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### Storia contemporanea

E. DI RIENZO, E. GIN, *Le Potenze dell'Asse e l'Unione Sovietica 1939-1945*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2013, pp. 414

With its provocative topic, the work entitled *Le Potenze dell'Asse e l'Unione Sovietica 1939-1945* offers, and we must say it from the very beginning, keys for an interesting lecture in a domain which started multiple debates and controversy. The topics of the origins, responsibilities and structuring of the projects during and after the war of the great powers participating in the conflict were launched and debated shortly after the war ended. There appeared schools and historic currents which justified decisions and explained attitudes. The American "isolationists" pointed towards the aggressive and provocative measures taken by President Roosevelt, the "interventionists" noted his diplomacy in a pragmatic and realistic key, saying that the war was an effort to maintain the democratic system and eliminate the closed economic blocks. The British remained for a while the prisoners of Churchill's perspective that put responsibility on Roosevelt administration, and the Russians were proposing nothing but the official perspective, that is, the Soviet Union had been attacked and forced to react in the «Great War for defending their country». The "opening" of the British archives in the 70's followed by that of the Russians after the fall of the Soviet Empire, added some tones on the perspectives.

The later have created a rich literature in the domain which focuses not only on the military, political-diplomatic, economic or social aspects at a global level but also on case studies. It is worth mentioning in this context recent or relatively recent works which investigate the participation at war of some European countries or talk about the implications of the conflict on them (Ian S. Wood, *Britain, Ireland and the Second World War*; G. Kurt Piehler, Sidney Pash, *The United States and the Second World War: New Perspectives on Diplomacy, War and the Home Front*; John Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish Experience in the Second World War*; Peter Davies, *France and the Second World War: Occupation, Collaboration, and Resistance*; Wayne H. Bowen, *Spain during World War II*). Others (Peter Calvocoressi, *Fall out. World War II and the Shaping of Postwar Europe*) analysed the impact of the World War II on the process of dividing Europe after the war or created models of alternative interpretation of the history in the south-eastern Europe during the war, by elaborating a manual such as *The Second World War (Teaching Modern Southeast European History. Alternative Educational Materials)*, eds. Krešimir Erdelja, Koulouri Christina, under the cure of the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe.

The work *Le Potenze dell'Asse e l'Unione Sovietica 1939-1945* raises a few essential issues in understanding the trigger factors of the hostilities between Germany and Russia, of the relationships between Berlin and Moscow and also the position of Italy during the war. The authors come with, as they say in the *Introduction*, a new way of interpreting

the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, looking beyond the direct relationship of the two powers, the conclusion being that the trigger factor of the conflict was more the hazard than the long accumulations. The issue of planning the war was a little controversial for historians: some specialists say that Hitler started the war for the war's sake in order to destroy the world, having a warrior's vocation. Others say that Hitler was a sensible person and that he followed a well-crafted plan to extend Germany towards the East Europe, and to transform it into a world power, while some other historians like A. J. P. Taylor affirm that the western countries were the ones which started the war. They actually invited Hitler, through their hesitation, to ask for more. Hitler's aim was to change the world order and his tactics was patience. Despite his aggressive speeches he was a master of the waiting game, until the opponents collapsed in confusion. He didn't state clear demands, he would just declare himself dissatisfied and would wait for the concessions on behalf of the Occident. Taylor says that Hitler didn't have a detailed plan, nor solutions, just the determination to exploit favourable situations.

Having as a starting point the affirmation with solid arguments that until the autumn of 1940 the real Pact of Steel wasn't that between Rome and Berlin, but that between Berlin and Moscow, Eugenio Di Rienzo and Emilio Gin say the World War II wasn't an inevitable conflict between Antifascism and Fascism. «Russia and Germany, the authors say, continental powers, had as their natural opponent the countries of the *Rimland*, the coast and the island part, and they were trying to divide them, luring them into an Euro-Asian alliance: Italy and Japan, maritime countries, but strongly linked to the continent» (pages 12-13). «And in this case, the authors add, the destinies of the nations seemed more influenced by their geographical positions rather than the changing ideological directions of their governments» (page 13).

The end of the Hitler-Stalin compromise and the actual beginning of the war, were marked by the availability of the Soviet Union to sign in April 1941 a treaty of mutual friendship and non-aggression with Yugoslavia, which made Germany respond by invading the region. «The fear of the German Dictator not to be trapped between the Anglo-American power in the Atlantic and Russia in the Orient dared him seek a military solution based on quick-war against the Soviet Union» (page 16). Another interesting thing is the analysis which the authors make on the position of Italy, noticing the duality of the external political discourse. They analyse the division between Mussolini's perspective and Ciano's, and also the Duce's efforts to get close to Stalin out of ideological reasons. The authors then put responsibility on the Russian dictator for starting the Cold War, expressing their opinion about another issue which made history and divided the world historians.

This work represents a scientific discourse, well done, with a lot of information and coherently structured, which makes us reflect on things and raise questions.

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