

# The Role of Germany, Italy and Portugal in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in the Representation of the British Media

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the article is to reveal the nature of the reflection of the events of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 in the British press. The most important factor shaping public opinion was the periodical press. The authors emphasize that events on the European continent, including local conflicts, significantly influenced the mindset of British society, combined with an acute party struggle on foreign policy issues. The practical component of the article is based on the analysis of about 20 titles of British Newspapers political orientation. The results of the study showed that the publications were divided on the issue of criticism or support for the Italian-German intervention in Spain as follows: sharp rejection - the Communist, labour and liberal press (violation of international norms, understanding of intervention as aggression); neutral or slightly negative attitude: part of the conservative press (mutual internationalization of the conflict).

**Keywords:** Public society, propaganda, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Observer, The Times, Manchester Guardian.

## INTRODUCTION

The first large-scale study of the attitude of British society to the events of the 1930s in the Pyrenees was the monograph of the English historian (Watkins 1976; Pena-Rodríguez 2020).

Some works related to information support of the appeasement policy (Cockett 1989). For instance, David Deacon his monograph was published in 2008.

The research includes such topics as the influence of British government and commercial structures on publications about Spain in the press, propaganda techniques, and historical myths about the Spanish war (Deacon 2008).

A large number of works are dedicated to the extreme right to the extreme left newspapers (Hindle 1937). Separate problems of foreign policy coverage in the British press of the 1930s (relations with leading powers) (Gannon 1971; Leitão, Marques Pereira, Pereira dos Santos and Tavares 2019).

Thus, foreign historiography attempted to study British press coverage of the Spanish war 1936-1939, but the focus was shifted from propaganda issues to journalism, foreign policy and public opinion. The problem of intervention of Germany, Italy and Portugal in the Spanish Civil war of 1936-1939 was studied from a foreign policy point of view, without considering the information aspect (Brodie 2020).

## OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of the article is to investigate and demonstrate the nature of the reflection of the events of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 in the British press. The most important factor shaping public opinion was the periodical press. The authors emphasize that events on the European continent, including local conflicts, significantly influenced the mindset of British society, combined with an acute party struggle on foreign policy issues.

## METHODOLOGY

To accomplish our aim, we have deployed various methods. In addition to general scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction), essential-content analysis of print materials as a historical source, were used some special methods: descriptive-narrative method needed to identify new and refine existing scientific facts about the historical period 1936-1939. Statistics, used for qualitative and quantitative analysis of newspaper material – the name and the content of articles, names, and frequency of mention.

## RESULTS

German and Italian policy towards Spain has been repeatedly analyzed in the British newspapers publications. The Manchester Guardian has repeatedly written about the desire of Germany and Italy to weaken democratic forces in Europe. In the article «Goals of Italy and Germany» even before the Civil War, the newspaper defended the point of view that the

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war in Spain is necessary for Berlin to «shake up» the international situation: «to hinder the European policy of France». Moreover, according to an author of the Manchester Guardian, Italy supports Germany in this. In the future, he saw only one scenario – further cooperation between Italy and Germany, and between the USSR and France (Manchester Guardian. 1936. 8 Jul).

The Daily Herald, which stood on Pro-Republican positions, reported (September 1936) that some of the officers of the Portuguese army and Navy were anti-francoist. The main reason for the uprising was a desire to help loyalists in Spain. Emphasizing the ambiguity of attitudes on the Spanish issue in the Portuguese armed forces, the Daily Herald actually refuted the propaganda of a number of British conservative publications that considered Portugal only as an ally of the gen regime Franco (Daily Herald. 1936. 10 Sept).

In the Daily Worker (publication of the Communist party of Great Britain) in September 1936, a point of view was expressed, which was later confirmed in the works of domestic and foreign researchers of the Spanish civil war: "The War will continue as long as the intervention continues». This thesis is equal to the statement that the rebellion would be suppressed, and the areas occupied by the nationalists would be liberated if the military and diplomatic assistance from Italy and Germany were stopped (The Daily Worker. 1936. 29 Sept).

The motives of the German government in helping Franco were presented in The Observer (a liberal and clerical newspaper) as a desire to protect 15 thousand Germans who lived in Spain, strengthen the «fascist bloc» in Europe, and nullify the influence of Russia in the country (The Observer. 1936. 9 Aug). As the goals of «active» German intervention in Spanish affairs, the author of the Pro-Communist Inprecorr H. Behrend called Hitler's desire to destroy the Popular fronts in France and Spain and make the latter an ally capable of drawing back part of the French troops in the event of war (International Press Correspondence. 1936).

For the first time directly about the participation of Italians in the civil war in the Pyrenees, The Daily Worker wrote in September 1936: "Now the intervention in Spain can be considered direct, along with the sending of aircraft and ammunition to Spain went and transport with soldiers-members of the Italian fascist militia» (The Daily Worker. 1936. 27 Sept).

Articles in the Manchester Guardian accusing Italy of direct participation of its troops in the war in Spain began to be published in September 1936. The sharp rejection of this fact, initially qualified as an intervention, by the editorial staff of the publication is indicative (Manchester Guardian. 1936. 7 Sept).

In the article «The Collapse of the hopes for reassurance», a correspondent of the Manchester Guardian wrote about the 6 thousand German volunteers who arrived in Spain in early December 1936: "This negates all of Eden's claims that foreign contingents will not be able to get to Spain» (Ibid. 1936. 2 Dec).

In very cautious terms, the Daily Express correspondent wrote at the same time about the role of Germany in the Spanish civil war. He recalled that Germany is the most populous state in Europe, located in the very center of it. The organization that was achieved in the country on the basis of an authoritarian state mechanism, racism and nationalism was the most important political factor on the continent, Germany and England had no reason to compete in Spain (Manchester Guardian. 1937. 19 March).

Later, the Italian-German intervention in the Spanish conflict was already qualified by The Times as an «intervention». The article «Spanish request to the League» was published in May 1937, which reported a telegram from the Minister of foreign Affairs of Spain to the Secretariat of the League of Nations with a request to send a Commission to the country in order to fix the fact of foreign aggression (The Times. 1937. 21 May).

In the section «Fascist intervention in Spain» (which became permanent in the newspaper), the Manchester Guardian in May 1937 told about the foundation of the Committee to investigate events in Spain, created under the Commission on violations of international law, which included many left-wing members of Parliament. The members of the Committee stated that the scheme of control over the Spanish borders, which had been in effect since the 20th of March, 1937, supported intervention by Italy and Germany (Manchester Guardian. 1937. 27 May).

At the same time, a number of articles were silent on the interference, for example, during the finalization of the control scheme for the control of Spanish territorial waters under the patronage of the «Committee on Non-intervention» in the Spanish affairs. The Times in June 1937 described with extreme

restraint an episode of an attack on one of the Italian warships by a Republican vessel. The official conversation between G. Ciano (the Minister of foreign Affairs of Italy) and E. Drummond (representative of the United Kingdom) contained the idea of a possible quadripartite agreement on Spain (England, France, Italy, Germany) (The Times. 1937. 7 Jun). This fact demonstrated the Times's almost complete commitment to the evolution of the government's laissez faire line on Spain.

Since the summer of 1937, Italian contingents have been widely involved in the Spanish war. The war was not «hushed up» by the Italian press and official Rome. The same can be said for The Times. The newspaper (mid-June) analyzed an article by Mussolini in *Popolo d'Italia* in which he reproached the British press for disrespecting the courage of Italians in Spain. The Times called the main reason for the Italian defeat at Guadalajara's mistakes of command, and reminded the reader that the Italian troops made a great contribution to the victory of the allies during the I World war (Ibid. 1937. 18 Jun).

Daily Herald in the beginning. August 1936 in the article «The Reign of Italian terror on a rebellious island» told about the harsh military regime established by the Italians in Majorca. The attitude of the British foreign office to the reports of the landing of the Germans and Italians in late 1936 in Spain was indicative. The Daily Herald accused Eden (1935-1938 Minister of Foreign Affairs) of hiding from the public the true extent of the Italo-German intervention in Spain. Correspondent called Eden's data on the presence in Spain in December 1936 of only 5 thousand German combatants underestimated. Moreover, in one of his speeches, Eden said that not only did the Germans violate the non-intervention agreement, but also the Italians in Majorca and the Russians do it. Eden's conciliatory «position on the issue of volunteers» was criticized by the Daily Herald, one issue of which stated that he sought to downplay the extent of German involvement in the Spanish events (Daily Herald. 1936. 11 Aug).

The actions of Italian troops in the battle of Guadalajara (March 1937) were negatively evaluated by the Daily Herald. The newspaper ironically reported that according to forecasts of the general Franco, the «national army» (Spanish rebels), and Italian forces were to enter Guadalajara on March 13, and Madrid on March 14, 1937 (Ibid. 1937. 16 March).

The Observer reported in the summer of 1937 about the raid of 10 Junkers airplanes on the suburb of

Barcelona, describing the victims and destruction. The Daily Telegraph correspondent P. Stephens called the attack of the fascist division «Black arrows» on mount Hata near Bilbao together with the Spanish rebels «brilliant». He spoke in other articles with an obvious sympathy for the Italians who participated in the Spanish Civil War (The Daily Mirror. 1937. 20 May).

The Daily Mirror wrote in late 1938 that during the attack on Almeria by German warships suffered and the British (J. Young who was also the leader of the Spanish Aid Committee (Ibid. 1938; Quezada-Sarmiento, & Enciso, 2016).

The Daily Mirror reported in June 1937 that socialists in Parliament were demanding full information from Eden about the actions of German and Italian aviation in Spain. His arguments and «excuses» had no effect on the parliamentarians. E. Rathbone, an independent member of Parliament, argued that Guernica was destroyed by German aircraft, and asked Eden whether the security of airspace is not the primary task of the British defense organization. Eden admitted that the planes used by the Spanish insurgents in the attacks on Bilbao were produced in Germany and Italy. The Minister did not comment on the bombing of Guernica (Daily Mirror. 1937. 27 Jun).

The problem of the Balearic Islands has been repeatedly discussed in the House of Commons. It is important that even at the end of the Spanish War, April 6, 1939, in the debate on this question the representative of the British government R. Butler could not comment on the fact that the Italian troops on the Balearic Islands. He also said that he hopes that the territorial integrity of Spain will be restored and that the government of «New Spain» will not join the fascist axis (Reports on meetings of the British Parliament 1936).

At the end of October 1937, The Times stated that at least 40 thousand Italian «volunteers» were staying in Spain, referring to information from the Italian Ministry of foreign Affairs. The document stated that the purpose of the stay of Italian troops in the country is to fight against the enemies of Italy, it was noted that the number of volunteers fighting on the side of the Valencian government is many times higher (The Times. 1937. 4 Sept; 19 Oct).

The Daily Herald wrote (November 1937) that new transports with Italian troops constantly stay in Spanish

ports, with reference to the British United Press (B.U.P.) stated that only on the front of the Italians at least 75 thousand people., in the rear areas, the calculation is almost impossible. A new transport with 500 soldiers arrived from Italian occupied Palma to Tangier on 20 November 1937 (Daily Herald. 1937. 21 Nov). In contrast, the Pro-Franco Western Morning News and Daily Gazette quoted a member of Parliament, J. Eklund of Troita: «Why is there so much talk about the Germans and Italians on the side of Franco, but so little about the Russians and French on the side of the Reds?» (Western Morning News and Daily Gazette. 1937. 12 Aug).

The fascist newspapers justified the Italian-German intervention. In the article «Lies in «The News Chronicle» correspondent «The Blackshirt» Ch. Power claimed that the publication of this liberal newspaper is not true. Thus, the British fascist press tried to minimize the psychological effect of the participation of Italian troops in the Spanish war on the side of the gen. Franco, understating their numbers (The Blackshirt. 1937. 13 Nov).

The Daily Mail wrote with sympathy about the Italian «volunteers» who visited Spain. The correspondent of the newspaper I. Munro in October 1938 noted that the Legionnaires in the Pyrenees borrowed elements of the military uniforms of the fashion trend in Italy, reporting that about 10 thousand Italians left Spain. Munro's article resembled an ode extolling the legionaries. Important was the information that about 20 thousand Italian combatants were still taking part in the Spanish Civil War at that time (the figures are clearly understated) (The Daily Mail. 1938. 21 Oct).

Significant clarification on the participation of foreign troops in the gen. Franco army was given in the Daily Herald in November 1937. The Dutch correspondent of the newspaper, F. G. Stork, who was for a long time on the territory of the nationalists, gave detailed information about the composition, number, characteristics of foreign troops. According to Stork, in the army of the Spanish nationalists fought by the beginning of 1938 about 500,000. Of these, foreign contingents: Italians – 120,000, Germans-200,000, the French - 2,000, British and Irish - less than 1,000 and individual volunteers from other countries (Daily Herald. 1937. 21 Nov). According to the author of the Yorkshire Post, competent columnists brought the total number of Italians in Spain to 70,000 (The Yorkshire Post. 1937. 27 Nov). The Manchester Guardian quoted a figure of 40,000 people in October 1937. (for the Italian army in

Spain). It was reported that there were significantly fewer German troops there (Manchester Guardian. 1937. 27 Oct).

The Manchester Guardian in March 1938 reported on another debate in Parliament on the Spanish question. J. Strauss (labour) accused the government of being unable to confirm or deny information about the activities of a number of German officers in Spain, allegedly leading the nationalist offensive on the Aragon front. Also F. Noel-Becker (labour) demanded that the ban on arms trade with the Republic be lifted, as the nationalists were regularly supplied by Italy and Germany. Such a statement of questions can be considered typical. Chamberlain (the Prime Minister 1937-1940), again (March 1938), avoiding the answer, only focused the attention of parliamentarians on Franco's statement that if the territorial integrity of Spain is guaranteed after the war, the country will not seek to change the status quo in the region (Manchester Guardian. 1938. 24 March).

The Daily Herald noted that Italo-German aviation provided serious assistance to the nationalist forces during the «March to the sea» in March-April 1938. A special correspondent of the newspaper reported that pilots from Majorca tried to destroy a small contingent of Republicans, in the case of the surrender of Tortosa, communications between Catalonia and the Central zone of the Republic could be cut (Daily Herald. 1938. 7 Apr).

The critical tone towards the Italian-German intervention in The Times was steadily increasing by 1938. The newspaper wrote about the crucial importance of the participation of Italian military formations in the offensive on Catalonia, as well as the fact that goods and contingents continue to be transported from Italy to Spain. These facts were confirmed by the Daily Herald, indicating in the spring of 1938 the arrival in Spain of «fresh» Italian forces from Libya. The publication reported that the Italian command declared a «walking in Spain» (Daily Herald. 1938. 9 March).

After the speech, gen. Franco on the neutrality of «New Spain» in a possible European war against the background of reports from Republican leaders about the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from the Republican zone, Mussolini announced in October 1937 the beginning of the immediate evacuation of Italian troops from Spain. The Daily Herald viewed his speech as purely propagandistic (Daily Mirror. 1937. 14 Oct).

## CONCLUSION

To sum it all, the Italo-German intervention in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 was itself a significant news event (up to 10% of the publications reviewed). There are 3 main news topics in the description of the intervention of Italy, Germany and Portugal in the Spanish crisis by the British press. First, it is diplomatic and propaganda support for the Franco regime (speeches and statements of political figures, results of official meetings, signed agreements, and diplomatic activities, the information in the media). Second, supplies to the rebels. Third, the direct participation of German and Italian contingents in the battles of the Spanish Civil War (the number of troops, losses, «success-failure»). It should be noted that the second and third motives were often mixed, and the supply of weapons and ammunition was described in the context of the participation of Italian-German troops in the fighting and Portugal participating.

The publications were divided on the issue of criticism or support for the Italian-German intervention in Spain on three main points of view: a sharp rejection of it (violation of international norms, understanding of intervention as aggression). The Daily Herald, Manchester Guardian, The Yorkshire Post, The Daily Mirror, Evening Standard, The Daily Worker are the largest group were belonged to the first type. The second group included The Times, The Observer, The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph (The Daily Telegraph and Morning Post): neutral or slightly negative attitude (mutual internationalization of the conflict) or support for non-intervention (fighting the «Communist danger»). An intermediate position between the first and second groups was occupied by the Daily Express (criticized the direct participation of the interventionist troops in the fighting). The third group consisted exclusively of fascist Newspapers (first of all, Action), a number of strongly anti-Communist local Newspapers (for example, the Western Daily Press). It is significant that publications openly supporting Italian-German intervention were isolated. Left-wing Newspapers exaggerated the number of military contingents of Italy and Germany in Spain (there were significantly different data). The highest numbers were contained in The Daily Mirror and the Daily Worker. They also focused on the failures of the Italo-German forces.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that this study be considered in order to better and better consider the impact of other

countries in this war and the impact of different media in different countries to consider the issue in different aspects.

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