did so on the orders of the Genoese Republic³³. This memorandum aimed to discredit the newspaper venture by implying that the printer was on the payroll of the Spanish and just copied the news coming from Milan, the Habsburg stronghold in Northern Italy³⁴. Playing on Genoa's neutrality, arguing it was unworthy for a printer of a free republic to spread lies in favour of Spain, the anonymous author(s) must have hoped that the Senate would intervene.

The other problem the memorandum touched upon was the wide circulation of Castelli's newspaper on the Italian peninsula. In May 1640 Massi and Landi, two enterprising printers in Florence, started to copy and print the Genoese newspaper³⁵. Just a few months later, to protect his income as well as reputation, Castelli started to write various letters to Grand Ducal secretaries of state to complain about the activities of these Florentine printers and obtain a Florentine privilege for his venture³⁶. Other diplomats became involved in the matter: the Modenese ambassador in Florence was instructed to see what he could do in favour of Castelli³⁷. These requests were repeatedly denied, forcing Castelli to change tactics: he started to release his newspapers only after the postal service for Florence had already left Genoa³⁸. It seems to have had the opposite effect, Cioli, the Tuscan secretary of state spread negative reports in Genoa about Castelli and was involved in trying to obtain copies of the newspaper through a variety of tricks; even having someone bribe Calenzani to obtain a printed copy³⁹. Castelli's case highlights that the politics of privileges allowed printed news to be drawn into the sphere of reputation and international relations. If news favouring any foreign power appeared to be published with the stamp of approval of the state, the allegation that it might signal the state's favourable attitude was not unwarranted. The question, however, remains whether Castelli was actively supported by Spanish ambassadors or pro-Spanish factions.

2. Tracing Spanish involvement

Spanish involvement in Castelli's venture is extremely difficult to verify based on Spanish sources. The successive Spanish ambassadors in Genoa did not have the habit of including this type of information in their letters to the king and his ministers. As Enrique Corredera Nilsson has argued it was often considered better for the Spanish king not to know what his envoys were undertaking to influence public opinion⁴⁰. Ambassadors' overviews of expenditures,

³³ Neri, «Michele Castelli», 303: "*Chi è costi un certo stampatore Calenzano? Come si li comporta mandar in volta per l'Italia ogni settimana certi avvisi stampati piene di glose, di commenti, e d'altre vanità a favor de spagnoli con molto sospetto che ciò sia fatto dara d'ordine di V.V. Ser.me SSrie?*".

³⁴ Neri, «Michele Castelli», 303: "*ordinandogli che corregga le sue stampa lasciando le glose, le bugie, e le passioni da parte e non si facci echo degli avvisi di Milano, che ciò non si conviene a stampatore di città libera, e non serva di spagnoli*".

³⁵ *Genoua 18. Maggio 1640* (In Genoua, e di nuouo in Firenze nella stamperia nuova) is the first known newspaper printed in Florence by Massi and Landi (the only surviving copy is kept in BL, Shelfmark 936 d. 7). They copied Castelli's newspaper printed in Genoa by Calenzani.

³⁶ On the basis of the available evidence, the suggestion by Diego Pizzorno that Castelli and Calenzani might have used "*stampatore fiorentino*" as a nom de plume needs to be firmly rejected. See «Genova, gli Este e Giannettino Giustiniani: il terreno negoziale genovese nella crisi spagnola di metà Seicento», *Società e storia* 161 (2018): 451. For Castelli's letters to Florence consult Morelli, «Gli inizi della stampa periodica», 314–316.

³⁷ See the unsigned secretarial draft dated 30 December 1640 from Modena to Castelli, ASMo, Genova, 3.

³⁸ The Florentine operation affected the other news writers active in Genoa as well: when Castelli's newspaper did not reach Florence, Massi and Landi sometimes printed Boticelli's handwritten newsletters. Boticelli applied Castelli's tactics and delayed the appearance of his sheets, see Morelli, «Gli inizi della stampa periodica», 317–318.

³⁹ In this respect his letters on the matter sent in January 1641 from Genoa (ASMO, Genova, 3) are really interesting.

⁴⁰ See his article «Confessional public diplomacy? Bernardino de Rebolledo's defence of Catholicism in Denmark 1655–1656», *Seventeenth century* 36, n.° 3 (2021): 463–483.

containing a section on “secret” costs, at the same time both hint and conceal their involvement in activities such as bribing or even offering pensions to agents willing to work in Spain’s favour in the Genoese Republic⁴¹.

So far, Spanish influence has been presumed based on scant evidence: Castelli’s connections to the Pallavicino family, and one specific episode in his newspaper of 23 August 1642. In this issue, Castelli admitted that he sailed to Livorno from Genoa together with Juan de Eraso, the Spanish ambassador in Genoa, and Cardinal Trivulzio, with galleys of Tursi⁴². He is more dubious about his reason for setting sail writing in his newspaper:

there were, as is customary, various passers-by who went either in the service of the aforesaid gentlemen or for their own particular business, which we do not know so well how to distinguish, as perhaps those who have written in their public accounts, with too much foresight, what induced the author of these to embark⁴³.

This remark should be read as a reply to Massi and Landi, his Florentine competitors. In their Florentine newspaper, dated 16 August, they had claimed he had joined this party to see whether these powerful individuals could assist him in dissolving the privilege granted by the Grand Duke of Tuscany to the Florentine printers⁴⁴. Indeed in Florence, Castelli had tried to lobby to obtain a privilege for his newspaper in the city by enlisting the help of powerful families, such as the Guicciardini⁴⁵. It was, however, not the sole reason why Castelli travelled to the city. He seems to have joined the mission on behalf of the Francesco d’Este, Duke of Modena⁴⁶.

It is precisely in his letters to Francesco d’Este and his secretaries that there are more traces to be found about Spanish involvement and pro-Spanish tendencies⁴⁷. On 4 January 1641, he reported that someone affiliated with the household of the Spanish ambassador in Genoa was sent around two o’clock at night to his house with an urgent request: “to dissimulate” in his “public” –presumably meaning printed– newssheets (*avisi publici*) that the Count of Messerati was staying with the ambassador Juan de Velasco y la Cueva, conde de Siruela⁴⁸. Baldassare Messerati supported Maurice and Thomas of Savoy in their fight against the regency of Christine and travelled to Madrid on multiple occasions to obtain Spanish support for the princes⁴⁹. The fewer people knew about his meeting with the Spanish ambassador in Genoa the better. Castelli’s dispatch thus offers some additional insight into the practices of concealing specific content for political purposes in the newspapers. In these letters, there are also a few

⁴¹ See for instance: «Cuenta de los gastos ordinarios y extraordinarios que Juan de Eraso, embajador en Génova, ha hecho en esta embajada desde el 1 de julio hasta el 31 de diciembre de 1643», in AGS, Estado, leg. 3555, doc. 114.

⁴² Pastine, *La repubblica di Genova e le gazette*, 34–35; reiterated by Gangemi, «Michele Castelli».

⁴³ *Genoua 23 Agosto 1642*: “dell’occasione dell’imbarco valsero come suole avvenire diversi passaggieri ch’andoro o servendo detti signori o per loro particolari affairi che noi non sappiamo così bene distinguere come forse hà preteso fare con soverchia pontualita chi ha scritto nelli suoi publici ragguagli quello ch’in-dusse l’autore di questi ad imbarcarsi che pure non è tanto scioperato che non potesse avere qualche altra facendo fuor di quello che s’allega” (consulted copy in ASMO).

⁴⁴ See the opening paragraph of *Di Genoua li 16. Agosto 1642* (In Firenze, nella stamperia d’Amadore Massi e Lorenzo Landi): “[...] essendo ancora imbarcao nella detta galera M. Michele Castello, quello che da in stampa li avvisi per vedere se col mezzo di S. Emin. possa ottenere di fare rompere il privilegio fatto dall’Altezza Serenissima di Toscana ad alcuni ristampano li suoi avvisi” (consulted copy BL, 936 d. 7).

⁴⁵ Letter by Michele Castelli to [Francesco I d’Este?], 16 August 1642, from Florence, and especially his letter on 6 September 1642 from Genoa in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genoa, 3.

⁴⁶ See his letter to [Francesco I d’Este?], from Florence dated 16 August 1642, in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genoa, 3.

⁴⁷ The draft secretarial letters sent to Castelli from Modena are unsigned, but in one of the letters dated 6 July 1645, the author reports his son Giulio married Caterina Calori. A clear indication this letter was drafted by Fulvio Testi. Appointed as ducal secretary in 1642, Testi became the prime interlocutor of Castelli.

⁴⁸ «Puntos tratados entre Juan de Velasco y la Cueva, conde de Siruela, embajador de España en Génova, y el conde Messerati sobre las negociaciones entre Felipe IV, rey de España, y los príncipes Tomás de Saboya y su hermano, el cardinal», Genoa, 14 January 1641, in ASG, Estado, leg. 3596, doc. 105.

⁴⁹ See Amedeo Peyron, *Notizie per servire alla storia della reggenza cristina di francia duchessa di Savoia* (Turin: Stamperia Reale, 1866), 62–75.

more indications that he is producing other texts favouring the Spanish as he is responsible for printing texts in Genoa in Castilian⁵⁰.

In his letters, Castelli was also more open in making remarks about geopolitical matters than he was in his newspaper, such as when he commented upon the death of Richelieu in December 1642:

The great leader who for years held the fate and prosperity of France in his hands has finally died. At times, his immense fortune seemed to defy all the favourable circumstances for the Spanish. [...] In short, my lord, I do not believe that with the tyrant's death, tyranny will reign over other subjects and I hope that things are about to change for the better.⁵¹

He labelled the late Cardinal as a tyrant and hoped that the state of affairs would improve. Castelli was writing to the Duke of Modena at a time when Francesco d'Este was still loyal to the Spanish house of Habsburg but increasingly trying to keep his options open⁵². A close relative of the feuding members of the house of Savoy, during the civil war in Piedmont, he corresponded with both parties⁵³. The Modenese ruler, however, did not have official diplomatic ties with France until 1646⁵⁴. The vast amount of Castelli's letters in the archive in Modena allows us to unravel the complex political and personal ties at play and provides us with pieces of firmer evidence to understand Castelli's pro-Spanish bent.

3. Establishing a coordinated network of pro-French agents

Whereas Spanish ambassadors have left very few traces of their efforts to manage the content of newspapers, we can reconstruct the French strategy to influence media in far more detail, especially under Mazarin's period as first minister (1642-1659)⁵⁵. Mazarin instructed his formal diplomats to recruit local actors to assist in such efforts. These different individuals ranging from formal French diplomats and unofficial local agents in Genoa and Turin maintained close contact with each other.

One month after succeeding Richelieu as first minister, Mazarin already requested Raoul Leseigneur, sieur d'Amontot, the French ambassador in Genoa (1643-1646), for information about Luca Assarino⁵⁶. Like so many of the men active as intelligencers in this period, Assarino had a rather turbulent start to life: he was twice condemned for murder (in 1619 and 1627) and served a part of his first sentence in the Genoese army in the war against Savoy (1625)⁵⁷. By the time, he became involved in the news writing business, he was well-known as the author of the successful

⁵⁰ Castelli's letter to [Francesco I d'Este?], from Genoa 12 January 1641: "*Al S. Marchese Bellinvicini diedi una scrittura Castigliana ch'io ho fatto ristampare qui, egli la trasmesse a V.A. per via di Milano [...]*", in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3.

⁵¹ Letter by Castelli to unknown individual [Rinaldo d'Este?], 10 December 1642 from Genoa, in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3: "*E morto finalmente quell' ettorie da anni per destino dependevano le prosperità dalla Francia, quello la cui gran fortuna V.S.A. talvolta hà opposto ad ogni apparenze di cose favorabili alli spagnuoli. [...] In somma signore non credo ch'in Francia murto il tiranno, sia per regnare in altri soggetti la tirannia e sperarei che le cose fossero per mutare faccia*". The death of Richelieu is not mentioned in his newspaper *Genova 13. Dicembre 1642* and appears only in the next issue *Genova 20. Dicembre 1642* without any such reflections (both copies in BUG, Rari XIII, 17).

⁵² For his foreign policy consult Elena Fumagalli and Gianvittorio Signorotto, eds. *La corte estense nel primo Seicento: diplomazia e mecenatismo artistico* (Rome: Viella, 2012).

⁵³ The deal would only be sealed in September 1647. For more information: Pizzorno, «Genova, gli Este e Giannettino Giustiniani», 445–470.

⁵⁴ See the series of letters in ASMO, with a significant gap for France between 1628 and 1646.

⁵⁵ Olivier Poncet, *Mazarin. L'art de gouverner* (Paris: Perrin, 2021).

⁵⁶ Letter by Mazarin to Amontrot, [Saint-Germain-en-Laye], 29 January 1643, in Adolphe Chéruel, ed. *Lettres du Cardinal Mazarin pendant son ministère*, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1872), 57.

⁵⁷ For a brief biography consult Alberto Asor-Rosa, «Luca Assarino», in *DBI*, vol. 4 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1962). Last accesseds on September 30, 2023. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luca-assarino_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luca-assarino_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

novel *La Strattonica* (first published in 1635 in Italian and translated in French and printed in Paris in 1641)⁵⁸. In March 1643, Mazarin recommended d'Amontot to continue to exhort Assarino to write:

in truth to the advantage of France, and assure him that I shall endeavour to obtain for him from the King such recognition for his work that he will have reason to praise himself for his kindnesses and the trouble he has taken⁵⁹.

Assarino, writing in favour of the French, was thus promised a reward for his services. The promise of receiving a pension was a commonly used strategy and for men with a background like Assarino, this must have been an attractive prospect, offering a heightened social status, steady income, and recognition.

In Genoa, alongside d'Amontot, the Genoese patrician Giannettino Giustiniani played a crucial role. As we have already seen, thanks to his letter mentioning the publication of a newspaper in the city, he acted as an informer for the Medici government in 1639. A year later, presumably, he started to operate as an unofficial diplomatic agent for France in Genoa⁶⁰. He became one of the most important and active pro-French agents: corresponding with other Italian rulers and influential families such as the Savoy, Barberini and later also d'Este⁶¹. Apart from commanding a vast network of correspondence and surveillance, he was heavily involved in influencing Italian audiences: translating and printing accounts of French victories (at times sending it to Casale to have it printed) and maintaining close contact with Castelli's rival, Alessandro Boticelli who "served France with partisan affection"⁶².

In June 1644, Alessandro Boticelli started to have his news sheets printed by Giovanni Maria Farroni⁶³. In the city, two newspapers were now published on the same day with an almost identical heading. The only way to distinguish between the two was the initials "AB" at the bottom of the sheets and Farroni's name⁶⁴. Towards the end of 1644, Boticelli was no longer hiding his authorship of the sheets and simply added his name "Il Boticelli".

It is not entirely clear why the Genoese Republic allowed the publication of two different newspapers for more than a year. But it coincided with Luca Giustiniani's tenure as Doge, who was known to favour policies less in the interest of Spain⁶⁵. A detailed comparison of their content would lead too far for this article, however, the respective locations of surviving copies of these two

⁵⁸ On his literary success Ivo da Col, *Un romanzo del Seicento: la strattonica di Luca Assarino* (Florence: Olschki, 1981).

⁵⁹ Letter by Mazarin to Amontrot, [Saint-Germain-en-Laye], 9 March 1643: "*dans la vertiré à l'avantage de la France, et assurez le que je tascheray de luy procurer auprès du Roy une telle reconnoissance de son travail qu'il aura sujet de se louer de ses bontez et de la peine qu'il aura prise*", in Chéruef, ed. *Lettres du Cardinal Mazarin*, 124.

⁶⁰ The date of his service to France is still uncertain, as Marinelli also indicates in her study. His contacts and service to the Medici in 1639 and later years require further exploration in the correspondence of Cioli and other state secretaries in Mediceo del Principato in the State Archives in Florence.

⁶¹ For the references to his letters to the Duchess of Savoy, I would like to thank Alessia Ceccarelli. See her article: «So long and tormenting is the silence. The Great Plague of Genoa through the letters of Giannettino Giustiniani to the Court of Turin (1656-59)», *Eurostudium* 58 (2022): 3-79; also see Pizzorno, «Genova, gli Este e Giannettino Giustiniani».

⁶² Marinelli, *Un corrispondente Genovese*, 9, footnote 2. In 1645, he published an anonymous letter celebrating French successes in Catalonia, around 2000 copies were printed to be distributed across the Italian peninsula.

⁶³ First known surviving issue is *Di Genoua li 11. Giugno 1644* (In Genoua, per Gio Maria Farroni). A copy in Biblioteca Civica Berio in Genoa (BCBG), Shelfmark: F. Ant. Gen. C 68, and one in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), Stamp Barb FF VIII 68. The last known issue of newspaper currently is *Il Boticelli, Genoua li 14. Settembre 1645* (In Genoua, per Gio Maria Farroni) copy kept in BCBG.

⁶⁴ For instance, "Genoua 3 settembre 1644" and "Genoua li 3. Settembre 1644". The entire period, Castelli's newspapers appeared without an imprint. The last mention of Calenzani as a printer on the newspaper dates from end of April 1642. In 1645, he attached his name to two newspapers dedicated to news from Venice *Raguagli di Venetia di 19. Agosto 1645*, but here the relation with Michele Castelli is unclear.

⁶⁵ See Calogero Farinella, «Luca Giustiniani», in *DBI*, vol. 57 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2001). Last accessed on October 3, 2023. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luca-giustiniani_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luca-giustiniani_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

newspapers are highly revealing of their partisan nature and readership: Castelli's newspapers are kept in Modena and Madrid, and Boticelli's in Turin⁶⁶. Their distribution run along the political divisions of the Italian peninsula.

In 1645, the pro-French publicity on the peninsula was further reinforced by the appearance of the newspaper in Turin. Despite Socini's opening statement to praise Duchess Christine, from the very beginning of the newspaper, the French meddled in this venture. Looking at the profile of the newspaper editor offers further clues to understand the appearance of pro-French reports. Socini, a Florentine priest, had learned the tricks of the trade in Venice from Vittorio Siri, an intriguing figure in the murky world of early modern intelligencers. Mostly known as the author of the Italian *Mercurio, ovvero historia de' correnti tempi*, Siri had arrived in Venice as a Benedictine monk to teach mathematics⁶⁷. He quickly became involved in politics of persuasion, with the publication in 1640, of pro-French texts. From the beginning of his career, Socini belonged to the same pro-French factions in Venice, and upon his arrival in Turin, he managed to move into the pro-French circles⁶⁸.

The pro-French content in the newspaper is obvious. With a report on the renewal of the Savoy alliance with France in their war with Habsburg Spain in March 1645, Socini complimented the young king Louis XIV for his protection of the liberty of the Italian princes⁶⁹. Here, Socini repeats the idea the French king intervened to protect their liberties against Spain, a commonly used theme in French propaganda⁷⁰. Within three years after starting the venture, Socini corresponded with Mazarin and was incorporated into French diplomatic information channels. He was one of the recipients of diplomatic circular letters (*lettere circolare*) which were also sent to other pro-French agents on the peninsula such as the Barberini brothers and Giustiniani in Genoa⁷¹. Contemporaries such as papal nuncio Crescenzi, seem to have been impressed with the density of information in the newspaper but also did notice the rather passionate tone of reporting⁷².

Socini's pro-French and anti-Habsburg tone were influential beyond the borders of the duchy⁷³. His newspaper, increasingly, became a point of reference for other pro-French agents on the Italian peninsula, especially during the Frondes (1648-1653). In one of his letters to Cardinal Barberini, Giannettino Giustiniani wrote that he had nothing else to add than the good news contained in the printed newspaper from Turin⁷⁴. Men such as Socini were crucial informal agents in a larger pro-French network supplying different Italian governments with information either to keep them in the French sphere of influence or to sway their political affiliations⁷⁵. Following Socini's activities is highly revealing as we continuously encounter a coordinated network of pro-French agents working together. The news writers such as Assarino, Boticelli, Socini were directly linked and affiliated with foreign power and served Mazarin's interest in complex patron-client relationships, offering them a service and hoping for rewards.

⁶⁶ The collection of the Genoese newspapers in Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid, Shelfmark Z/7117, *Gazetta di Genova*.

⁶⁷ Blum, *La diplomatie de la France*, 566-569. For a brief biography, consult Alessia Ceccarelli, «Vittorio Siri», in *DBI*, vol. 92 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2018). Last accessed on October 3, 2023. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittorio-siri_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittorio-siri_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

⁶⁸ Letter by Socini to unknown individual on 7 September 1648 from Turin in which he proclaimed the Marchese Villa to be his patron, Biblioteca Reale di Torino (BRT), Ms. 283.

⁶⁹ Castronovo, «Storia del primo giornale», 72. See also *Torino li 25 Marzo 1645* in BNUT, RIS 43/1.

⁷⁰ Blum, *La diplomatie de la France*.

⁷¹ Copies of these circular letters sent in 1649 by Mazarin are kept in BRT, Ms. Storia Italia 52/3.

⁷² Letter by Crescenzi to [Giovanni Giacomo Pancirolì?] from Turin on 15 June 1650 in AAV, Segretaria di Stato, Savoia, 69, fol. 219: «*Qui si stampano li riporti assai copiosi, ma un poco appassionati [...]*».

⁷³ Socini frequently corrected the news reports from Milan newspaper, see for instance in *Torino il primo Febraro 1651* related to the Duke of Savoy's concession of Villafranca to the English (copy kept in ASMO, Biblioteca, Periodici).

⁷⁴ Letter by Giannettino Giustiniani to Francesco Barberini, 10 March 1649, Genoa, in BAV, Barb Lat 9822, fol 35r.

⁷⁵ In 1650, Socini must have started corresponding with Francesco d'Este and his brother Cardinal Rinaldo d'Este in Rome, both allies of France. ASMO, Ambasciatori, Torino, 12: first letter by Socini, Turin 1 February 1651, but there must have been an earlier one, as an earlier draft addressed to Socini from Modena suggests.

4. Changing fortunes

Enlisting writers and offering them rewards was only one of the strategies in the French arsenal. The other strategy, deployed at the same time, was to threaten those perceived to be writing against French interests on the peninsula. Their prime target in Genoa was the news writer Michele Castelli. Already in 1643, Castelli wrote to the Duke of Modena that he was being persecuted by d'Amontot⁷⁶. On 3 June, he had escaped an assassination attempt, and fearing for his life he stayed indoors for a few weeks. The date of this attack was not a coincidence: his reporting on the surrender of the city of Tortona to the Spanish troops might have led d'Amontot to send a clear message to Castelli that he better be careful in his reporting on the matter⁷⁷. It must have remained unsafe for Castelli: in July, Castelli temporarily escaped or travelled to Lombardy, where he joined the newly appointed Spanish governor of Milan, Antonio Sancho Dávila de Toledo y Colonna, Marquis of Velada⁷⁸. The exact nature of Castelli's relationship with this Spanish official remains hitherto unclear, but he likely sought assistance and protection in a safer environment⁷⁹.

Just before the appearance of Botticelli's newspaper, in April 1644, Giannettino Giustiniani threatened Castelli for having written a piece about the rebellion of the Duke of Perrone, to the "disadvantage of France"⁸⁰. Once Botticelli was allowed to produce a newspaper, French agents no longer issued threats. After a year-long co-existence of the two newspaper editors, a decision by the Genoese Senate, on 8 August 1645, intervened in the status quo. The Senate granted the privilege to publish the newspaper to Castelli for three years⁸¹. The privilege was extensive: Castelli did not only have the sole right to print each week the news but the privilege was extended to "handwriting" as well. Without the consent of Castelli, no one else in the city could write and distribute news both in print and in handwriting. For the first time, in return for this sole privilege, Castelli had to pay: in total 3010 lire for an entire year⁸². He seems to have been very worried about this high sum of money he needed to pay and suggests he did not request these conditions.

For Castelli obtaining this extensive privilege backfired: at the end of August, he and his eldest son received permission from the Genoese Senate to carry arms. A clear indication both men felt the need to protect themselves. Castelli informed the inquisitors of state that a priest Agostino Castelletto had threatened him. He requested Francesco d'Este's protection against Giannettino

⁷⁶ Letter by Castelli to [Francesco I d'Este?] on 15 June 1643 from Genoa: "*Me ne stò tuttavia senz'uscire di casa per l'assassinamento attentato alli 3 del corrente e la dichiarata persecutione di Mons. D'Amontot contro di me*". Also see his letter to [Rinaldo d'Este?] from Genoa dated 16 June 1643 requesting payment in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3.

⁷⁷ In issue *Genoua 30 Maggio 1643* reported on the events and subsequent capitulation (consulted copy in BUG, Rari XIII 17).

⁷⁸ At the end of July, he sent a letter from Milan, and a letter dated 3 August 1643 from Pavia. He was governor of Milan from July 1643 to June 1646. For a biography by Santiago Martínez Hernández, «Antonio Sancho Dávila y Toledo Colonna», in *Diccionario Biográfico Español*. Real Academia de la Historia. Last accessed on 28 August 2023. <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/21224/antonio-sancho-davila-y-toledo-colonna>.

⁷⁹ I have been unable to visit the Archive in Simancas to check letters sent by Velada. Equally unclear is why he did not seek assistance from Juan de Eraso, Spanish ambassador in Genoa (1641-1646), whom he must have known. It would not be the last time that he travelled to Milan, see letter from 22 April 1645 in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genova, 3.

⁸⁰ This is based on Giustiniani's letter "disvantaggio della Francia". Castelli does not mention this incident in his letters to Modena in April/May 1644. See also the letter by Juan de Eraso to Philip IV of Spain, Genoa, 4 June 1643, in ASG, Estado, leg. 3598, doc. 183: <http://pares.mcu.es:80/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/3558138>.

⁸¹ Neri, «Michele Castelli», 304-305: "*si concedesse per tre anni facoltà e licenza al dottore Michele Castelli di potere così a stampa come a mano fare, far fare, scrivere, dare e distribuire ogni settimana i novellarj di quello che alla giornata va seguendo, e questa licenza e facoltà sia e s'intenda concessa a lui privatamente ad ogni altro, in modo che non resti più lecito a chi che sia, senza licenza, e permissione di detto Castelli poter scrivere, fare, dare, distribuire novellarj così stampati come manoscritti*".

⁸² "*Per la qual licenza e facoltà sia detto Castelli tenuto et obligato pagare ogni anno al cassiere della camera lire tremila diece, ogni mese la duodecima parte*". He mentioned the same sum of money in a letter dated 18 October 1645, ASMO, Genova, 3.

Giustiniano as he no longer dared to leave his house⁸³. The French government ministers and officials were all involved and their actions were no longer subtle or concealed. On 1 November, at *Piazza dei Bianchi*, in the heart of the city centre, Mensil, the secretary of French ambassador Amontot, intimidated Castelli publicly. He showed Castelli a letter from the French secretary Count of Brienne in both French and Italian accusing him of having dared to have written on multiple occasions “various scandalous and false things against the honour and reputation of France”⁸⁴. The Spanish ambassador was offended that the French issued an intimation in Genoa but was, at the same time, not willing to get involved and create a full-blown scandal. In an act of desperation, two weeks later, Michele Castelli even directly wrote to Cardinal Mazarin, in the hope of being left alone, but it seems to have been to no avail⁸⁵.

Soon after Castelli left the city: on 29 November, he was writing partially ciphered letters to Modena from Milan and referred to having been at Novara, where the governor of Milan, was with his army⁸⁶. His eldest son, Alessandro remained in Genoa to continue his activities of gathering and compiling the newspaper. Eventually, on 18 February 1646, Alessandro announced the end of their activities, and two months later he joined his father in Milan⁸⁷. Michelle's last letter to Modena dates from 27 June 1646, his whereabouts after this date remain unknown⁸⁸.

A month earlier, his rival Alessandro Boticelli had started to write to Modena, decrying that he had not been able for seven months “to celebrate in his sheets the glorious deeds of the French monarchy”⁸⁹. With Francesco d'Este moving ever closer to a French alliance, sending an ambassador to the French court, perhaps Castelli knew his fortunes were turning and left Milan together with the Marchese di Velada? Castelli seem to have made a wise decision to leave Genoa: his successor Giovanni Battista Oliva was killed in suspicious circumstances in Genoa at the end of 1646⁹⁰.

Castelli's case could lead to confirm Helmers' hypothesis that republics, where various interests and groups were at play, could be more easily exploited by foreign ambassadors. Looking at Socini in Turin complicates the idea, rather it seems that states undergoing shifting political alliances were far more dangerous to news writers compared to those that had declared their allegiance. The intelligencers continuously performed a difficult balancing act between the various interests at play, in Socini's case satisfying both Mazarin and Duchess Christine. His publishing activities and especially his ties to Mazarin created problems for Socini when the international alliances at the court of Savoy started to shift.

In October 1650, the Bavarian envoy, Max Kurz von Senftenau was officially sent to Turin to negotiate the marriage between Henriette Adelaide of Savoy (1636-1676) and Ferdinand Maria (1636-1679), the future elector of Bavaria. Since the conclusion of the Treaty of Westphalia in

⁸³ In a letter 28 October 1645 (ASMO, Genova, 3), he refers to “*persecutione mossami da partiali di Francia*” and later he refers to Giustiniani as “*autore della mia persecutione*”.

⁸⁴ His letter dated 2 November 1645 to [Francesco I d'Este?] from Genoa with an account of the events in ASMO, Genova, 3: “*diverses choses scandaleuses et fauses contre l'honneur et contre la reputation de la France*”. For his letter on the events to the Genoese Senate, consult transcription by Neri, «Michele Castelli», 306-307.

⁸⁵ Reference to this letter written on 13 November 1644 taken from Marinelli, *Un corrispondente Genovese*, 10.

⁸⁶ These letters are in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Milano, 108.

⁸⁷ Bongi, «Le prime gazzette», 45. Alessandro seems to have continued to travel back and forth to Genoa to secure the postal arrangements for the Duke of Modena. His last letter from Genoa to Modena is dated 12 April 1646, in ASMO, Genova, 4.

⁸⁸ The last letter sent to Modena by Michele Castelli was dated around the same time 26 June 1646 from Milan. A few weeks before this date, he was in Venice in protection of Duke of Modena's resident. See the letters in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Milano, 108. His name reappeared in June 1647 in the records of the Genoese Senate, see Neri, «Michele Castelli», 308, but nothing else has been found so far.

⁸⁹ See letter by Alessandro Boticelli to [Francesco d'Este?] on 12 May 1646 from Genoa in ASMO, Ambasciatori, Genova, 5: “*non ha havuto altra mortificatione che non haver potuto ccelebrare ne miei fogli le gloriose imprese di questa monarchia*”. The letters by Ercole Manzieri in ASMO, Ambasciatori Genova, 4, from 1647 regularly include references to Boticelli's newspaper.

⁹⁰ Bongi, «Le prime gazzette», 46.

1648, the idea for this marriage had been proposed⁹¹. Mazarin disapproved of this plan, as he was afraid it would induce Savoy to re-align with the Austrian branch of the Habsburg dynasty. Socini's newspaper acted as a mouthpiece for his point of view and the Bavarian envoy immediately started to complain⁹². To avoid further complaints an issue of Socini's newspaper was censored, but some handwritten copies continued to circulate on the Italian peninsula⁹³. This measure did not silence Socini's critique, even after the wedding, he continued to question the new alliance. It infuriated the envoy who demanded swift action. As a result, the Savoy authorities imprisoned Socini at the end of February 1651 and suspended the publication of his newspapers⁹⁴. Temporary imprisonment of printers and publishers was a relatively common measure used by Italian rulers when another power complained about unfavourable reports⁹⁵. Despite pleas on his behalf, also by other Italian rulers, Socini remained in prison for more than a year⁹⁶. He was only released from prison after Henrietta Adelaide of Savoy had left Turin for Munich in June 1652. The timing is indicative of the huge pressure Bavaria put on the government in Turin.

Socini paid a heavy price for his allegiance to Mazarin. Upon his release, he was allowed to return to Turin but not to edit the newspaper⁹⁷. He started to compile handwritten newsletters and sent them to the d'Este and Medici courts in Modena and Florence⁹⁸. His newspaper, however, continued to be interrupted for several years, and significantly in 1658, the privilege was granted to the ducal printer Carlo Gianelli, instead of Socini⁹⁹. A change which indicated that the court in Turin was keen to avoid further diplomatic incidents. Yet even when he was actively side-lined, Socini influenced the reporting of newspaper issues in the summer of 1658, on behalf of the Duke of Modena¹⁰⁰. Presumably thanks to the pressure exerted by Modena, an ally of France, Socini managed to become its editor again¹⁰¹.

⁹¹ See also Karl Theodor Heigel, «Vermählung des kurfürsten Ferdinand Maria mit Adelaide von Savoyen und die Beziehungen zwischen Bayern und Savoyen 1648-1653», *Quellen und Abhandlungen zur neueren Geschichte Bayerns* (1890): 1-47.

⁹² For the letters see Castronovo, «Storia del primo giornale», 77-79.

⁹³ For 1650, the print run of newspaper is near complete with the issue of 28 October (the censored one) missing.

⁹⁴ His imprisonment was reported within diplomatic circles: letter by Giovanni Maria Botero on 1 March 1651 from Turin to [Francesco I d'Este?] in ASMo, Ambasciatori, Torino, 11 and letter by Crescenzi to the [secretary of state Giovanni Giacomo Panciroli?], Rome on 1 March 1651, in AAV, Segreteria di Stato, Savoia, 70. *Torino li 18 Febbrao 1651* is the last issue of his newspapers known so far, consulted copy BNUT, RIS 43/5.

⁹⁵ For another example: in June 1666, a Florentine printer was thrown into prison on the request of John Finch, the English ambassador, who subsequently showed mercy and allowed the printer to be released again. See Nina Lamal, «In sight of the whole world': Public Diplomacy and the Anglo-Dutch Community in Livorno in 1666», in *Anglo-Dutch Connections in the Early Modern World* ed. by Sjoerd Levelt, Michael D. Rose and Esther van Raamsdonck (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023), 203-212.

⁹⁶ In a letter to d'Este duke Giovanni Maria Botero wrote on 5 April 1651 from Turin requested him to plea to the Archbishop, and even the papal nuncio, to get Socini released. Botero was able to visit Socini at the end of May, see his letter from 31 May 1651 from Turin in ASMo, Ambasciatori, Torino, 11.

⁹⁷ Letter by Giovanni Maria Botero to [Francesco I d'Este?] on 19 June 1652 from Turin, ASMo, Ambasciatori, Torino, 11, and Socini's letter to [Francesco I d'Este?] on 19 June 1652 from Turin in ASMo, Torino, 12.

⁹⁸ In a draft letter to Socini dated 14 August 1652 the Modenese government payed 12 *doppie* for his services. His handwritten newsletters to Cioli are kept in Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, 2963a.

⁹⁹ The first issue *Ristampata in Torino li 11. Maggio 1658* (Per Carlo Gianelli vicino al Senato) is kept in BNUT, RIS 43/6. In 1655, for a brief period of time, Socini was in Genoa, ASMo, Torino, 12. His other letters to Modena are from written from Turin. Castronovo's claim («Storia del primo giornale», 69) that Socini ran the newspaper without interruption until 1669 needs to be corrected.

¹⁰⁰ His letters from the year 1658 in ASMo, Torino, 12 offer interesting material in this respect.

¹⁰¹ After a short-lived newspaper venture in July 1658 to celebrate Francesco I d'Este's military ventures. The first known issue *In Modana li 6. Luglio 1658* (In Modana: Per Andrea Cassiani stampator Ducale, 1658) with an interesting address to the reader consulted copy in ASMo, Biblioteca, Periodici 295, the Modenese printer Cassiani started reprinting the Turin newspaper. The first known issue is *Stampata in Torino, e ristampati in Modana li 20. Agosto 1658* (Presso Andrea Cassiani Stampator Ducale), consulted copy ASMo, Biblioteca, Periodici, 292.

With the death of Mazarin (1661), and Christine (1664), Savoy policies shifted and Socini's anti-Spanish stance, in the end, was fatal for the newspaper venture in 1669. Abbot Vincenzo Dini, Savoy ambassador in Madrid, suggested in one of his letters to Charles Emmanuel II that it may be best to consider suspending its publication¹⁰². The duke headed this advice: on 20 June 1669, Socini announced in his newspaper that he had been ordered to end his venture¹⁰³. In an interesting concluding paragraph, he writes that it is better to remain quiet if one is not allowed to speak the truth. With this final editorial note, Socini disappears from our view.

Conclusion

This article has sought to address the geographical imbalance in current scholarship on public diplomacy in the early modern period. Applying the concept of public diplomacy to the Italian peninsula allows for a new view of the first printed Italian newspapers. Their appearance in the 1640s, in a highly volatile political context of shifting alliances on the peninsula, has often been ignored and even dismissed within Italian historiography. I have shown, by contrast, that they were important vehicles for publicity. Newspaper editors were personally called into action, and their choices, far from being merely concerned with spreading true information and growing their own business, were seen as highly political and capable of influencing issues of foreign policy. Mazarin recognized their inherently political nature and his attempts to break the *status quo* on the Italian peninsula perhaps explain why the French actions are far more visible in the sources (compared to the Spanish ones). Together with his network of formal and informal pro-French agents on the peninsula, Mazarin tried to gain influence by pursuing two strategies: printing their newspapers and through violence silencing the opposition. For these men, patronage often functioned as a double-edged sword, once alliances started to shift, both in the Genoese Republic and Duchy of Savoy, they were left to their own devices and were faced with life-threatening situations. More than a specific state structure, the geopolitical alliances of a state and the degree of independence of its ruler or ruling elites, had a huge influence on the activities of these intelligencers¹⁰⁴.

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¹⁰² For this letter see Castronovo, «Storia del primo giornale», 85.

¹⁰³ *Torino li 20. Giugno 1669* (In Torino, per Gio. Antonio e Giuseppe Antonio Fratelli Gianelli con Privilegio di Sua Altezza Reale) is the last issue and survives in a single copy in BAV, Stamp Barberini, QII 47: “E quà si fa punto alle nostre gazette, mentre ci viene ordinate di tacere per ovviare le cagioni di doglianze, che malagevolmente possono cuitarsi etiandio da’ scrittori più avveduti, e dalle stampe più purgate. Opposta è la conditione del Piloto à quella di chi scrive le cose del monde: che se quegli adopra la carte di navigare, da cui gli vengono addatati I scogli più occolti; non può questi dimeno di prevarlersi carte, che mendaci, ò veritiere si sieno, non so assicurano da perigli d’inciampare nelle altrui male sodisfattioni; non potendosi per lo più nel racconto d’un successo tutti appagare tutti onde per togliere ogni occassione di querele, opportunamente ci è stato imposto il silenzio, con cui solo appunto si riveriscono I prencipi le loro attioni, come c’insegnarono I Gimnosofisti nell’adorare gran pianeta col ditto alla bocca”.

¹⁰⁴ Conflict of interest: none.

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