

The Mediterranean vocation of the University of Bari. Foreign female students

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Abstract: Since its formation the University of Bari was born by declaring distinctly its willingness to open up to the East. But until then, and still for long time, the opening up of the University of Bari to the Mediterranean countries does not go far the Adriatic sea, because the rest of the Mediterranean sea was a continent, precisely Africa, that is considered only a territory of conquest, where “the Italian imperial power” had to overflow. After a short analysis of trends that characterize story of University of Bari, in this essays we are focusing especially on the last twenty years, considering the most relevant trends of the presence of female university foreign students from Mediterranean countries. The analysis is referred also to presences of foreign students, especially female ones, in Apulia university system and in others Italian universities. This presence is related with the more wide migration flows.

Keywords: Foreign students, woman, university, migration

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Since its formation to the Eighties

Since its formation (1924), the University of Bari was born by declaring distinctly its willingness to open up to the East.

It is very interesting an application for some information written by the Chancellor of the University to the Illustrious Prefect of the Province of Bari, sent on 8th January 1925. This document clearly speaks about this opening. This is the Chancellor's application:

Among the ambitions of the University of Bari, the most important one consists in attracting the higher number of registrations and students from the East in order to bring more prestige to our national culture. (...) But I am worried that, among the foreign students who come to our University, someone may be factious and dangerous. Therefore, I take care to enclose the list of these students and I pray you to ask the respective consuls some detailed information about their social and political conduct. (...).

So, with all the necessary precautions, right from the beginning, Bari opens "its lecture halls" to foreign students and put itself up for a centre of attraction for Balkan-Adriatic countries.² Until then, and still for long time, the opening up of the University of Bari to the Mediterranean countries does not go far the Adriatic sea, because the rest of the Mediterranean sea was a continent, precisely Africa, that is considered only a territory of conquest, where "the Italian imperial power" had to overflow.

Nevertheless, this opening up, though limited, is designed to be disappointed from the beginning, since, among the first twenty-nine foreign students, only five come from the other bank of the Adriatic sea (4 from Yugoslavia and 1 from Dalmatia), while all the others come from the East European countries, where the presages of the future race laws and of the incumbent "disaster" upon all people of Jewish origin, were already

² If we refer to Vittorio Marzi's work, we can notice that there was not an inaugural address delivered by this or that Chancellor of the University of Bari in the Twenties or Thirties, and this address did not refer to this "mission" of the University of Bari. Nevertheless, a long time before the University was born (at the end of November 1921), in a parliamentary inquiry addressed to the Minister for Education (the first subscriber was the senator Chimenti), a lot of politicians, all senators, asked information about the Government's intention to create the University in Bari, "for a long time asked by interested people", and remark that the birth of this university was «made necessary by the Italian renewed peaceful mission of civilisation and culture in Adriatic countries and Balkans" (2009, p. 41).

perceived. It is no accident that in a very short time these students “disappear” even from the more and more lined up Italian fascist republic. In any cases, among these students, women are absent, but they begin to appear among the registered students only during the first Thirties, even if they are a very limited number and come especially from East European countries (in the academic year 1934-35 among the eight registered women only one comes from Albania).

In short, if we observe these data, we notice that the University of Bari, during its first ten years, has not managed to attract a satisfying number of foreign students. So, even its vocation to look “beyond the Adriatic sea” is unsatisfied, especially as regarding the group of foreign female students.

This situation is also confirmed in the Forties, a period in which the number of foreign students is very low despite the several courses of study offered by the University. Even a comparison to the trend of the other Italian universities (Yearbooks of the University of Bari) shows a lower “force of attraction” of the University of Bari. Referring to all the courses of study which are also in Bari, the students of the University of Bari represent the 7% of the total number of registered students in Italy. But the percentage of foreign students in Bari is only the 0,1%. A percentage that is lower than the percentage of the other Italian universities, even if this is however limited (0,7%).

Within this already low presence of foreign students registered at the University of Bari, it is in any case marginal the presence of foreign female students who carry on coming especially from East Europe.

The Fifties mark a change of rhythm, even if partial, compared to the previous background. In the period of post-fascism and post-war, Greek students begin their movements and they will be, for a long time, the larger group of foreign students registered at the University of Bari. The presence of these new students allow also women “at last” to arrive from the Adriatic banks.

In the Sixties, the trend of the previous decade becomes more evident. The total number of foreign students becomes very high, because the number of courses of study increases a lot. There is also a consolidation of the presence of Greek students (they represent the 96% of the total number of foreign registered students). This trend is also confirmed, even if in a not so marked way, if we consider the other Italian universities. And among the registered Greek students at Bari (they are 305) the percentage of female students is more than 16%. At the end of the Sixties, if we consider the 56

female students registered at Bari, 49 are from Greece, 1 from Yugoslavia and 1 from Austria.

The Seventies and Eighties confirm the trend of the previous decade. It's in the Seventies that the large number of foreign students from Greece, who are still the larger group of registered foreign students, seems to be the joint effect of elements of expulsion, linked to the "colonel dictatorship" (1967-74)³, and elements of attraction, linked to the relative geographic Mediterranean proximity, to the reputation of some faculties (especially Medicine and Agriculture) and to the greatest dynamism of the Italian job market compared to the Greek one. This process is further highlighted by a sort of "friend chain" which makes new students move to Bari, friends of students already registered at the University of Bari.

Therefore, the larger number of courses of study at the University of Bari, which now has got all the humanistic faculties, gives the *feminization* of the University⁴ a great boost, even as regarding its foreign group.

Since the Nineties to nowadays. Background and trends

In this essays we are focusing especially on the last twenty years, considering the relevant trends.

In 1990 the presence of female students from Mediterranean countries is this one⁵. The female students from Mediterranean countries⁶ registered at the University of Bari are 108 and represent the 79% of the total number of female students registered during that year. Most of all are from Greece and only 2 from Albania (while male students from the same area represent the 83%, together with a considerable number of Greeks).

³ The Italian Communist Party and Italian CGIL represent, in this specific historical period, a solid "bridge" which allows, trough Greek Communist groups, young people, who are politically "at risk", to be ferried to Italy.

⁴ A further boost is given by the formation the "low secondary school" for all children, which appeals a lot of female students to universities, especially Italian girls, addressed to all faculties with school opportunities.

⁵ The data here referred have been given by the Statistical and Informatics Centre (C.S.I.) of the University "Aldo Moro" in Bari. The little difference between these data and those given by Istat and then by Miur, relating to same years, does not change the meaning of this research.

⁶ Among the Mediterranean countries we have deliberately excluded Spain because it has a more continental relationship with our country. Nevertheless, the presence of Spanish students at the University of Bari has always been very marginal.

After five years, Greek female students are 234, increasing by 120% (while male students from Greece have increased only by 65%). Even though they are few in terms of absolute numbers, female students from Albania increase considerably and change from 2 to 33 (even male students from Albania change from 3 to 50 during the same five years, and this fact witnesses a more widespread process which was starting up). There are also 5 female students from Balkans and even 1 from Malta and 1 from Morocco.

This trend opens up to a process that will consolidate during the following years. As a matter of fact, in 2000 foreign female students increase and reach the number of 484, and the 93% comes from Balkans (students from Albania are 123 and still increase, compared to the previous period, students from Greece are 316 and they also increase, and then 3 from Bosnia, 3 from Croatia, 3 from Macedonia and 2 from Serbia).

A trend confirmed even among male students: in addition to those students from Balkans, there are also 1 from Cyprus, 2 from Morocco and 3 from Tunisia. As regarding male students, a new movement from Northern Africa starts now, even if *timidly*, and in the following years it will become a female phenomenon, too.

Concerning the last years, in 2005 foreign female students registered at the University of Bari are 569 and represent the 61% of the total number of foreign students, even though they still represent only a low percentage (1,4%) of the total percentage of female students at the University. But from the first days of 2000 on, the equilibrium reached in the previous period change significantly. The number of registrations of Greek students begins to decrease, and even that of female students, whose number decrease so much that it will represent the 31% of the total percentage of foreign female students, by losing more than thirty points in only five years (in 2000 they represented the 65,3% of the total percentage of female foreign students registered at the University of Bari).

But this decrease was balanced with the registrations of female students from other Balkan-Adriatic countries, especially from Albania, whose number will go past the 43% of the total number of registered foreign female students (versus the 25% in 2000). So, female students from Greece, Albania and other countries beyond the Adriatic sea represent, together, more than the 79% of the total number (431).

In the same year, there is a little number of registered female students who come also from Mediterranean countries, but it is recorded a number

even lower than 2% of the total number of foreign female students (they are only 8) and are from Egypt (2), Morocco (5) and Tunisia (1).

This is a remarkable female trend because, as regarding male students, despite the general decrease (in 2005 they are only 414), Greek students still represent the larger number of the registered students, 181, the 44% of the total number. Then, there are students from Albania, more than the 31%, and from the other Balkan-Adriatic countries, about the 3%. On the other hand, as regarding the Mediterranean Africa, the exiguity of student's number is similar to the recorded datum of female students, seeing that students from those countries are only a little more than the 1% (4 from Morocco and 2 from Tunisia).

At last, the process confirms the trend stressed in the immediately previous years. The registrations of female students at the University of Bari increase as regarding both absolute and relative values: they are 579 people and represent the 64% of foreign students. Greek female students go on "losing weight" by representing only the 11% of the total number of foreign female students, while girls from Albania increase their own "weight" (about 42%), and even those students from countries on the other side of the Adriatic sea, who are, in this year, 44 (almost the 8% of the total number). It is evident that the decrease of arrivals from Greece is balanced with the increase of registrations by girls from the other Adriatic countries, so female students, despite a relative decrease compared to 2005, represent however the 67% of the total number.

The number of female students from Mediterranean Africa increases, even if only a bit. They are 14 (12 from Morocco and 2 from Tunisia). But there are no female students from Cyprus, Malta or Turkey. Among the boys, the number of Greek students decreases and even the number of students from Albania, but only a bit, while students from Balkans increase, only few boys. Even the number of registered students from Mediterranean Africa increase a bit (they are 10).

We observe that, despite the weak attraction power of the University of Bari towards foreign students, it is relevant its relationship with female students from Mediterranean countries. Of course, we have to highlight the fact that while Mediterranean countries, i.e. Cyprus, Malta, Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, ignore Bari almost completely, the real point of interest is the Adriatic sea. During the last twenty years, at the University of Bari the number of female students have increased compared to the number of male students, but we have noticed

that these girls come from East Europe in large number and especially from Balkan-Adriatic countries.

We are witnessing a great *feminization* of students' migratory waves, a process in line with what happens in more general movements. This datum become more typical if we consider a *new female protagonism* which characterizes the migratory movements. In the wide range of female students there are different women and girls. Those who arrive here to rejoin their family (this is a typical situation of people who arrive from East European countries⁷ and, only in part, from African countries), those who arrive alone but included in larger migratory movements, and at last those girls who arrive alone by starting these movements. The last ones are the new protagonists of the migratory waves of students.

If we still pay attention to the last twenty years, but we also look at the choices made by all the *Mediterranean* female students, as regarding the different faculties, we can notice equally definite processes. In order to catch the sense and the dynamics of these choices we have collected the faculties in rather similar groups: Language-Literature-Pedagogy, Medicine-Pharmacy, Business-Right-Politics, Sciences⁸.

In 1990, the only 2 girls from Albania are registered at the faculty of Business and Arts, while the 106 Greek girls are registered 43 at Medicine-Pharmacy, 41 at Arts, 11 at Sciences and 8 at Business-Right. In this way, the number of Mediterranean girls is "sold out".

After five years, female students from Mediterranean countries became 272 and are registered at all faculties of the University of Bari. The 33 girls from Albania are concentrated in the Business-Right area (26 are registered), while the girls registered to the other faculties are few. Considering the 234 Greek girls, only 33 are in the same area, while 78 are in the Medicine-Pharmacy area, 76 in Language-Literature-Pedagogy area and 47 in the scientific area. During this year, there are 6 registrations from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Medicine), Croatia (Modern languages), Malta

⁷ These girls come especially from countries where, during the last decades, a lot of women came from and, in a lower number, men, who in Italy have found a job in the area of welfare services, so they are healthcare workers for the elderly. At the moment of the departure, these women have left young children at home, who have rejoined their mothers only when they have grown and when their mothers' economic situation has improved.

⁸ The groups are these ones: Language-Literature-Pedagogy group: Liberal arts, Modern languages and Foreign Literature, Education; Business-Right-Politics group: Business, Right, Politics; Medicine-Pharmacy group: Pharmacy, Medicine, Veterinary medicine; Scientific group: Agriculture, Biotechnology, Mathematics, Physics and Natural sciences.

(Modern languages), Morocco (Natural Sciences), Serbia-Montenegro (Politics).

At the beginning of the new decade, the more and more registered girls from Albania go on preferring the faculties of the Business-Right area (73), Medicine-Pharmacy (24), Language-Literature (20), and only a few Sciences (only 11). Greek female students, even increased in number, go on preferring, instead of the previous group, Medicine-Pharmacy (134), Language-Literature-Pedagogy (101), Business-Right (42), Sciences (39). The other 11 girls (3 from Bosnia, 2 from Croatia, 3 from Macedonia, 2 from Serbia) are divided between Modern languages and Medicine (only 2 Business and Natural Sciences).

Still in 2005 Greek female students carry on choosing especially faculties of the Medicine-Pharmacy group (94), then Language-Literature-Pedagogy (26), Sciences (22), Business-Right-Politics (15). Students from Albania confirm their tendency towards faculties of Business-Right-Politics group (112 are registered), then Language-Literature-Pedagogy (53), Medicine-Pharmacy (51), and at last Sciences (20). Girls from other Balkan-Adriatic countries choose Language-Literature (19), Business-Right-Politics (14) and only 3 Medicine-Pharmacy. The scientific group is absent. The few female students from Morocco and Tunisia choose especially faculties of the Business-Right-Politics group (4), there is also 1 girl registered at Modern languages and 2 at Pharmacy.

In 2010, female students from Albania, the larger group at the University, carry on confirming the tendency toward the Business-Right-Politics area, chosen by 124 of them (50%), then 57 choose Language-Literature-Pedagogy, 51 choose Medicine-Pharmacy and at last 15 the scientific group. Greek students confirm, on the contrary, their historic tendency towards the faculties of the Medicine-Pharmacy area (they are 44, so the 71% of the total number of these students), then, so distant, the other three areas with 6 registered girls each one. The other students from other Balkan countries are registered, more than half, at the faculties of Language-Literature-Pedagogy (especially Modern languages), and then at Business-Right-Politics and only a few at Medicine-Pharmacy. The 15 female students from the Mediterranean, 12 from Morocco, 2 from Tunisia and 1 from Cyprus are divided between Language-Literature and Medicine-Pharmacy.

Foreign female students do not seem to be attracted to the faculties with school opportunities like many Italian girls; instead, they seem to prefer

those faculties that direct towards freelance jobs (the same goes for students from Albania) and towards medical career (like Greek girls who confirm the historic tendency, even male, towards this faculty).

But the interest in the faculty of Modern languages is increasing, because it perhaps represents an opportunity for these young women to put up for the area of linguistic and cultural mediation. Choices made by students from African countries are too recent and numbers are still too low to advance explanatory hypothesis. But we can suppose reasonably that the same observations made for other origins go also for these ones, so that their university choices are explicated with their occupational intention of working as mediators or doctors in the medical area. Surely, these choices would be better inquired through a qualitative search to analyse their reasons, but also their ideas of job market, both Italian and of their home country, according to their future plan of permanence or return.⁹

Some comparisons among regional systems

It is advisable now to make a quick comparison, by considering the last years (2005-2009), between the University system in Apulia and the system in three regions, in Abruzzo, Calabria and Sicily¹⁰, whose position can be attractive to Mediterranean female students.

First of all, we have to remark that, inside the university system in Apulia¹¹, the University of Bari, before quoted, shows noteworthy numbers of foreign female students but also of the total number of registered foreign students. The only year 2005 represents the 73% of foreign female students registered at different universities in Apulia (and the 71% of the total number of foreign male students). If we enter into details, at the University of Bari, we have the registrations of the 76 % of Greek female students (and of the 70% of Greek male students), of the 75% of girls from Albania (and of the 65% of boys from Albania), of the 93% of girls from Balkan-Adriatic countries. The ratios which regard girls from Northern Africa

⁹ A similar analysis has been carried out in a search personally conducted last year whose results have been discussed in a recent publication (Carrera, 2011).

¹⁰ In this analysis, I referred to the data by Miur, as regarding the years 2005-06 and 2009-10 (because this is the most recent datum in hand).

¹¹ The university system in Apulia includes, besides the University of Bari, other four universities: the Polytechnic in Bari, the Jean Monnet University in Casamassima, the University in Foggia and the University in Lecce (now Salento University).

countries are still marked because they are all registered at the University of Bari (while the ratio which regards male students is more balanced).

These ratios are the same, but only decreased in some points, after five years, and this fact witnesses a growth of the other universities that however does not bring the quantitative weight into question.

If we compare the academic years 2005-06 and 2009-10 (Tables 1 and 2), we notice clearly the widespread fall of the Greek female students' presence. As regarding female students, but also male students, in Apulia in terms of both absolute and relative values, the registrations halve, as well as in Calabria and, even though in a softened way, in Sicily.

On the contrary in Abruzzo, absolute numbers even increase, even if the relative weight of the percentage halves.

Totally different is the registration trend of female students from Albania. In Apulia they increase, even if only a few units, and present themselves as the heftiest ethnic group among all the foreign groups of registered students at the University. By themselves, they reach the 43%. Even in the other regional systems, both their absolute number and their percentage weight increase, and in Abruzzo the last one triples. But, even in this region, female students from Albania are the same as in Apulia (the University of Bari has got a larger number of registered female students from Albania than the other regional universities here considered).

The same observations can be referred to girls from other Balkan-Adriatic countries who however only in Apulia confirm a relative significant presence.

We have to make a different observation as regarding girls from Mediterranean Africa. Even though their number is always too low in all the regional systems here considered and they are never more than 5%, their number increases significantly in a period of only four years, even threefold and fourfold compared to 2005.

But there is a distinctive feature of these particular presences: a large number of female students from Northern Africa gather especially in Apulia, a lower number in Abruzzo, but not so many in regions like Calabria and Sicily, which are geographically nearby and easily reachable by these students.

Table 1. Foreign university students in 2005- Italian regions

Italian Regions	Apulia		Abruzzo		Calabria		Sicily	
	Female <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	Female <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	Female <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	Female <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
Total foreign students	751 (100,0)	1.344 (100,0)	228 (100,0)	502 (100,0)	108 (100,0)	208 (100,0)	295 (100,0)	540 (100,0)
Greece	207 (27,6)	468 (34,8)	127 (55,7)	318 (62,3)	22 (20,4)	59 (28,4)	55 (18,6)	149 (30,0)
Albania	433 (43,3)	524 (39,0)	42 (18,4)	67 (13,3)	13 (12,0)	19 (9,1)	11 (3,7)	16 (3,6)
Balkan-Adriatic countries	41 (5,5)	58 (4,3)	4 (0,2)	11 (2,2)	1 (0,9)	1 (0,5)	3 (1,0)	4 (0,7)
Mediterranean Africa	10 (1,3)	20 (1,5)	4 (0,2)	9 (2,0)	3 (2,8)	6 (2,9)	6 (2,0)	19 (3,5)
Turkish	0 (0,0)	1 (0,1)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	2 (1,0)	2 (0,4)
Cyprus	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)
Malta	0 (0,0)	1 (0,1)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	1 (0,1)

Table 2. Foreign università students in 2010 – italian regions

Italian Regions	Apulia		Abruzzo		Calabria		Sicily	
	F <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	F <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	F <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)	F <i>N</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
Total foreign students	791 (100,0)	1.312 (100,0)	652 (100,0)	1.201 (100,0)	257 (100,0)	485 (100,0)	347 (100,0)	685 (100,0)
Greece	101 (12,8)	246 (18,7)	154 (23,6)	379 (31,6)	11 (4,3)	33 (6,8)	37 (10,7)	109 (15,9)
Albania	341 (43,1)	533 (40,6)	145 (22,2)	217 (18,1)	25 (9,7)	40 (8,2)	28 (8,1)	40 (5,8)
Balkan-Adriatic countries	56 (7,1)	76 (5,8)	17 (2,6)	31 (2,6)	3 (1,2)	7 (1,4)	11 (3,2)	15 (2,2)
Mediterranean Africa	24 (3,0)	40 (3,1)	18 (2,7)	37 (3,0)	10 (3,9)	29 (6,0)	17 (4,9)	42 (6,1)
Turkish	0 (0,0)	1 (0,1)	0 (0,0)	1 (0,1)	0 (0,0)	1 (0,2)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)
Cyprus	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	1 (0,0)	1 (0,1)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)
Malta	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)	0 (0,0)

Conclusion

The number of foreign female students from Mediterranean countries and registered at the University of Bari (as well as foreign male students) is still very low and represent only a very low percentage of the total number of registered female students at the University (about 1%). Therefore, despite the data analysis shows that foreign students, registered at the University of Bari, come particularly from Mediterranean area, it is also plain that this number does not correspond to the fostered University expectation towards this *opening*.

Not only as regarding the presence of students from Mediterranean countries but also generally, these numbers let think of a weaker appeal to Bari than the other important universities in Italy. Perhaps it is not only a weak appeal of the University as regarding the courses of study, but maybe Bari does not manage to stand comparison with other Italian cities as regarding life conditions and opportunities, even free time. Indeed, it is clear that Bari and, in general, the Apulia university system do not stand comparison with the bigger Italian universities (Rome, Milan, Turin) which are surely more attractive as regarding both the courses of study and especially the prestige and the opportunities of the cities where these universities are situated. But, at the same time, it is also evident that both Bari and the “Apulia system” seem to be totally appropriate and “attractive” when they are compared to other regional cities and universities which are geographically more nearby.

Therefore, we cannot overlook that the choices made by students linked to wider migratory phenomena, and so they are affected by different elements that regard both the appeal of the arrival country and the expulsion factors from the departure country. If we consider the first ones, the welcome conditions in the different regions are important, because they consolidate the migratory movements already settled in those regions, but it's also important the quality of job market. Job is very significant, first in the migratory plans and then in the following choices of stay. Then, we cannot here include all the instances in which the requested permits for study or the registrations at the University hide the entrance of foreign people who are headed toward jobs for undeclared work which no earnings are declared.

In Italy, particularly in Apulia, and especially in Bari, students' migrations have always followed the larger migratory movements. This is

the situation of migration from Albania and recently from African countries, except Greek students whose arrival to Bari has never been considered part of a larger migratory movements, as confirmed by the fact that their choices of stay have been relatively contained, especially when political conditions regarding expulsion failed.

But there is no doubt that the presence of foreign students in Bari, as in other territories, can consolidate a quality presence, strengthen the migratory movement, and, according a circular trend, build the condition for the stay choices and for the settlements' formation of new migrants' communities.

In spite of these processes' importance, the new element of migratory movements, not only students' waves, of the last years is the steady *feminization* of foreign students. In Bari, as in the whole Italy, the new protagonists are women, on the line to the new migratory models where women, with or in search of valuable qualifications, very often start migratory movements (against the old model of the family rejoining or of women migratory movements in search of a job of low or very low qualification) (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004). But we have to highlight that the most restrictive laws for family rejoining, especially concerning people from extra-European countries, make an hypothesis plausible according to, behind a lot of registrations by female students from African countries, there is the intention to get a temporary residence permit.

If we want to review, even on a temporary basis, we can conclude that the University of Bari has managed, only in part, to fulfil its desired vocation to look "beyond the Adriatic sea", and less towards the East Mediterranean countries. However, according the present trends, these openings up are destined not only to be confirmed but also to become more solid and interesting as regarding the quantity.

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