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Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NND No.

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AC, FRENCH-ITALO FRONTIER
SEPT. 1945

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TO : THE REPRESENTATIVES OF ITALY, FRANCE AND THE ALLIED NATIONS.

The occupation by the French of Ventimiglia and of the Italian towns in the Poia basin, which has taken place during the campaign for the liberation of Northern Italy by the Allied Nations, has kindled great hope in us: that our town, divided for many centuries, and victim of conflicts between powerful states, may finally regain unity and prosperity.

The Italo-French controversies regarding the frontier at Poia valley, which have sprung up again during this war, find their origin in the treaty of 24 March 1860 which gave the County of Nice to France; this was the result of an erroneous principle with which the border was established at that time. In spite of this treaty France has never renounced the idea of appropriating Briga and Tenda, while Italy has continued to make claims for Breghia, Sarpello, Mentone and Nice itself. This was the inevitable result of a solution based on compromise, which established in the Poia valley a border that cuts in half hills and valleys, ignoring completely geography and the welfare of the inhabitants.

We, the Italians and the French living in the zone, feel that such a situation cannot prevail and that our two nations cannot allow this absurd and deplorable state of affairs to continue: the time has come for a final and definite solution.

As inhabitants of this border region we have for many centuries maintained for the sake of tradition and our common interests the spiritual unity of the region which extends from Tenda to Mentone, from Molinetta to Belforcia; it is our duty to-day to propose to Italy and to France a conciliatory but fundamental solution of the problem. At the same time we ask the Allied Nations to give their authoritative support and their friendly and objective attention to what we are proposing.

Our responsibility would be indeed grave if, because of our negligence, the citizens of Ventimiglia, Mentone, Pigna and Breghia would find themselves fighting in a future war against each other on the border line of Poia. Our sons would consider us guilty if we did not at least attempt to prevent this.

We wish to declare to the representatives of Italy, France and of the Allied Nations that our movement has a single objective: to eliminate once and for all disagreements and clashes between two sister Nations and to create instead a new situation which will contribute to the renewal of a traditional and lasting friendship.

We ask to receive our entreaty which is the entreaty of every wrecked home and mourning family: we ask them to realize that we intend to work for a reconciliation of two peoples and do not want to become anymore the object of clashes foreign to our wishes, as it has fallen to us more than once in the course of history.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE REGION

It is enough to glance at the map to see that the Poia basin, which lies within the Cape of Bordighera, Mount Asello, Langan Hill, Mount Tenda and the sea, is definitely a geographic unit.

The basin is flanked by two chains of mountains which originate from the 4354

The Italo-French controversies regarding the frontier at this valley, which have sprung up again during this war, find their origin in the treaty of 24 March 1860 which gave the County of Nice to France; this was the result of an erroneous principle with which the border was established at that time. In spite of this treaty France has never renounced the idea of appropriating Briga and Tenda, while Italy has continued to make claims for Brigo, Sospello, Mentone and Nice itself. This was the inevitable result of a solution based on compromise, which established in the Royal valley a border that cuts in half hills and valleys, ignoring completely geography and the welfare of the inhabitants.

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As inhabitants of this border region we have for many centuries maintained for the sake of tradition and our common interests the spiritual unity of the region which extends from Tenda to Mentone, from Kalineth to Beiraço; it is our duty today to propose to Italy and to France a conciliatory but fundamental solution of the problem. At the same time we ask the Allied Nations to give their authoritative support and their friendly and objective attention to what we are proposing.

Our responsibility would be indeed grave if, because of our negligence, the citizens of Ventimiglia, Mentone, Riga and Groglio would find themselves fighting in a future war against each other on the border line of Roia. Our sons would consider us guilty if we did not at least attempt to prevent this.

We wish to declare to the representatives of Italy, France and of the Allied Nations that our movement has a single objective: to eliminate once and for all disagreements and clashes between two sister Nations and to create instead a new situation which will contribute to the renewal of a traditional and lasting friendship.

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GEOGRAPHY OF THE REGION

It is enough to glance at the map to see that the Roia basin, which lies within the Gorge of Bordighera, Mount Agello, Langan Hill, Braus Hill, Mount Tenda and the sea, is definitely a geographic unit.

The basin is flanked by two chains of mountains which originate from the ⁴³⁵⁴ ridge on both sides of Tenda Hill that end in the sea. The western chain goes from Mount Clapier to Mount Agello through Autione and Braus hills, and separates Roia river from the waters of the Varo basin; the other, in the east, starts from the peak of Mangiareis Hill, through Saccarello and Ceppo Monte, to Mount Nero near Bordighera, and separates the waters of Roia river from those of Tanaro and Argentina rivers.

Between these two chains which are nowhere lower than 1,000 meters, Roia river flows vertically from Tenda to Ventimiglia, between the valleys of its tributaries and dependent streams, of which the main ones are the Bevera and Nervia. The coast, from Bordighera to Impecco, forms a great amphitheatre closed in its extreme wings by mountains that rise almost straight from the sea. The entire civil and economic life of this area is consequently enclosed within this system of mountains and rivers, which is like a big rectangle which Nature has placed between Italy and France.

The more traversable passes which connect Liguria with Piemonte and Provence begin from the sides of the rectangle: in the west, Braus Hill (1,000 meters) connects Nice with Piemonte; in the North, Tenda Hill crossed by the railway and the main highway which descend from Piemonte to Ventimiglia and Nice; in the east, Langa Hill (1,100 meters) opens the way to the high valleys of the Argentina and Tanaro rivers. The Genoa-Nice railway and the Cornice Road, one of the largest arteries that connect Italy with France, runs on the fourth side, formed by the coast.

This particular position of the Roia basin has been the cause of clashes and wars which in turn have brought about its dismemberment. Today its territory is divided into two almost equal parts between Italy and France. Here is a list of the towns and their population according to the last official census.

Italian Communes

1. Tenda	2,720
2. Briga Marittima	2,026
3. Airole	819
4. Olivette	1,091
5. Ventimiglia	16,762
6. Figa	2,502
7. Castelvitto	1,215
8. Isolabona	907
9. Rocchetta	576
10. Polceacqua	2,103
11. Camporosso	2,062
12. Perinaldo	1,410
13. Apricale	1,127
14. Salardo	1,026
15. San Biagio	1,322
16. Vallecrosia	2,579
17. Saorge	203
18. Vallobo	724
19. Bordighera	8,306

	45,495

French Communes

1. Molinetta	547
2. Sospello	3,815
3. Castellero	427
4. Castiglione	891
5. Sant'Agnese	257
6. Gorbio	686
7. Mentone	21,793
8. Roccaruna	6,193
9. Draglio	2,562
10. Fonteno	731
11. Saorgio	558

	37,820

The border line that separates the Italian communes from the French crosses the Roia twice so that the upper part of the valley (Tenda and Briga) is Italian but is aggregated to the province of Cuneo, from which, however, it is separated by the Alpine ridge; the middle part (Draglio, Saorgio, Sospello) is French, and the lower part is half Italian (Ventimiglia, Bordighera and the communes of the Nervia Valley) and half French (Mentone, Roccaruna and the communes nearby).

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way which descend from Piemonte to Ventimiglia and Nice; in the east, Lanzo Hill (1,100 meters) opens the way to the high valleys of the Argentina and Tanaro rivers. The Genoa-Nice railway and the Cornice Road, one of the largest arteries that connect Italy with France, runs on the fourth side, formed by the coast.

This particular position of the Poia basin has been the cause of clashes and wars which in turn have brought about its dismemberment. Today its territory is divided into two almost equal parts between Italy and France. Here is a list of the towns and their population according to the last official census.

Italian Communes	French Communes
1. Tenda 2,700	1. Molinetto 547
2. Briga Marittima 2,026	2. Sospello 3,615
3. Airole 819	3. Castellero 427
4. Olivetta 1,021	4. Castiglione 301
5. Ventimiglia 16,762	5. Sant'Agnese 427
6. Pigna 2,502	6. Corbio 686
7. Castelvittorio 1,215	7. Mentone 21,703
8. Isolabona 907	8. Roccebruna 6,133
9. Roccchetta 576	9. Dreglio 2,562
10. Polceacqua 2,103	10. Fonteno 731
11. Camporosso 2,052	11. Seborgio 558
12. Fervinaldo 1,410	
13. Apricale 1,127	
14. Baiardo 1,026	
15. San Biagio 1,322	
16. Vallescrosia 2,579	
17. Seborgio 302	
18. Vallobona 731	
19. Bordighera 8,305	
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49,499	37,320

The border line that separates the Italian communes from the French crosses the Poia twice so that the upper part of the valley (Tenda and Briga) is Italian but is aggregated to the province of Cuneo, from which, however, it is separated by the Alpine ridge; the middle part (Dreglio, Seborgio, Sospello) is French, and the lower part is half Italian (Ventimiglia, Bordighera and the communes of the Nervia Valley) and half French (Mentone, Roccebruna and the communes nearby).

HISTORY

This apparently absurd partition of a region which in all its natural aspects presents a definite geographic unity is not an ancient one, as one would believe.

If we go back many centuries, we learn that the Poia basin was inhabited by a single people, the Liguri Intenelli and Albiun Intemelium was the capital of the entire zone. The unity of our territory was a fact even before the arrival of the Romans, and it existed since the earliest times.

After the conquest, Rome respected our borders and our internal constitution;

indeed, it created in the Poia Basin a political and administrative entity which which was more precise and coherent than ever: the "civitates" of the Intemelii, with Alantimilium (Ventimiglia) as the capital, whose jurisdiction extended from Ventone to Bordighera and from Mount Tenda to the sea. This unification brought about centuries of prosperity and welfare, and the ancient monuments prove that this was one of the happiest and splendid periods of our history. The lasting peace established between Italy and Gaul gave us at that time this great privilege; of being the agent of the union of the two latin countries and the exchange of their culture and civilization.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the administrative unity of the region was continued through the diocese of Ventimiglia which, under the authority and tutelage of the Bishop, was able to maintain its status of city and its independence amid the whirlpool of invasions by the barbarians. The diocese of Ventimiglia kept its ancient borders, which corresponded to the geographical features of the zone, for over 14 centuries, until 1802. Only during this period was the diocese deprived of the parishes lying west; this was done with the object of identifying the diocesan borders with the political borders; it was later extended eastward, at the expense of the diocese of Albenga. Nevertheless Tenda and Briga remained and are still included in the diocese of Ventimiglia. The religious unity of our people was one of the main factors which contributed to the maintenance of their spiritual unity, their language, customs and individuality.

A new feudal administrative unit was formed, within the same geographic boundaries, during the early part of the middle ages; this was the district (contado) of Ventimiglia, which in the X and XI centuries was ruled by a Count with the prerogatives of a sovereign. This was the period of the independence of our region, of the glories of our communes, when our trade and navigation reached their peak.

In the XII century, when Genoa began its expansion toward western Liguria and Provence, the contado of Ventimiglia blocked her way in a series of desperate and fierce battles that lasted for over 70 years. But finally, in 1222, it was forced to succumb, although its task had been achieved: Genoa at this time was no longer in a position to realize her aims. Some decades afterwards, a compromise was reached between Genoa and Provence; the contado of Ventimiglia, exhausted and at the mercy of the victor, was to pay. The Treaty of Aix (12 July 1262) sealed the definite dismemberment of the Contado and its partition between Genoa and Provence, so that Ventimiglia and Nervia Valley (with the exception of Pigna and Rocchetta) remained Genoese, while Breglio, Sestri, Sospello and the nearby towns became Provencal.

Thus the ancient unity of the Intemelian region was destroyed. Our country became a mosaic of seigniories, of fiefs contested by the most powerful states; they were torn by local controversies and devastated by many wars. The border line between Breglio and Ventimiglia, which cuts the Poia, became in 1388 the border between the possessions of the Republic of Genoa and those of the Count of Savoy, who from this date became ruler of the County of Nice, and aimed to establish across the Tenda, Breglio, Sospello and Braus hills a corridor in his states to give Piemonte an outlet to the sea. Genoa for her part made of Ventimiglia and the Genoese communes of Nervia Valley a line of fortifications for the defence of its territory against Piemonte; thus Pigna, Castelvittorio, Apricale and Balarzo, Breglio and Pigna, Mentone and Ventimiglia, inhabited by inter-related populations were forced, in peacetime as well as in war time, to line against one another. Tenda and Briga had become a bastion where the descendants of the counts of Ventimiglia took refuge and defend their independence to the end, when finally the county was absorbed by Piemonte. Mentone and Roccabruna were incorporated into the Principality of Monaco which the Genoese family of Grimaldi had set up.

The situation continued to exist until the French revolution. Amid the rapid events of this period the County of Nice passed to France and soon afterwards, part

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Thus the ancient unity of the Intermontian region was destroyed. Our country became a mosaic of seigniories, of fiefs contested by the most powerful states; they were torn by local controversies and devastated by many wars. The border line between Breglio and Ventimiglia, which cuts the Roia, became in 1368 the border between the possessions of the Republic of Genoa and those of the Count of Savoy, who from this date became ruler of the County of Nice, and aimed to establish across the Tenda, Breglio, Sestri and Braus hills a corridor in his states to give Piemonte an outlet to the sea. Genoa for her part made of Ventimiglia and the Genoese communes of Nervia Valley a line of fortifications for the defence of its territory against Piemonte; thus Pigna, Castelvitto, Apricale and Batarlo, Breglio and Pigna, Mentone and Ventimiglia, inhabited by inter-related populations were forced, in peacetime as well as in war time, to line against one another. Tenda and Briga had become a bastion where the descendants of the counts of Ventimiglia took refuge and defend their independence to the end, when finally the county was absorbed by Piemonte. Mentone and Roccebrune were incorporated into the Principality of Monaco which the Genoese family of Grimaldi had set up.

The situation continued to exist until the French revolution. Amid the rapid events of this period the County of Nice passed to France and soon afterwards, part of the Riviera up to Taggia was also annexed. But this was merely a brief interlude, for in 1815 the House of Savoy regained not only the County of Nice but extended its rule over the entire Republic of Genoa, including Ventimiglia. However, the Intermontian region did not at this time re-acquire, as it was logical, its administrative unity, because the border across the Roia was kept as the dividing line between the provinces of Nice and Sanremo. When in 1860, Nice again became part of France, the old corridor of the Dukes of Savoy, with the salient of Breglio, Sestri and Sospello, followed its fate; and this salient cut in two communes of Roia Valley that still remained to Italy: Tenda and Briga in the North, Ventimiglia in the South. Mentone and Roccebrune, which in 1848 had ceased to be part of the Principality of Monaco and set themselves up as independent cities, also became part of France in 1861.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

This strange frontier, which has prevailed up to the present time, constitutes an absurdity also from the economic point of view: it is an obstacle to the free movement of persons and goods and of farm products among the various towns in the region.

A citizen of Tenda or of Briga, in order to go to Ventimiglia, a distance of about 45 kilometers, must go all around through Cuneo and Savona. The products of the Soorpello area, which is less than 20 kilometers from Ventimiglia, must be brought over Braus hill, 1,500 meters high, in order to find their outlet in Nice, while they could be brought directly to Ventimiglia along Bevere river, where, however, no passable road has hitherto been built. The inhabitants of Breglio likewise have to cross two hills more than a thousand meters high (Brouk and Braus hills) in order to go to Nice, and Tenda and Briga hills in order to go to Cuneo; and yet the river Poia, which forms a straight line to Ventimiglia flows through each and every one of these towns. What is more important, the trade between Pisonte and the sea, which could be carried out easily through Tenda Hill and Poia valley, is reduced to zero: the railway, which was built some ten years ago, has hitherto been little active; before and during the war most of its cars were always empty. All this explains the gradual impoverishment of the region, which has not been able to reap any profit from the industrial, commercial and tourist progress of the surrounding territories and is faced with a gradual decrease of its population.

It is quite clear that the question of the unity of our region is to us, its inhabitants, of vital importance; we are anxious to see the end of barriers which have been the cause of our ruin. Moreover, these barriers have been one of the causes also of recent misunderstandings between Italy and France. It is to be remembered that long before fascism, some attempts were made various times to solve the problem peacefully. Two opposite views arose at that time, and still prevail today: The Italian view which favors the exchange of the territory between the zone of Mollieres, that is, the entire zone of the Private Hunting grounds of the King of Italy in the high valleys of Verubia and of Tinea, which remained Italian in spite of the fact that they were situated on the Nice side of the Alps, and the cantons of Breglio, Soorpello and Montone; this would bring the border back to the ridge defined by Mount Clapier and Mount Agel, which would correspond to the old historical frontier between the dioceses and the counts of Ventimiglia and Nice.

The French view would vindicate the territory of Mollieres and of Tenda and Briga, the latter on the basis of plebiscite of 1869 (in which the two communes gave 710 votes to France, as against one with 113 abstentions), and also on the basis of the false assertion that they are geographically French.

The truth, which lies between these opposed views, as found from the geographical and historical data, is that the Role Basin in its entirety forms a true "intermediate zone" between Italy and France. In 1860 the two nations, for strategic motives, divided it between the two of them, thus sacrificing its unity and its welfare for their own military defense. Today, on the eve of a new period of peace and lasting understanding between the two peoples, Italy and France have an excellent opportunity to forget military and political differences and unite their efforts for the reconstruction of the civic life in our town, devastated by the war. They can create there a haven of Italo-French understanding and collaboration, by demilitarizing it and reconstructing its economic unity.

The solution which we propose to the Representatives of Italy, France and the Allied Nations, at the time in which they are about to lay down the bases for the solution of this question in the coming peace treaty between Italy and France, consists of creating an "International Free Zone" comprising the entire Poia Basin. None of the

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It is quite clear that the question of the unity of our region is to us, its inhabitants, of vital importance; we are anxious to see the end of barriers which have been the cause of our ruin. Moreover, these barriers have been one of the causes also of recent misunderstandings between Italy and France. It is to be remembered that long before fascism, some attempts were made various times to solve the problem peacefully. Two opposite views arose at that time, and still prevail today: The Italian view which favors the exchange of the territory between the zone of Mollieres, that is, the entire zone of the Private Hunting grounds of the King of Italy in the high valleys of Verbena and of Tinea, which remained Italian in spite of the fact that they were situated on the Nice side of the Alps, and the cantons of Breil, Sospel and Mentone; this would bring the border back to the ridge defined by Mount Clapier and Mount Agel, which would correspond to the old historical frontier between the dioceses and the context of Ventimiglia and Nice.

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The truth, which lies between those opposed views, as found from the geographical and historical data, is that the Roia Basin in its entirety forms a true "intermediate zone" between Italy and France. In 1860 the two nations, for strategic motives, divided it between the two of them, thus sacrificing its unity and its welfare for their own military defense. Today, on the eve of a new period of peace and lasting understanding between the two peoples, Italy and France have an excellent opportunity to forget military and political differences and unite their efforts for the reconstruction of the civic life in our town, devastated by the war. They can create there a haven of Italo-French understanding and collaboration, by demilitarizing it and reconstructing its economic unity.

The solution which we propose to the Representatives of Italy, France and the Allied Nations, at the time in which they are about to lay down the bases for the solution of this question in the coming peace treaty between Italy and France, consists of creating an "Italian Free Zone" comprising the entire Roia Basin. None of the two States would renounce any of its sovereign rights, and each one of us would retain his nationality; the unity of the region, for purposes of trade, and the creation of a single economic zone, demilitarized, would satisfy the population of the region; the peoples of Italy and France, and would put an end to the controversies on the Italo-French frontier in this sector. These are the details of our scheme:

Free Italian Zone

1. The Free Zone will comprise the territory of all the Italian and French communes in the region of Intensita (see the list of communes)

Sovereignty

2. Italy and France will continue to have full and absolute sovereignty over their respective communes in the Zone.

Customs duties

3. The Italian customs service will be carried out in the limits of the French Zone and city limits of the Italian communes. The French service will analogously take place in the French zone.
4. Italian and French goods will circulate freely throughout the zone.
5. Local goods may be exported free of duty to France and Italy in such quantities as will be established by an Italy-French commission formed for the purpose.
6. Italy and France may grant permits for temporary exports to the Free Zone.
7. Other goods produced in Free Zone will be subject, in order to enter Italy, to the same customs duties as French goods, and to enter France to the same duties as Italian goods.

Passports

8. Documents will be checked in the zone limits.
9. The simple identity card or any similar document will be sufficient to enable Italian subjects or foreign subjects residing in Italy to commute between Italy and the Free Zone. French subjects and foreigners residing in France will commute between France and the Free Zone with a similar document.
10. Those who reside in the Italian communes of the Free Zone may enter France with a pass authorized by the French authorities; and reciprocally, persons residing in the French communes will have the same privilege to enter Italy.

Demilitarization

11. Military installations and troops will be removed from the Free Zone.

Administration

12. The Italian and the French group of communes will be attached for administration purposes to the border provinces, and the prefectural functions will be exercised in each group by a High Commissioner appointed by each government.
13. The French group and the Italian group will elect a Farvier Council, composed of an equal number of members who will have the same functions as the electing provincial

their respective communes in the Zone.

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7. Other goods produced in Free Zone will be subject, in order to enter Italy, to the same customs duties as French goods, and to enter France to the same duties as Italian goods.

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Demilitarization

12. Military installations and troops will be removed from the Free Zone.

Administration

13. The Italian and the French group of communes will be attached for administration purposes to the border provinces, and the prefectural functions will be exercised in each group by a High Commissioner appointed by each government.
14. The French group and the Italian group will elect a Partial Council, composed of an equal number of members who will have the same functions as the existing provincial bodies.
15. The members of the two Partial Councils will form the General Council of the Free Zone which will deal with problems of common interest and will settle all differences. The decisions of the Council of the Free Zone will have to be ratified by the High Commissioners in order to become executive.

Diocese

16. A request will be made to the Vatican for the reconstruction of the ancient diocese of the Intemelian region.

Declassified E.O. 12356 Section 3.3/NNND No. 785016CONCLUSION

The formation of the Free Zone would permit the achievement of two objectives: one of great international political importance and one of elementary justice to the inhabitants of the zone.

It is evident that the Free Zone, once rid of nationalistic movements, of imperialistic overtures and of military counter-measures deriving from these, will be of great value to a sincere and lasting friendship between Italy and France.

The two sister nations will then find, in the free intellectual and commercial communion, as well as in the friendship of their citizens residing in the zone, a point of contact which will not fail to enhance the mutual understanding on any future problems of interest to them.

We, the inhabitants of the zone, can finally enjoy the free passage of our valleys and the possibility of giving our region that welfare which artificial barriers have hitherto denied, and of repairing the immense damage that the war has brought upon us.

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Civil Affairs Section

With reference to your 36/PHC/014.2 of 31st August with attached report in connection with a French Committee in regard to the establishment of a free, economic zone in the Boia Valley, I agree that the Sindaco should not have associated themselves with this movement without the authority of the Prefect of the Province and Allied Military Government. If he had any such proposals to put forward they should have been put up through the Prefect who in turn would have referred them through Allied Military Government to the Italian Government.

2. In themselves the proposals if practicable might be a useful step towards the solution of the problem involved in French claims to this area but I think it most likely that the Italian Government would not accept the arrangement.

6.ix.45

H. Hopkinson
Political Advisor (B)

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