What obstacles did the Italian unification movement face during 1815-70? How were these obstacles overcome? S6A Yip Ka Yan

Since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Italy was divided into eight states were put under Austria or foreign rule, except the Kingdom of Sardinia. In fact, there was not a country called Italy, it existed on the map as geographical expression. During the Italian unification movement, it had to face a lot of obstacles such as foreign intervention, disunity of the Italian, weak national feeling among the Italian states. Both the serious obstacles hindered the Italian to unify their country. It made Italian to overcome all obstacles with nearly six decades in order to complete the unification movement. In 1870, she finally completed her unification through policies and the element of luck.

Since the powers divided Italy into eight states, and Austria controlled most of them. It seemed Austria had played a major role to hinder the Italian unification. Then, the first obstacle was the intervention of Austria. Austria made use of her influence to stop the unification in order to protect her interest. Austria was a multi-racial empire. She must suppress the Italian unification movement in order to keep her country in stable. Austria directly ruled Lombardy and Venetia. She also ruled Parma, Modena and Tuscany indirectly. Although Piedmont-Sardinia tried to conquer these states, it was defeated by Austria as the military inferiority of Piedmont-Sardinia. Therefore, it was hard for the Italians to unify the country herself by military force. However, Cavour got the help from France to defeat Austria in 1860 and get back Lombardy. Later, she also got back Venetia through Austro-Prussian War in 186 as she allied with Prussia.

France also was an obstacle in foreign intervention. In 1849, France sent troops to Rome in order to protect the Pope. It hindered the Piedmont-Sardinia to unify the country in final stage. In1870, Franco-Prussian War broke out and France called back the troops in Rome to fight against Prussia. It helped Italy to complete the unification movement without defeated the French garrison in Rome. The foreign countries controlled the Italian states and intervened Italian affair brought a great obstacle to the unification.

The second obstacle was the disunity of the Italian. Having different political view had made the unification movement more difficult. For example, Mazzini set up the Society of Young Italy in 1830 and aimed to unite Italy under a republic. Other Italian wanted to set up a constitutional government under the leadership of an Italian king or a confederation of Italian states under the Pope’s leadership. Although they both wanted to expel foreign rule and build their country, their different aim made them hard to work closely. In 1848, Piedmont-Sardinia attacked Austria in order to unity the northern Italian states. During the war, the southern Italian states didn’t give
any respond or even sent troops to help Piedmont against Austria. Therefore, disunity of Italian made it hard to complete the unification. French garrison in Rome after July 1849 showed the failure of Republicanism. The Pope withdrew the support in early 1849 showed the failure of building a Federation under the Pope. Therefore, Italians knew that the only way to unify the country, they could only support Piedmont. After they solved the different political view, Italian co-operated together and achieved the unification.

The last obstacle of unification of Italian was weak national feeling. When Piedmont started a war with Austria, other Italian states didn't take any action to help her. The defeat of Piedmont showed it lack of support from Italian. Italian was still ruled by foreign powers, they were senseless of unify Italy. Since 1831, Mazzini set up by Society of Young Italy in order to promote republicanism. At the same, he also promoted the nationalist feeling among the Italian. Though his republican experiment failed in 1849, it awaked Italian. In 1860, three Italian states, Parma, Modena and Tuscany held a plebiscite to join Piedmont-Sardinia. Later in 1861, Garibaldi as a patriot conquered Sicilies with his thousand red shirts. All of the above cases showed the national feeling had been strengthened among the Italian. Therefore, an obstacle of weak national feeling among Italian was overcame.

In conclusion, compared with the above obstacles, we could say Austria as a great obstacle during the unification movement. It’s because Austria controlled most of Italian states and her military force was superior to any other Italian states. Therefore, it was hard for Italian states to defeat Austria in order to unify Italy or even started uprisings. In completing the unification, there were lots of reasons for success. Italy had four able leaders, and each of them contributed greatly to the course of unification. They were Mazzini, Garibaldi, King Victor Emmanuel II and Cavour. This is able leadership. Another important factor explaining the success of Italian unification was foreign aid. Italy got the help from France, Britain and Prussia. France and Prussia helped Italy to defeat enemies and get back Italian states. Britain sent warships to help Garibaldi’s followers to land on Sicily. Both the above countries had contributed to help Italy unification. Thirdly it is favourable circumstances. During 1830s, Prussia and Italy both wanted to unify their countries. Then they understood and helped each other during the unification movement. Moreover, they had some enemies such as France and Austria. This brought two countries closely to expel foreign powers. In 19th century, nationalism spread throughout Europe. Under the effect of nationalism, each race wanted to unify their countries. This became a force to help Italy to start unification. Finally, there was also had the element of luck in Italian unification. For example, France recalled her troops in Rome during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. This helped Italy to overcome the last obstacle to unify
without any deliberate measures or policies. No matter what, Italian had overcome lots of obstacles and unified their country.