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# THE ITALIAN ASTRONAUTICAL SECTOR AND THE A.I.R., THE ITALIAN ROCKET ASSOCIATION

**Abstract**

This paper analyses the circumstances and events that led the Italian scientific community to encourage the astronautical sector in Italy at the end of the Second World War. Particularly important was the contribution of the A.I.R., Associazione Italiana Razzi, founded in 1951 for the purpose of extending rocket and space culture. At the end of the World War I, modern rocket science was already going forward in a number of countries. In the U.S.A., Robert Goddard launched the first liquid propellant rocket in 1926; in Germany, Hermann Oberth, Wernher von Braun, Karl Becher and Eugen Sänger worked in the Peenemünde and Trauen centres on developing the V-2 rockets. In Italy, during the fascist regime activities focused on the aeronautical sector, although since 1938 eminent scientists Gaetano A. Crocco, Antonio Ferri, Luigi Crocco and Antonio Eula had been carrying out research in the subsonic aerodynamic wind tunnel at Guidonia at the D.S.S.E., the Air Force Ministry's High Directorate for Studies and Tests. In order to increase technical development, in 1937 Hitler and Mussolini created the Achse Berlin-Rom auch in der Luftfahrttechnik, the Axis Berlin-Rome in the sector of aeronautical technologies. This pact brought about a closer link between Italy and Germany with the exchange of technicians and experts. At that time the most prominent organizations in the field were the two major aeronautical associations: the Lilienthal-Gesellschaft, in Germany, and the A.I.D.A., the Italian Association of Aerotechnics in Italy. At the end of the war, Italy was in a highly critical economic and social situation that also had repercussions on the aeronautical sector; some scientists, Antonio Ferri, Angelo Miele and Carlo Riparbelli among them, were forced to move to the U.S.A. It was precisely at this tragic time that other scientists, among them Antonio Eula, were courageous enough to found a new cultural association called the A.I.R., the Italian Rocket Association, to inject new vigour into the Italian rocket and space sector. This paper recalls these years, before and after the World War II, in order to highlight the work done by the A.I.R., a small association that succeeded in giving important impetus to development in the astronautical field, and not in Italy alone. Antonio Eula and Eugen Sänger whose firm friendship went back to the years of the World War II, were among those who, in 1951, founded the I.A.F., the International Astronautical Federation of which Sänger was the first President.