

# Vittorio Emanuele II

**Victor Emanuel II** (Vittorio Emanuele Maria Alberto Eugenio Ferdinando Tommaso; 14 March 1820 – 9 January 1878) was the [King of Piedmont](#), [Savoy](#), and [Sardinia](#) from 1849 to 1861. On 17 March 1861, he assumed the title [King of Italy](#) to become the first king of a [united Italy](#), a title he held until his death in 1878. The Italians gave him the epithet [Father of the Fatherland](#) ([Italian: Padre della Patria](#)).

Victor Emanuel was born in 1820 the eldest son of [Charles Albert of Sardinia](#) and [Maria Theresa of Austria](#). His father was King of Sardinia. He lived for some years of his youth in [Florence](#) and showed an early interest in politics, the military, and sports. In 1842 he married his cousin [Adelaide of Austria](#). He was styled as the [Duke of Savoy](#) prior to becoming King of Sardinia. He was involved in the [First Italian War of Independence](#) and fought in the front line at the battles of [Pastrengo](#), Santa Lucia, [Goito](#) and [Custoza](#).

He became King of Piedmont in 1849 when his father had abdicated the throne after a humiliating military defeat by the Austrians at [Novara](#). Victor Emanuel was immediately able to obtain a rather favorable armistice at Vignale by the Austrian commander, [Radetzky](#). The treaty, however, was not ratified by the Piedmontese chamber, and Vittorio Emanuele retaliated by firing Prime Minister Claudio Gabriele de Launay, replacing him with [Massimo D'Azeglio](#). After new elections, the peace with Austria was accepted by the new Chamber of Deputies. In 1849 he also fiercely suppressed the revolt in [Genoa](#), defining the rebels as a "vile and infected race of canailles".

In 1852, Victor Emanuel II gave Count [Camillo di Cavour](#) the title of Prime Minister. This turned out to be a wise choice because Cavour was a political mastermind and a major player in Italian unification in his own right. Victor Emanuel II soon became the symbol of the Italian [Risorgimento](#), the Italian unification movement. He was especially popular in the Kingdom of Sardinia because of his respect for the new constitution and his liberal reforms.

## Crimean War

Following Victor Emanuel's advice, Cavour joined Britain and France in the [Crimean War](#) against Russia. Cavour was reluctant to go to war due to the power of Russia at the time and the expense of doing so. Victor Emanuel, however, was convinced of the rewards to be gained from the alliance created between Britain and, more importantly, France.

After successfully seeking British support and ingratiating himself with France and Napoleon III at the [Congress of Paris in 1856](#) at the end of the war, Count Cavour arranged a secret meeting with the French emperor. In 1858, they met at [Plombières-les-Bains](#) (in [Lorraine](#)), where they agreed that if the French were to help Piedmont combat Austria, which still occupied [Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia](#) in northern Italy, France would be awarded [Nice](#) and [Savoy](#).

At the time, Victor Emanuel had become a universal symbol of the Italian [Risorgimento](#), the movement pushing towards the unification of Italy.

## Wars of Italian Unification [Italian Wars of Independence](#)

The Italo-French campaign against Austria in 1859 started successfully. However, sickened by the casualties of the war and worried about the mobilisation of Prussian troops, Napoleon III

secretly made a treaty with [Franz Joseph of Austria](#) at Villafranca whereby Piedmont would only gain [Lombardy](#). France did not as a result receive the promised Nice and Savoy, but Austria did keep [Venetia](#), a major setback for the Piedmontese, in no small part because the treaty had been prepared without their knowledge. After several quarrels about the outcome of the war, Cavour resigned, and the king had to find other advisors. France indeed only gained Nice and Savoy after the [Treaty of Turin](#) was signed in March 1860 after Cavour has been reinstalled as Prime Minister and a deal with the French was struck for plebiscites to take place in the Central Italian Duchies.

Later that same year, Victor Emanuel II sent his forces to fight the papal army at Castelfidardo and drove the Pope into [Vatican City](#). Victor Emanuel II's success at these goals got him [excommunicated](#) from the Catholic Church. Then, [Giuseppe Garibaldi](#) conquered Sicily and Naples, and Sardinia-Piedmont grew even larger. On 17 March 1861 the Kingdom of Italy was officially established and Victor Emanuel II became its king.

Victor Emanuel supported [Giuseppe Garibaldi's Expedition of Thousand](#) (1860-1861), which resulted in the rapid fall of the [Kingdom of the Two Sicilies](#) in southern Italy. However, the King halted Garibaldi when he appeared ready to attack Rome, still under the [Papal States](#), as it was under French protection. In 1860, through local authoritarian plebiscites, Tuscany, Modena, Parma and Romagna decided to side with Sardinia-Piedmont. Victor Emanuel then marched victoriously in the [Marche](#) and [Umbria](#) after the victorious [battle of Castelfidardo](#) (1860) over the Papal forces, after which he gained a Papal [excommunication](#).

The King subsequently met with Garibaldi at [Teano](#), receiving from him the control of southern Italy. Another series of plebiscites in the occupied lands resulted in the proclamation of Victor Emanuel as the first [King of Italy](#) by the new Parliament of [unified Italy](#), on 17 March 1861. [Turin](#) became the capital of the new state. Only Rome, [Veneto](#), and [Trentino](#) remained to be conquered.

### **Completion of the unification [Third Italian Independence](#) War**

The [Third Italian Independence](#) War started in 1866 when Victor Emanuel allied with [Prussia](#) against Germany, and although not victorious in the Italian theater, he managed anyway to receive Veneto after the Austrian defeat against Prussia.

In 1870, after two failed attempts by Garibaldi, he also took advantage of the Prussian victory over France in the [Franco-Prussian War](#) to capture Rome after the French withdrew. He entered Rome on 20 September 1870 and set up the new capital there on 2 July 1871, after a temporary move to [Florence](#) in 1864. The new Royal residence was the [Quirinal Palace](#).

The rest of Victor Emanuel II's reign was much quieter. After the Kingdom of Italy was established he decided to continue on as King Victor Emanuel II instead of Victor Emanuel I of Italy. This was a terrible move as far as public relations went as it was not indicative of the fresh start that the Italian people wanted and suggested that Sardinia-Piedmont had taken over the Italian Peninsula, rather than unifying it. Despite this mishap, the remainder of Victor Emanuel II's reign was consumed by wrapping up loose ends and dealing with economic and cultural issues.

Victor Emanuel died in Rome in 1878, just after the reversal of excommunication by [Pope Pius IX](#)'s envoys. He was buried in the [Pantheon](#). His successor was his son [Umberto I](#).