

Buon Compleanno, Italia!

Happy 165th Birthday, Italy!



On this day, March 17, in 1861, King Vittorio Emanuele II (1820-1878) of Sardinia became the first King of united Italy since the 6th century.

Born in Turin as the eldest son of Charles Albert, Prince of Carignano, and Maria Theresa of Austria, he fought in the First Italian War of Independence (1848-49) before being made King of Piedmont-Sardinia following his father's abdication. He appointed Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, as his Prime Minister, and he consolidated his position by suppressing the republican left.

Vittorio Emanuele supported the Expedition of the Thousand (1860–1861) led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, which resulted in the rapid fall of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Southern Italy. However, Victor Emmanuel halted Garibaldi when he appeared ready to attack Rome, still under the Papal States, as it was under French protection. In 1860, Tuscany, Modena, Parma and Romagna decided to side with Sardinia-Piedmont, and Vittorio Emanuele then marched victoriously in the Marche and Umbria after the victorious battle of Castelfidardo over the Papal forces. He subsequently met Garibaldi at Teano, receiving from him the control of southern Italy and becoming the first King of Italy.

In 1866, the Third Italian War of Independence allowed Italy to annex Veneto. In 1870, Victor Emmanuel also took advantage of the Prussian victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War to taking over the Papal States after the French withdrew. He entered Rome on September 20, 1870 and set up the new capital there on July 2, 1871. He died in Rome in 1878, and was buried in the Pantheon.

The Italian national Vittorio Emanuele II monument in Rome, containing the Altare della Patria, was built in his honor.

And so March 17, 1861 marks the birthdate of the modern day Italy that we know today.