

# Italy and Post-Habsburg Central Europe (An Introduction)

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## Abstract

KŠIŇAN, Michal – ĎURČO, Michal. Italy and Post-Habsburg Central Europe.

This is an introduction to the thematic issue of *Forum Historiae* 1/2021, Italy and the Post-Habsburg Central Europe, which outlines the main research questions and hypotheses that the authors worked with. Italy had ambitions to be in the position of a great power in the region and played an important role there in several different dimensions. The papers of this volume examine the political, diplomatic and military aspects of the Italian presence, as well as its economic, local and social dimension in post-Habsburg Central Europe. The intention of this thematic issue is not to cover the matter in its entirety, but rather to focus on lesser-known topics or those that have yet to be researched.

**Keywords:** international relations, social and economic history, Italy and Central Europe, immediate after-war, interwar period, Italy and Balkans

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In the autumn of 1918, after four years of the greatest conflict in the history of mankind up till that point, the armies of Entente and its allies fought to a definitive victory against the Central Powers. However, the ensuing period of stability did not come immediately to East-Central Europe, where the aftermath of the First World War lasted much longer than in the Western countries. The end of the war, the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the reconstruction of the East-Central European region were some of the most important political, diplomatic and military milestones of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Creating successor states opened the question of drawing new borders, leading to new disputes among countries.

One of the consequences of the First World War was the dissolution, or notable internal weakening, of the four powers that traditionally maintained a strong influence on the Balkans and Central Europe. The disintegration of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Civil War and the weakening of Germany created a power vacuum, which Italy and France attempted to fill. This French-Italian rivalry had deeper roots and is one of the key components of this region in the interwar period.<sup>2</sup> Some papers in this volume discuss the matter, others mention it more implicitly.

<sup>1</sup> SHARP, Alan. *Versailles 1919: A Centennial Perspective*. London : Haus Publishing, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> For more about the French-Italian rivalry in the Balkans and Central Europe, see LE MOAL, Frédéric. *La France et l'Italie dans les Balkans, 1914-1919 : le contentieux adriatique*. Paris : Harmattan, 2006; NARDELLI-MALGRAND, Anne-Sophie. *La rivalité franco-italienne en Europe balkanique et danubienne, de la conférence de la Paix de 1919 au pacte à Quatre de 1933. Intérêts nationaux et représentations du système européen*. (manuscript of the PhD. thesis) Paris : Université Paris 4, 2011.

Italy had ambitions to become a great power mainly in the Balkan region, which Rome considered as a part of its sphere of influence, but also in Central Europe. Italy thus had an active policy towards the successor states which included its own military mission in Czechoslovakia, membership in the Allied Commission in Hungary and the annexation of several former Habsburg territories. Although these Italian territorial aspirations interfered directly with the Yugoslavia's desires, they also clashed with those of the USA and France.

Nevertheless, this new period of instability came to an end in the early 1920s. Italy had paid a high price for victory in the war—approximately 650,000 fallen—for which the public expected compensation in the form of new territories. A general belief prevailed that this was a “mutilated victory”—the name given by D’Annunzio—and the feeling that the Italians had been betrayed by the other Allies, who had not fulfilled the conditions of the Treaty of London of 1915 (the treaty that Italy signed with the Entente to enter the war). These factors made it easier for Mussolini to grab power at the beginning of the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> Antonio Varsori admits that the Italian objectives were not completely satisfied but, according to him, Rome achieved most of the goals of the London Treaty of 1915, gaining a strong and strategic border with Yugoslavia and also with Austria by annexing South Tyrol (Alto Adige), which contained a mostly German speaking population. He writes that the “mutilated victory” was only a myth, but one effectively exploited by the fascists.<sup>4</sup> Regardless, Mussolini’s March on Rome had a significant influence on later Italian foreign policy.

The centenary of the First World War brought a new momentum into the research. “During the last decade, there has been a remarkable flow of new scholarly publications, especially in English, French and German, on both the First World War and the attempts by the victorious powers, starting with the Versailles Conference, to create a peaceful and stable international order.” Recently, Italian political roles and diplomatic activities in the immediate after-war have also been analysed.<sup>5</sup>

However, relations between Italy and post-Habsburg Central Europe go far beyond political, diplomatic or military history. Diplomacy and political interests went hand in hand with economic concerns. Railway infrastructure played a key role in transportation during that period, making it crucial to establish a dominant position in train transport. As the First World War radically changed traditional social structures, this volume pays special attention to social history. At the time, a great number of former POWs returned home from Italy to new-born states and vice versa. The demilitarization of society was a primary task in the aftermath of the war and the situation at local levels could offer the new perspectives as well. As having had a part in the construction of New Europe became an important source of political capital, the question of historical memory is also brought up.

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3 MACMILLAN, Margaret. *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*. New York : Random House, 2002.

4 VARSORI, Antonio. How to Become a Great Power: Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922. In VARSORI, Antonio – ZACCARIA, Benedetto (eds). *Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922*. Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 12–13.

5 VARSORI 2020, p. 1.

Naturally, the region of post-Habsburg Central Europe, or broadly, East-Central Europe, has been studied by Italian historians as a whole with the main aim of analysing Italian foreign policy towards the region.<sup>6</sup> Looking at the Italian historiography country by country, due to the conflicting nature of Italian-Yugoslav relations in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Italian historiography dealt a lot with Yugoslav history.<sup>7</sup> From post-Habsburg Central Europe, Italian historiography focused mainly on the history of Hungary thanks to the creation of the Inter-university Centre of Hungarian Studies in 1985, (Centro Interuniversitario di Studi Ungheresi in Italia). From 2000, it became the Inter-university Centre of Hungarian and Central-Eastern European, Studies (Centro Interuniversitario di Studi Ungheresi e sull'Europa Centro-Orientale), which shows a broadening of its specialisation. Though, the history of other countries is analysed as well<sup>8</sup>, priority is given to the intersection of Italian and East-Central European history, such as the Rome Congress of Oppressed Nationalities or Milan Rastislav Štefánik.<sup>9</sup>

Historians from the region are also interested in Italian history, or rather the Italian presence in post-Habsburg Central Europe. The intersection of Italy and post-Habsburg Central European history is the dominant concern<sup>10</sup>, though, specifically “Italian” questions have also been explored.<sup>11</sup>

The ambition of this thematic issue is not to cover the matter in its entirety, but rather to bring attention to topics that are not as well known or have not been researched. We can divide the contributions into two parts: the first three papers cover specific questions of international relations, and the remaining four analyse rather topics related to local, social or economic history. From a chronological perspective, the period of immediate after-war is the most discussed, while the whole interwar time (in one case, even after the Second World War) is covered by three papers. As previously mentioned, these areas were researched mainly in Italian or in the respective languages of the nations in the region. By publishing this thematic issue in English, these matters become accessible to a wider international scientific public.

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- 6 For example CACCAMO, Francesco. *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa». Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla conferenza di pace di Parigi (1919–1920)*. Milano; Trento : Luni Editrice, 2000; SANTORO, Stefano. *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943*. Milano : FrancoAngeli, 2005; CAPUZZO, Ester – CREVATO-SELVAGGI, Bruno – GUIDA, Francesco (eds). *Per Rita Tolomeo, scritti di amici sulla Dalmazia e l'Europa centro-orientale I-II*. Venezia : La Musa Talia, 2014; MOTTA, Guiseppe. *Less Than Nations: Central-Eastern European Minorities After WWI*, 2 Vol. Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.
- 7 For more bibliographical data on this topic, see the references in the book RUDIĆ, Srđan – BIAGINI, Antonello – VUČETIĆ, Biljana (eds). *Serbian-Italian Relations: History and Modern Times*. Belgrade : The Institute of History, Belgrade; Sapienza University of Rome, 2015.
- 8 GUIDA, Francesco. *Romania*. Milano : Unicopli, 2009. For more references, see GUIDA, Francesco. *Historiographie italienne récente sur l'Europe centre-oriental d'une guerre mondiale à l'autre*. In. SANDU, Traian (ed.) *Illusion de puissance, puissance de l'illusion. Historiographies et histoire de l'Europe centrale dans les relations internationales de l'entre-deux-guerres*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2005, p. 57–67.
- 9 LEONCINI, Francesco (ed.) *Il Patto di Roma e la Legione ceco-slovacca. Tra Grande Guerra e Nuova Europa*. Vittorio Veneto : Kellermann Editore, 2014; MUSIL, Miroslav – BIAGINI, Antonello (eds.) *Milan Rastislav Štefánik vo svetle talianskych archívov*. Bratislava : Nadácia pre záchranu kultúrneho dedičstva, 2010.
- 10 PAVLOVIĆ, G. Vojislav (ed.) *Italy's Balkan strategies 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Belgrade : Institute des études balkaniques, 2014; RAUCHOVÁ, Jitka – JIROUŠEK, Bohumil et al. *Věda, kultura a politika v československo-italských vztazích 1918–1951*. České Budějovice: Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích, 2012; BOKOR, Zsuzsa (ed.) *În căutarea țărâmului promis: Italienii din România*. Cluj-Napoca : Editura ISPMN, 2017.
- 11 HORVÁTH, Jenő. *Ólaszország Kelet-Közép-Európa politikája 1918-tól napjainkig*. Grotius e-könyvtár, 2006 ; ORMOS, Mária. *Mussolini I.-II*. Budapest : PolgArt Könyvkiadó, 2000.

Francesco Caccamo talks about the Italian position at the Paris Peace Conference on creating the borders of Czechoslovakia. Italy was interested in the possibility of economic and political influence in East-Central Europe. Because of that, Rome also had a special policy for the area, which was being shaped mainly by France. The first steps in this regard were made during the war by developing positive relations with the Czechoslovak National Council based in Paris. From a diplomatic point of view, Czechoslovak support of the Southern Slavs and their aspirations on the eastern Adriatic coast and planned Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor was not compatible with the Italian interests. The author comprehensively reconstructs the Italian position towards the Czechoslovak demands, mainly the negotiations within the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs and Supreme Council and concludes that Italy was the one member among the great powers that exhibited the most reservations towards these territorial ambitions of the young state.

As Petra Hamerli outlines in detail, Italy and Hungary shared a similar position towards Yugoslavia. This state was the main obstacle for Italian foreign policy in Europe, which sought to gain influence in the Balkans, Central-Europe and the Mediterranean – especially after Mussolini came to power. Due to its revisionist foreign policy, Hungary had also interest in weakening the South-Slavic state. Hamerli, in her case study of the support of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) by Italy and Hungary, shows the close cooperation of the two states in backing the separatist movements organized within Yugoslavia. If the IMRO had the support of these two countries, it was not considerable as both were afraid of being compromised by its violent actions.

Stefano Santoro studies a different dimension of Italian penetration in East-Central Europe mainly during the interwar period, paying special attention to the case of Czechoslovakia. Santoro understands that culture and propaganda were instruments that allowed Italy to compete, mainly with France, for hegemony in East-Central Europe. In January 1921, the Institute for Eastern Europe (Istituto per l'Europa Orientale), was established in Rome. This initiative was personally supported by the foreign minister of Italy and its main goal was to strengthen Italian cultural policies in East-Central Europe. Soon after, cultural institutes, (“Institutes of Italian Culture”, later renamed “Italian Institutes of Culture”) followed. As Santoro states, France did basically the same and established a network of Instituts français. The main task of Italian cultural diplomacy in the late 1930s was to spread a revisionist policy of fascists against Yugoslavia. However, Italy lost its position in this sphere definitively after the Second World War.

Biljana Stojić analyses the Yugoslav ruling over Rijeka, (Fiume), in 1918, describing it through the war experience and writings of Stanislaw Krakow. He was only 22 in 1918, but had already survived seven years of warfare that had begun in 1912 for him. His story is almost unbelievable. By the end of the war, he was wounded 14 times in total, suffered from mumps, cholera, malaria, Spanish flu and was awarded 18 medals. In the interwar period, he was a man of many professions. The author chose Krakow as he had rich personal experience and was witness to conflicts between pro-Yugoslavs and pro-Italians. Of course, he was not neutral minded. It is important to mention that Krakow was mostly pro-Yugoslav.

Juhász Balázs' research draws attention to Hungarian POWs and their journey home, which was not easy or fast. Ethnicity together with political and ideological concerns were crucial determiners of who returned home first. POWs had access to assorted press reports and were able to follow events in their home countries. A contributing factor was that POWs were used as a cheap labour force, responsible for filling war trenches, collecting scrap metal and explosives, and preparing the land for agricultural production. The possibility to enlist Hungarian POWs to fight Hungarian Bolsheviks also emerged but was not realised. Except for a few cases, the mass repatriation of Hungarian POWs was not possible until August 1919. Juhász presents this issue from both the Hungarian and Italian points of view.

Anne-Sophie Nardelli-Malgrand addresses the issue of transport infrastructure, and especially the railways. Railways are always described as a tool of political and economic penetration. The extensive European railway networks were finished mostly during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This network served each state who had a planned transport policy and financed its construction. However, a problem appeared immediately after the First World War and after the establishment of the successor states and their borders. It happened sometimes, for instance, that an important railway station was left behind a border and without a special agreement between the states, the whole area was without transport. The importance of these transport issues was also highlighted by the fact that the Railway Committee worked as an integral part of the Paris Peace Conference. The abovementioned Commission was later replaced by an International Wagon Exchange Committee led by a French civil servant instead of army officers. This was not in accordance with the Italian railway policy in Central Europe and post-Habsburg territories. Italy wanted to use its political and financial influence to have control over some of the great railway companies. Nardelli-Malgrand analysed the details of this ambitious strategy.

Michal Kšišňan and Juraj Babják focus their paper on Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation (1918–1919) in the official historical memory of the interwar period. The authors detail two dimensions of the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation in 1918–1919, one pertaining to ceremonies and the formal aspects of remembrance, and the other to the effects of international politics—specifically, the often-turbulent Italian-Czechoslovak relations—on commemorative practices. First, they present some context; the emergence and early days of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation between 1918–1919 and Italian-Czechoslovak relations in the interwar period. Next, three important events are the focus: the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Czechoslovakia in 1928, the tragic death of General Graziani in February 1931, and the celebrations of 1938. Aside from ceremonies, the authors also examine Czechoslovak legionnaire monuments and cemeteries in both Italy and Czechoslovakia as places of historical memory. The political situation of the time shaped the commemorations greatly as the heroic side of military cooperation was put forward and its “less heroic” aspects forgotten. The construction of monuments and maintenance of the cemeteries also played an important role in this context. The historical legacy of the Czechoslovak Legion and its subsequent military cooperation mainly with France and to a lesser extent, with Italy, formed the basis of the Czechoslovak military tradition.

This thematical issue shows an expansion towards topics no longer exclusively devoted to political, military and diplomatic history. In total, eight authors present their research in seven papers, proving that there remains a knowledge gap in some areas. Their contributions are significant in gaining a better understanding of the post-war and inter-war era, and also the Italian presence in post-Habsburg Central Europe, and more broadly, in the European historical context.

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# Italy, the Paris Peace Conference and the Shaping of Czechoslovakia

Francesco Caccamo

## Abstract

CACCAMO, Francesco. Italy, the Paris Peace Conference and the Shaping of Czechoslovakia.

In the aftermath of the First World War, relations between Italy and the new Czechoslovak state rapidly took a turn for the worse. The Italians were irritated by widespread sympathy demonstrated by Czechs and Slovaks toward the Southern Slavs and by the Francophile alignment of Prague leadership. Moreover, Italy was convinced that Czechoslovakia was trying to establish a regional preeminence in East-Central Europe and therefore preferred what it considered a more balanced settlement. Subsequently, at the Paris Peace Conference Italy was the only great victorious power to voice criticism vis-à-vis the territorial claims of the new state, first, during the preliminary exam in the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, then during the decision-making process in the Supreme Council. Although the Italian representatives remained cautious about the German presence in the Czech Lands, they expressed significant reservations toward the territorial settlements in southern Slovakia, Subcarpathian Ruthenia and Teschen, and strongly contested the hypothesis of a corridor with Yugoslavia reaching the Adriatic coastline.

**Keywords:** Czechoslovak Republic 1918–1938, Paris Peace Conference, Italian-Czechoslovak relations, Italian foreign policy 1918–1922

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## Italy and the new Czechoslovak state on the eve of the peace conference

Scholarly references to Italy's participation in the Paris Peace Conference generally focus on its territorial claims and on the Adriatic question.<sup>1</sup> This creates the impression that, apart from hostility to the new-born Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Italians lacked a policy for the East-Central European settlement that

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This essay develops, integrates and updates research undertaken by the author in a previous work, CACCAMO, Francesco. *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa». Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla conferenza di pace di Parigi (1919-1920)*, Milano; Trento : Luni Editrice, 2000.

- 1 On the Italian participation in the peace conference, the reference text still remains ALBRECHT-CARRIÉ, René. *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1938; moreover BURGWIN, H. James. *The Legend of Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference*. Westport : Greenwood Press, 1993; In Italy there is not a single exhaustive contribution on the peace conference, but the subject is dealt with in a considerable number of studies: VIVARELLI, Roberto. *Il dopoguerra in Italia e l'avvento del fascismo*. Napoli : Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1967; PASTORELLI, Pietro. *L'Albania nella politica estera italiana 1914–1920*. Napoli : Jovene, 1970; MELCHIONI, Maria Grazia. *La vittoria mutilata. Problemi ed incertezze della politica italiana sul finire della Grande Guerra*. Roma : Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1981; PETRACCHI, Giorgio. *La Russia rivoluzionaria nella politica italiana. Le relazioni italo-sovietiche 1917-1925*. Bari : Laterza, 1982; ROSSINI, Daniela. *L'America riscopre l'Italia. L'Inquiry di Wilson e le origini della Questione Adriatica, 1917–1919*. Roma : Edizioni Associate, 1992; GARZIA, Italo. *L'Italia e le origini della Società delle Nazioni*. Roma : Bonacci, 1995; CACCAMO 2000; MONZALI, Luciano. *Italiani di Dalmazia, 1914-1924*. Firenze : Le Lettere, 2007; CATTARUZZA, Marina. *L'Italia e la questione adriatica: dibattiti parlamentari e panorama internazionale (1918-1926)*. Bologna : il Mulino, 2014; BUCARELLI, Massimo. Mussolini, la questione adriatica e il fallimento dell'interventismo democratico. In *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 2011, Vol. 95, No. 1, pp. 137–205; LEFEBVRE D'OVIDIO, Francesco. *L'Italia e il sistema internazionale. Dalla formazione del governo Mussolini alla grande depressione (1922–1929)*. Vol. 1. Roma : Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2016, pp. 63–137.

was being shaped in the French capital.<sup>2</sup> This is true only up to a point. Although the Italians were conditioned and sometimes even absorbed by the pursuit of their aspirations on the eastern shore of the Adriatic, they did attempt to formulate an autonomous position on more general issues concerning the “new Europe”. The primary challenge was that their interests were not always aligned with those of the rest of the victorious coalition. Factors like their geographical proximity to the Danube region and the Balkan peninsula, the break-up of a traditional rival like the Habsburg Empire, the emergence of a Yugoslav state claiming most of the eastern Adriatic and intimately tied to France, led the Italians to consider with serious reservations the attempt to create a new order, based not simply on the principle of nationality, as it is often claimed, but rather on the predominance of the small and medium powers identifiable with the cause of the victors. Unlike the Americans, English and mainly the French, the Italians were only partially interested in the creation of a *barrière de l’Est* against Germany and its possible allies and preferred the establishment of some sort of balance of power among the various actors in the region, both victors and vanquished. Obviously, such political orientation aimed to widen Italy’s margin for maneuvering and encourage the spread of its economic and political influence in East-Central Europe. In the longer term, however, this positioning could also have provided an opportunity for reducing the national and territorial rivalries plaguing the region.<sup>3</sup>

This framework deeply affected the stance taken by the Italian representatives toward Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference. As a premise, it is worth remembering that, during the last phase of the war, the Italians seemed to develop positive relations with the Czechoslovak National Council (CNC) based in Paris and with its leaders, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Through the convention signed with Štefánik in Rome on 21 April 1918, the Italians formalized a collaboration with the CNC against Austria-Hungary and agreed with the creation of an autonomous military corps composed of Czech and Slovak war prisoners and volunteers. The so-called Czechoslovak legion reached a count of over twenty thousand men and was successfully deployed on the Alpine front during the final weeks of the conflict. Following the end of the hostilities, the legionnaires were sent to Prague under the command of a mission of Italian officers led by general Luigi Piccione and became the first organized military unit present in Czechoslovakia. Immediately afterwards they were charged with the fundamental task of taking control of Slovakia. Simultaneously Italy organized, armed and equipped the sixty thousand remaining Czech and Slovak prisoners of war present in the Apennines peninsula and sent them back to their homeland, while also providing the new state with shipments of food and various other materials.<sup>4</sup>

Needless to say, the Italians depended on this political and material support in order to establish a lasting influence over Czechoslovakia and to strengthen their position vis-a-vis the whole of East-Central Europe. They especially appreciated the importance of Czecho-

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2 LEDERER, Ivo. *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study in Frontiermaking*. New Haven; London : Yale University Press, 1963; MONZALI, Luciano. *Il sogno dell’egemonia. L’Italia, la questione jugoslava e l’Europa centrale (1918-1941)*. Firenze : Le Lettere, 2010.

3 Apart CACCAMO 2000, see CACCAMO, Francesco. Searching for a Policy for the New Europe: Italy and the Eastern European Settlement at the Paris Peace Conference. In VARSORI, Antonio – ZACCARIA, Benedetto (eds.), *Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 205–227.

4 PICHLÍK, Karel – KLÍPA, Bohumir – ZABLOUDILOVÁ, Jitka. *I legionari cecoslovacchi (1914–1920)*. Trento : Museo Storico di Trento, 1997 (1<sup>st</sup> edition 1996); for a new and original analysis, VOLPATO, Alessandro. *I legionari cecoslovacchi in Italia*. PhD dissertation, University “Sapienza” of Rome, 2021.



slovakia's economy and hoped to attract a substantial quota of the trade emanating from its industrial core in Bohemia to the northern Adriatic port of Trieste (Terst). The Italian expectations were perhaps best expressed in a message drafted by the President of the Council Vittorio Emanuele Orlando at the end of 1918, entitled "*To the People of Bohemia (sic)*". Here Orlando paid homage to "the heroism without equal that allowed the Bohemian nation to conquer her independence and her freedom" and formulated the most optimistic provisions for the future: "This bond of friendship and affection that so intimately ties the souls of the two nations regardless of distance, will remain strong over time. Nothing will be able to weaken it, even less to destroy it; on the contrary, thanks to the common will, it shall grow stronger and more solid."<sup>5</sup>

As a matter of fact, at the time Orlando wrote this message relations between Rome and Prague were already deteriorating.<sup>6</sup> The Italians were puzzled by the discovery that the Czech and Slovak political representatives who had spent the war in their homeland and the public opinion at large nurtured feelings of sympathy for the Southern Slavs and supported their aspirations on the eastern Adriatic coast. The leaders of the CNC were more cautious, but even they manifested their desire for a compromise based on ethnic principle and for the attribution of at least northern Dalmatia, Fiume (Rijeka) and eastern Istria to the Yugoslavs.<sup>7</sup> From the Italian perspective, projects aimed at connecting Czechoslovakia with the Kingdom SCS and subsequently with the Adriatic Sea through the districts of western Hungary were especially disturbing. For the Italians, the so-called Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor raised the specter of the creation of a Slavic bloc on the ashes of the Habsburg Empire, even of a Danubian confederation, capable of cutting Italy out of the East-Central European space and to contest its preeminence over the Adriatic Sea. Moreover, had Italy not obtained Fiume, the corridor could have seriously weakened the commercial position of Trieste. Revealingly, these kinds of concerns were expressed not only within Italian military and diplomatic circles<sup>8</sup>, but also by representatives of the *politica delle nazionalità*, the same ones that, during the war, had advocated for an alliance with the "oppressed nationalities" against Austria-Hungary and enthusiastically supported the creation of the Czechoslovak legion. For instance, the writer and journalist Giuseppe Antonio Borgese could not hide his disappointment after meeting twice with Beneš in December 1918. Even independent from the corridor issue, the new Czechoslovak foreign minister seemed to

5 Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, *Al popolo di Boemia*, 12 December 1918, reproduced in BIAGINI, Antonello – MUSIL, Miroslav (eds.) *Milan Rastislav Štefánik alla luce degli archivi italiani*. Bratislava : Nadácia pre záchranu kultúrneho dedičstva, 2012, pp. 72–73.

6 CACCAMO, Francesco. L'Italia nella corrispondenza tra Masaryk e Beneš all'indomani della prima guerra mondiale. In *Clio*, 1996, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 489–513; BOLECH CECCHI, Donatella. *Alle origini di un'inimicizia. Italia-Cecoslovacchia 1918–1922*. Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino, 2008.

7 *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (DDI). Roma : Tipografia dello Stato, 1954–, Series VI, Vol. 1, doc. 110, Bonin Longare to Sonnino, 11 November 1918. For the Czechoslovak standpoint, see *Dokumenty Československé zahraniční politiky* (DČZP). Praha : Ústav mezinárodních vztahů; Karolinum; Historický ústav AV ČR, 1994, Series A, Vol. 2, Tome 1, docs. 20 and 23, Hodža to the Foreign Ministry, 27 November 1918, and Beneš to Kramář, 29 November 1918 (quoting a statement by the social-democratic leader Vlastimil Tusar, according to which Trieste "must remain Slavic"). For his side, Beneš invited his compatriots to be cautious and to consider that Italy was a great power, therefore not to make it feel undervalued in comparison with France and Yugoslavia: DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 74, Beneš to Švehla, 19 January 1919. As a matter of fact, the dispositions of the foreign minister were not substantially different from those of his compatriots. The chargé d'affaires in Rome described in the following terms "Beneš' line and mine" toward the Italians: "not to speak clearly, leave them some hope, in short, not push them away, until we need them for our prisoners of war and for our economic needs". DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 111, Borský to Kramář, 10 February 1919.

8 DDI, 6, 2, doc. 141, Badoglio to Orlando, Sonnino and Barzilay, 28 January 1919; MALAGODI, Olindo. *Conversazioni della guerra (1914–1919)*, Vol. 1. Edited by Brunello Vigezzi. Milano; Napoli : Ricciardi, 1960, Vol. 1, pp. 499–501.

cultivate the concept of “a new Central European system with Bohemia at its head”, which was thought to be hardly compatible with Italian interests.<sup>9</sup>

Over the following weeks, other problems began to surface. In February 1919, the Italians were taken aback by the arrival of a French military mission in Prague led by general Maurice Pellé, by the evident political intimacy that it enjoyed with the Czechoslovak authorities and by the appointment of Pellé himself as chief of staff of the Czechoslovak army.<sup>10</sup> They would have been even more disappointed had they known that Beneš had already conceived plans for putting the French in charge of the organization of the new Czechoslovak army and was forging lasting political bonds with Paris without any consideration for the mission of Piccione or the Italian interests in East-Central Europe. Indeed, the line of conduct followed by the Czechoslovak foreign minister was clear since the end of the war: “our future military organization must be put under French influence for political reasons, because France will have an exceptional influence at the peace conference and France will always support us in everything.”<sup>11</sup>

Other difficulties were raised by the discovery of the extent of Czechoslovakia’s territorial claims. Beneš lobbied the great victorious powers in order to obtain support for the Czechoslovak program at the Peace Conference and received wide-ranging assurances from the French. However, he carefully avoided approaching the Italians, “so that they could not ask for compensations in exchange”.<sup>12</sup> Despite being uncertain about the full extent of Prague’s ambitions, the Italians became increasingly suspicious of the Czechoslovak occupation of regions either ethnically mixed or mostly inhabited by other populations.<sup>13</sup> For them, the advance of Czechoslovak troops led by the Piccione mission in areas of Slovakia with a strong Magyar presence was especially telling. Italian officers grew more and more skeptical about the compatibility of the Czechoslovak claims with the principle of nationality and in some cases did not conceal their sympathy for the Magyars. For their part, the Czechoslovaks reacted by expressing doubts about the reliability of the Italian mission and staged demonstrations against it.<sup>14</sup>

In this rapidly worsening atmosphere, the authoritative Italian foreign minister Sidney Sonnino, expressed his doubts about the opportunity to allow the return home of the Czech and Slovak prisoners of war that had been organized militarily in Italy, “till when we are able to better understand the attitude of its [Czechoslovakia’s] representatives in Paris for what concerns the Adriatic questions, in connection with Yugoslavia.”<sup>15</sup> Only after some hesitation Sonnino authorized the return of these POWs, but with “weapons and ammunitions in [an] amount [only] strictly necessary”.<sup>16</sup> For his part, the chief of the commission for the armistice in Vienna, General Segre, believed that Italy should support Czechoslovakia’s

9 ALBERTINI, Luigi. *Epistolario 1911–1926*, Vol. 3. Edited by Ottavio Barié. Verona : Mondadori, 1968, docs. 945 and 949, Borgese’s reports, 17 and 20 December 1918.

10 Apart from CACCAMO 1996, see also LENZI, Francesca Romana. *L’Italia e la Cecoslovacchia nel primo dopoguerra*. In VALENTE, Massimiliano (ed.) *Santa Sede ed Europa centro-orientale tra le due guerre mondiali*. Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino, 2011, pp. 117–142.

11 DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 41, Beneš to the Czechoslovak National Council, 9 November 1918.

12 DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 55, Beneš to Kramář, 30 December 1918.

13 DDI, 6, 2, doc. 184, Segre to Badoglio, 31 January 1919.

14 DDI, 6, 2, docs. 310 and 424, Lago to Sonnino, 11 February 1919, and Badoglio to Orlando, Sonnino and Caviglia, 21 February 1919. See also DČZP, A, 2, 1, docs 106 and 107, Presidium of the Council of Ministers to Kramář, and Štěpánek to Beneš, 6 February 1919.

15 DDI, 6, 1, doc. 877, Di Robilant to Orlando, 16 January 1919.

16 DDI, 6, 2, doc. 344, Sonnino to the Foreign Ministry, 15 February 1919.

consolidation, but at the same time specified that it should also avoid entering into a conflict with the Austro-Germans and the Magyars because of the new state.<sup>17</sup>

## The debate in the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs

Italy's doubt and puzzlement increased following the opening of the Paris Peace Conference and especially the presentation of the Czechoslovak demands before the highest body of the conference, the Supreme Council, or in its first iteration, the Council of Ten.<sup>18</sup> During their exposé on 5 February 1919, Beneš and Prime Minister Karel Kramář claimed the Czech Lands with over three million Germans on the grounds of historical considerations; the Duchy of Teschen (Těšín, Cieszyn) with its coal basin and with a considerable Polish minority for economic and historical reasons; the territory of Slovakia with 560 thousand Magyars (in actuality more than 800 thousand), on the grounds of the principle of nationality; Subcarpathian Ruthenia with its mostly Ruthenian or Ukrainian population in exchange for the concession of autonomous status. The Czechoslovak delegates also mentioned the corridor with Yugoslavia through the western Hungarian districts. Beneš called it a simple suggestion and offered alternative options such as the establishment of an international administration over the region or the internationalization of the railways that crossed it. However, the idea of direct territorial connection was developed in a specific memorandum addressed to the Peace Conference, *Le voisinage des Tchécoslovaques et des Yougoslaves*. The memorandum highlighted the presence of a Slav minority in the western Hungarian districts, the advantages stemming from the separation of two enemy peoples like the Magyars and the Germans and the economic benefits resulting from the concession of an outlet to the Adriatic Sea via Yugoslavia to Czechoslovakia. In the eyes of the Italians, the situation was worsened by the presentation of a map showing the envisioned Czechoslovak borders where Fiume, Istria, Trieste and Gorizia (Gorica) were all represented as part of Yugoslavia.<sup>19</sup>

Following the procedure adopted in Paris for minor countries identified with the victorious coalition, a preliminary examination of the Czechoslovak claims was conferred to a commission of technical delegates or experts. Italy was represented here by one of its plenipotentiary delegates, the Senator and former ambassador to Paris Giuseppe Salvago Raggi, and by the consul Augusto Stranieri, who had developed a specific competency on nationalities issues through long stays in the Balkans. Interestingly enough, the Czechoslovak delegation was thrilled to receive news about the composition of the commission but exhibited considerable consternation about the two Italians. The French (Jules Cambon and Jules Laroche), American (Charles Seymour and Allen Dulles), and British represen-

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- 17 Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Fondo Affari Politici 1919–1930, b. 932, General Segre, Report no. 4 of the commission for the armistice in Vienna, Presente situazione e progetti ceco-slovacchi, 26 January 1919.
- 18 For Czechoslovakia's participation in the Paris Peace Conference, the classic study remains PERMAN, Dagmar. *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia 1914–1920*. Leiden : Brill, 1962. See also DEJMEK, Jindřich (ed.) *Zrod nové Evropy: Versailles, St. Germain, Trianon a dotváření poválečného mírového systému*. Praha : Historický ústav, 2011. This volume includes a chapter on Italy by Ondřej Houska, pp. 305–320, that, however, focuses on the developments in the 1920s rather than on the peace conference.
- 19 *Papers on Foreign Relations of the United States, The Paris Peace Conference* (FRUS, PPC). Washington : United States Government Printing Office, Council of Ten, 5 February 1919; DČZP, A, 2, 1, Report of the Czechoslovak delegation, 7 February 1919, doc. 108. On the importance of the corridor for the Czechoslovak delegation, see DČZP, A, 2, 1, *Analysis of the Czechoslovak delegation at the Paris Peace Conference on the Czechoslovak borders under the military-strategic viewpoint*, 20 January 1919, doc. 76. For Italy's protests on the above-mentioned map, DDI, 6, 2, doc. 469 and footnote 2, Sonnino to Lago, 7 February 1919, and Lago to Sonnino, [...] February 1919.

tatives (Joseph Cook and Arthur Nicholson) were enthusiastically described as “friends, with whom we have been in touch for a long time and who share our point of view”. On the contrary, the Italians received just a curt comment: “Only the Italian delegates remain.”<sup>20</sup>

The Commission on Czechoslovak Affairs came into effect at the end of February. The first issue under scrutiny was the delimitation of the Czech Lands and the fate of the large local German population. Faced with the tendency of the representatives of the other powers to privilege historical, economical and geographical considerations over ethnic ones, Salvago Raggi could not help wondering: “Don’t we run the risk of excessively Germanizing the new State, if we include this German population in Bohemia?” Nonetheless, the Italian plenipotentiary preferred not to insist. Especially after Cambon stressed the necessity of giving the Czechs full control of the mountain chains surrounding Bohemia in order to ensure their protection against Germany, Salvago Raggi readily recognized the importance of this strategic criteria.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, Salvago Raggi was mindful of the relevance of strategic considerations for the Italian claims on the Alps and on the Eastern Adriatic. By supporting their application in the Czechoslovak case, he was establishing a precedent that he hoped could be applied when the Italian requests would come up for discussion. At the same time, Salvago Raggi conformed himself to the reserved stance that Italy adopted in almost all matters concerning Germany, in the hopes of reciprocation in a similar way when the Adriatic question came under scrutiny. The Italians maintained this line of conduct when the commission examined the delimitation of the Czech Lands in greater detail. After having initially agreed with the Americans on the opportunity to give Germany at least some areas with a clear German majority, such as the district of Eger (Cheb) and especially the *saillant* of Asch (Aš), Salvago Raggi and Stranieri ended up accepting the Anglo-French proposal of preserving the pre-war border division of Austria from Germany. In the end the Italians acquiesced even to a rectification beyond the historical delimitation of the Czech Lands, allowing Prague to obtain the Austrian locality of Gmünd with its railway junction.<sup>22</sup>

The Italians turned out to be more resolute when the Slovak-Hungarian border was examined. From the outset, Salvago Raggi demanded that the border be established as close as possible to the ethnic line: “One should not include in Czechoslovakia too many Magyar elements, in order not to modify the character of its population.” As he noted, the number of Magyars claimed by Czechoslovakia, which he estimated to be 860 thousand, was not too high in itself, but was certainly excessive compared to a Slovak population of allegedly 2.7 million people.<sup>23</sup> The Italians concentrated mainly on two areas claimed by Czechoslovakia: the Danubian island of Grosse Schütt (Žitný ostrov, Csallóköz), and the minor mountainous reliefs in the proximity of Budapest. In the first case, they demanded that the island with its compact nucleus of 90 thousand Magyars remain within Hungary, disregarding Anglo-French support for the defensive needs of what at the time was mainly

20 DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 108, Report of the Czechoslovak delegation, 7 February 1919.

21 *Conférence de la Paix. Recueil de Actes de la Conférence de la Paix (Recueil)*, IV C 1. Paris : Imprimerie National, 1920, p. 8-12, Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 27 February 1919 (No. 1). The *Recueil* is a confidential edition prepared by the French government during the peace conference and distributed only to the delegations of the great victorious powers. For the present work, I used the copy preserved in ASMAE, Conferenza della Pace.

22 *Recueil*, IV C 1, pp. 143–153 and 154–160, Sub-Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 11 and 13 March 1919 (Nos. 6 and 7).

23 *Recueil*, IV C 1, pp. 14-16, Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 28 February 1919 (No. 2). See also pp. 27–30, 5 March 1919 (No. 4).

known as Pressburg or Poszony (Prešporok, Bratislava). “He understands,” argued Salvago Raggi, “that, when there are elements of uncertain nationalities, they are given to friends rather than enemies, but, when almost all of the population belongs to the same race, the defensive argument becomes secondary.” As a matter of fact, Italy’s interest for the Grosse Schütt was motivated by the possibility that the island, situated just above the western Hungarian districts, might become the base for the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor. In the second case, the Italians wanted to prevent Czechoslovakia from taking possession of the hills north of Budapest, in order to avoid the new border running in proximity to the Hungarian capital. Despite resolute support by the French and British to the Czechoslovak demands, the Italians reached a common position with the Americans in order to contain Hungarian losses. According to a joint Italian-American proposal, Czechoslovakia was to obtain the Grosse Schütt, but the border in proximity to Budapest was to be moved 20 km further north than originally planned, along the course of the river Eipel (Ipoly). Moreover, at Slovakia’s easternmost fringe, the center of Satoralja with its mostly Magyar inhabitants was to be left to Hungary. As Stranieri would sum up later, through this compromise the Italians abandoned defense of the Grosse Schütt but were able to ensure that Hungary maintained control over territories inhabited by 150 thousand Magyars.<sup>24</sup>

The Italians were less successful with Subcarpathian Ruthenia. In this case the British, French and Americans agreed with the opportunity to follow the Czechoslovak proposals and confer Prague control over the region with a specific autonomy. For them, this solution offered the advantage of linking two friendly states such as Czechoslovakia and Romania territorially at the expense of enemy Hungary. Only Salvago Raggi objected, finding it contrary to Hungary’s complete encirclement and the severance of all connections with Poland. For him, it was better to leave Ruthenia to Hungary, although still with some form of autonomy: “He can’t see how friendly relations could be established by giving Czechoslovakia this corner of land. As it must be stressed, this solution will put an end to all the connections of Hungary and Romania with Poland and vice versa. Since we agreed that the Ruthenes will remain anyway independent [sic: autonomous], why don’t we unite them to the neighbors with whom they have some economic, strategic or political reasons to be united, that is to say, the Hungarians?” Even after his proposal was rejected, Salvago Raggi kept calling the union of Ruthenia with Czechoslovakia “a bad solution”. At least subordinately, he expressed his support for the American requests aimed at foreseeing concrete guarantees for Ruthenia’s autonomy and, moreover, at creating an ad hoc regime for Polish-Hungarian communications through the region.<sup>25</sup>

Needless to say, the Italians resolutely opposed the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor through the western Hungarian districts. At Salvago Raggi’s urging, the Commission drafted a statement that rejected this idea and suggested that the Supreme Council might consider

24 *Recueil*, IV C 1, pp. 19–35, 26–30, 34–36, 130–132, 133–134, 136–142, Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 3, 5 and 8 March 1919 (Nos. 3, 4, 5), and Sub-Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 4, 5 and 7 March 1919 (Nos. 3, 4, 5); ASMAE, Fondo Conferenza della Pace, b. 3, Stranieri’s Report for Tittoni, *Frontiere dello Stato Ceco-Slovacco*, 28 August 1919.

25 *Recueil*, IV C 1, pp. 16–18 and 81, Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 28 February and 19 March 1919 (Nos. 2 and 9). The issue of Ruthenia was also raised in the Commission for Romanian and Yugoslav affairs at the beginning of March. Here, the Italians suggested that the eastern part of the region be given to Romania in order to maintain at least some connection between Romania and Poland, but their proposal was sharply rejected by the representatives of the other powers: *Recueil*, IV C 4, pp. 81–82.

other means for facilitating trade between Czechoslovakia and the Adriatic.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, discussions were not over yet. Following the procedure established in Paris, the report of the Czechoslovak Commission was submitted for a final review to the Central Committee for Territorial Questions. This provided an authoritative member of the French delegation, such as André Tardieu, the opportunity to relaunch the idea of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor as an instrument for Hungary's containment. This seems to prove that the corridor was something more than a mere theoretical proposal and that it enjoyed substantial support within French political circles. Only thanks to the objection of his American colleague Sidney Mezes, Salvago Raggi (who happened to represent Italy in the Central Committee as well) had the chance to prevent approval of Tardieu's proposal. Together, Salvago and Mezes pointed out that the corridor would run through territories inhabited mostly by non-Slav populations and would not be defensible in the case of an outbreak of hostilities: "the barrier would be very frail and the countries where the corridor could be established are not inhabited by a Slav majority."<sup>27</sup>

The last claim to be examined concerned the Duchy of Teschen and its rich coal basin. The issue raised delicate political problems because in this case Czechoslovakia faced another country identified with the victorious coalition such as Poland. It also involved technical issues since it fell under the competency of a plurality of technical bodies; apart from the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs and its Polish counterpart, there was also a commission that the Council of Ten had sent directly to Teschen in January 1919 in an attempt to prevent an outbreak of hostilities. On its return to Paris, this Inter-allied Commission for Teschen decided to express its views on the future of the region. In a specific report, the British and American representatives, alongside their Italian counterpart, Colonel Antonio Tissi, supported the creation of a small independent state, but did not fail to mention the existence of a predominantly Polish population. On the contrary, the French representative reiterated his country's pro-Czech stance and asked that the whole region be placed under Prague's control.<sup>28</sup>

At the end of March, the two Commissions for Czechoslovak and Polish Affairs met in a joint session to examine this report.<sup>29</sup> All sides rejected the proposal to create a small and hardly viable independent state, but otherwise there was no consensus. The French reiterated their support for the attribution of the whole region to Czechoslovakia, but the Italians, both Salvago Raggi and his colleague from the Polish Commission, Pietro Tomasi della Torretta, stressed the existence of a Polish majority. In this way, the Italians avoided immediate approval of the French proposal favorable to Czechoslovakia, which allowed the continuation of what by now was called the Joint Commission for Teschen.<sup>30</sup> In the following days, the French alongside the British continued to favor the attribution of Teschen to the Czechs on the grounds of historical and economic considerations. Nonetheless, the Italians gained American support for a division based on the principle of nationality. For a moment, the Italians and the Americans seemed able to manifest their

26 *Recueil*, IV C 1, pp. 38–40, Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, 8 March 1919 (No. 5).

27 *Recueil*, IV C 8, p. 28, Central Committee for Territorial Questions, 25 March 1919 (No. 8); Stranieri's Report for Tittoni, *Frontiere dello Stato Czecho-Slovacco*, 28 August 1919.

28 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 3–4, Inter-allied Commission for Teschen, 26 March 1919.

29 In the previous days, the Commission on Polish affairs had already started to debate the Teschen issue within a specific sub-committee for Poland's western border. Since the Italian representative was not present, however, he refused to recognize the validity of what had been discussed.

30 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 5–10, Joint Commission for Teschen, 31 March 1919 (No. 1).

common position in a project representing a viable compromise, leaving Poland a majority of the population and Czechoslovakia most of the coal basin.<sup>31</sup> This possibility, however, was frustrated by hesitation of the Americans and their eventual realignment with the Czechoslovakophile views of the majority. Left isolated, the Italians kept insisting on an ethnic division and warned that different solutions risked “perpetuating insurmountable difficulties and a state of latent crisis”. The split was formalized on 6 April when the Joint Commission prepared a note expressing the two different standpoints. The French, British, Japanese and also the Americans demanded the attribution of three-quarters of the district and almost all of its coal basin to Czechoslovakia, while the Italians reiterated their belief that it would be more equitable to leave Poland the majority of the population and at least a portion of its coal production.<sup>32</sup>

With this, the examination of the Czechoslovak claims was essentially completed. Subsequently, we shall see how proposals prepared by the experts were received by the plenipotentiary delegates gathered in the Supreme Council. Before that, however, it is still worth mentioning some developments that affected Italian-Czechoslovak relations at the peace conference. First of all, it is good to keep in mind that although the activities of the territorial commissions were supposed to be strictly confidential, Beneš was constantly briefed on discussions concerning Czechoslovakia by several friends he counted among the allied representatives, above all the French. The news he received made him very optimistic. As he commented: “[I]f we were left with these borders, it would mean for us a real triumph [...] none of the other smaller nations fulfilled its claims in such an integral way as we did.”<sup>33</sup>

In this context, the only discordant note was provided by the Italians and the critical stance they had expressed toward some of the Czechoslovak claims. As a result, the entire Czechoslovak leadership developed a deep resentment toward the Italians.<sup>34</sup> These negative feelings were expressed symptomatically in a letter addressed in mid-March by President Masaryk to American Secretary of State Robert Lansing. In it, Masaryk went so far as to denounce the behavior of the Italians in Paris as evidence of their tendency to collaborate with countries hostile to Czechoslovakia, undermining the whole process of the peace conference. As he explained, because of their resentment towards the Yugoslavs and their rivalry with the French, the Italians were getting closer not only to the Magyars, but also to the Germans and the Poles. In this situation, the president saw only one remedy: “The Czechoslovak Republic must be as strong as possible. The Entente must help us not only from the material but also from the moral point of view, at the Peace conference she must not only recognize but also stress the importance of our nation and of our state. The Magyars, the Poles, the Austro-Germans and the Italians must acknowledge this desire of the Entente. Only in this way will the Czechoslovak Republic be allowed to organize Eastern Europe according to the demands of the world situation.”<sup>35</sup> After having

31 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 141–144, Joint Sub-commission for Teschen, 2 April 1919 (No. 2).

32 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 144–147, 148–152, 153–155, Joint Sub-commission for Teschen, 3, 4 and 6 April 1919 (Nos. 1, 2 and 3); pp. 14–15 and 19–21, Joint Commission for Teschen, 5 and 6 April 1919 (Nos. 2 and 3); pp. 22–26, Note of the Joint Commission for Teschen, 6 April 1919.

33 DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 140, Beneš report to the Foreign Committee of the National Assembly, 7 March 1919. As Beneš added, if these results were to be confirmed, “the whole war and the conference will be a real political and diplomatic triumph”.

34 *Masaryk a Beneš ve svých dopisech z doby pařížských mírových jednání v roce 1919*, Vol. 2. Edited by Zdeněk Šolle. Praha: Práce z dějin České akademie věd, 1994, doc. 29, Beneš to Masaryk, 3 March 1919.

35 DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 152, Masaryk to Lansing, 16 March 1919.

spoken with General Secretary of the French Foreign Ministry Philippe Berthelot, Beneš went even further. In a letter to Masaryk, he did not hesitate in depicting a gloomy scenario, with Italy and Czechoslovakia lined up on opposite sides in a future war: “I think we are going to be at war with the Germans, the Magyars and the Austrians, the Yugoslavs against the Italians, who would be with the Hungarians, the Austrians and the Germans. We should [go] with the French, the Poles and the Yugoslavs [...]. For this it is necessary to start getting ready for war.”<sup>36</sup>

The other factor to consider was the outbreak of a veritable crisis concerning the Italian mission in Slovakia. Polemics generated by the alleged Magyarophile sympathies of the Italian officers and by the rivalry with the French mission led by general Pellé culminated during the conflict that opposed Czechoslovakia to the Hungarian Republic of Councils. After the initial success scored by the Hungarian Bolsheviks, the Italians were accused of incompetency in the best case, in the worst of plotting with the enemy. As a result, the Piccione mission found itself in an unbearable position and had to be withdrawn from Czechoslovakia at the beginning of June 1919. Things were made even worse by the tragic death of Štefánik, the representative of the Czechoslovak movement for independence who had proved to be better disposed towards Italy and had unsuccessfully tried to moderate the Francophile course advocated by Beneš.<sup>37</sup>

For their side, the Italians were increasingly worried by rumors about the existence of a Czechoslovak-Yugoslav military agreement directed against them.<sup>38</sup> As we now know, it was not only fictional. Documentation available shows that, in the early summer of 1919, political and military circles in Belgrade actually proposed to Prague the conclusion of an alliance in order to contrast “German-Magyar-Italian intrigues” and to accomplish a *fait accompli* in western Hungary for establishing the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly enough, Beneš did not consider the moment ripe for military action, but also did not object to Yugoslav reasoning.<sup>40</sup>

## The final decisions concerning Czechoslovakia's borders

According to the plans originally conceived by the great powers, the experts from the territorial commissions were to make only a preliminary examination, open to full reconsideration by the plenipotentiary delegates gathered in the Supreme Council. As a matter of fact, the proposals of the commissions turned out to be much more binding than expected. Most were automatically accepted at the moment of the drafting of the peace treaties with the enemy powers. This was especially true in the case of the Commission for Czechoslovak Affairs, due to the general goodwill that surrounded the Czechoslovak delegation

36 ŠOLLE 1994, doc. 37, Beneš to Masaryk, 5 April 1919.

37 CACCAMO 1996; CACCAMO, Francesco, L'ultima missione di Milan Rastislav Štefánik alla luce delle nuove fonti. In CAPUZZO, Ester – CREVATO-SELVAGGI, Bruno – GUIDA, Francesco (eds.) *Per Rita Tolomeo, scritti di amici*, Vol. 2. Venezia : La Musa Talia, 2014, pp. 207-228; KLIMEK, Antonín. Beneš a Štefánik. In *Sborník k dějinám 19. a 20. století*, 1991, Vol. 12, pp. 35–66. On Štefánik, see the recent biography by KŠIŇAN, Michal. *L'homme qui parlait avec les étoiles. Milan Rastislav Štefánik, héros franco-slovaque de la Grande Guerre*. Paris : Eur'Orbem, 2019; on Beneš, the classic study is DEJMEK, Jindřich. *Edvard Beneš. Politická biografie českého demokrata*, 2 Vols. Praha : Karolinum, 2006-2008, but see also ZEMAN, Zbyněk – KLIMEK, Antonín. *The Life of Edvard Benes: 1884–1948: Czechoslovakia in Peace and War*. Oxford; New York : Oxford University Press, 1997; MARÈS, Antoin. *Edvard Beneš, de la gloire à l'abîme: un drame entre Hitler et Staline*. Paris : Perrin, 2015.

38 DDI, 6, 3, docs. 488, 748, 879.

39 DČZP, A, 2, 2, docs. 274 and 289, Šimek to the Foreign Ministry, 7 and 20 July 1919.

40 DČZP, A, 2, 2, doc. 300, Beneš to Machatý, 25 July 1919.



and especially the resolute support it received from the French. Under these conditions, the Italian representatives in Paris had little room for maneuvering. More importantly, they were increasingly distracted by the opening of discussions concerning the Adriatic question in spring 1919, their dramatic clash with American President Woodrow Wilson and their subsequent two-week withdrawal from the Peace Conference (the so-called Adriatic crisis).<sup>41</sup>

The unassertive attitude of the Italians was evident during discussions concerning the peace treaty with Germany. When the newly instituted Council of the Big Four quickly ratified the proposals of the Czechoslovak Commission and decided to leave, unaltered, the historical border that divided Germany from the Habsburg Empire, and thus from the Czech Lands, Orlando did not raise any objection nor make any comments. The same occurred when proposals formulated by the experts were included practically without changes in the peace preliminaries with Austria and Hungary. On a few occasions though, the Italians did not shy away from expressing their views. This happened for instance when the question of Teschen was taken into consideration by the Council of Foreign Ministers, the body assisting the Council of Four. While the French insisted that most of the region and its coal basin should be given to Czechoslovakia, the Italians reiterated their support for a division more respectful of ethnic considerations and Polish interests. For the moment, the stalemate was broken by an American proposal, which sought to leave the search for a solution to direct negotiations between Prague and Warsaw.<sup>42</sup>

Another discussion was raised by a new Austrian request aimed at revising the border traditionally dividing Cisleithania from Transleithania and annexing the western Hungarian districts or, according to the German definition, the Burgenland, to Vienna. In the Council of the Foreign Ministers the majority was favorably disposed toward this idea, not so much because of the presence of a predominantly German population, but rather as a means for compensating Austria for other territorial losses and, above all, for dissuading it from pursuing the Anschluss. On the contrary, Sonnino warned that the proposed solution would threaten the positive relations entertained by the Austrians and the Magyars and introduce a further element for tension in East-Central Europe. Although he neglected to mention it, his opposition was due in good part to the desire to avoid any change of the status quo in the Burgenland, which might offer neighboring states an opportunity to interfere and raise anew the issue of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor. For this reason, Sonnino stressed that Austria and Hungary should be left free to reach an agreement directly between themselves, without interference: “He couldn’t see a reason for inciting them [...]. He considered quite unnecessary to suggest them to raise superfluous problems. The two countries had never discussed their border for fifty years; their present governments were very unstable and this did not seem the right time to start a fight between them.”<sup>43</sup> Despite his colleagues’ objections, for the moment Sonnino seemed able to prevail. In mid-May, a joint session of

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41 On these developments, see the works quoted in footnote 1. Interestingly enough, Beneš claimed proudly that the postponement of the solution of the Adriatic question was due not only to opposition of the Yugoslavs, but also the help they received from the Czechoslovaks: DČZP, A, 2, 1, doc. 219, Beneš to the Foreign Committee of the National Assembly, 3 June 1919.

42 FRUS, PPC, 4, pp. 608–612, Council of the Foreign Ministers, 23 April 1919.

43 FRUS, PPC, 4, pp. 672–677, Council of the Foreign Ministers, 8 May 1919.

the Council of the Big Four and the Council of Foreign Ministers decided that the Austro-Hungarian border was to remain unchanged, at least unless Vienna objected.<sup>44</sup>

By late spring 1919, the imminent conclusion of the treaty with Germany at Versailles and the absence of a solution for the Adriatic question exacerbated the Italian public's dissatisfaction and initiated a prolonged phase of political instability that further diminished the efficiency of the Italian line of conduct at the peace conference. In June, the Orlando-Sonnino government fell and was substituted by a new cabinet led by Francesco Saverio Nitti, with Tommaso Tittoni simultaneously in charge of the Foreign Ministry and the Paris negotiations. Tittoni was critical toward his predecessors and was confident he could restore good relations with the other great powers, solving the Adriatic question at the price of some concessions. In the same context, Tittoni tried not to antagonize the East and Central-European countries linked to the victorious coalition and showed some interest for the overtures he received from Beneš as soon as he arrived in Paris. Nonetheless, his presence at the head of the Foreign Ministry was too short to seriously affect Italy's attitude toward Czechoslovakia and most of his collaborators remained critical toward Prague's demands.<sup>45</sup>

This was apparent in the final phase of negotiations for the peace treaty with Austria and with the creation of a commission charged with examining Vienna's counterproposals. In this commission Italy was represented by Luigi Vannutelli Rey, who had acquired a certain expertise on East-Central Europe having served as consul in Budapest. Faced with resurgent requests to cede the Burgenland to Austria, Vannutelli Rey stuck to the position previously formulated by Sonnino and stressed the opportunity that the two parties involved negotiated, in full autonomy, an arrangement compatible with their interests. Vannutelli Rey's reaction was harsher when the French and British representatives proposed another modification to the upper fringe of the Burgenland, that is, the attribution of a bridgehead beyond the Danube to Czechoslovakia, in correspondence with Pressburg. For the Anglo-French, this solution had the advantage of avoiding the separation of Pressburg from the nearby urban development situated south of the Danube (present day Petržalka). Moreover, Slovakia's main city would obtain a railway connection with Zagreb and, further away, with the Adriatic. For his side, Vannutelli Rey pointed out that the bridgehead interrupted the natural frontier provided by the Danube and further weakened the strategic position of Budapest and Vienna vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia. He was also clearly worried that, by reducing the Burgenland's extension, the establishment of the abhorred Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor might become easier in the future. As he summed up: "It is already negative enough that Pozsony was attributed to the Czechs, although the majority of the population is Hungarian and the Slovaks are not numerous. It would be a senseless humiliation if now the Czechs were given a bridgehead as well." However, Vannutelli Rey's objections concerning both the Burgenland and the Czechoslovak bridgehead did not have any effect and he could only express his dissent with his colleagues.<sup>46</sup>

44 FRUS, PPC, 4, pp. 503–507, Council of Ten, 12 May 1919.

45 CACCAMO 2000, pp. 181–186; ALATRI, Paolo. *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica (1919–1920)*. Padova : Feltrinelli, 1960; MICHELETTA, Luca. *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra*, Vol. 1. Roma : Jouvence, 1999, pp. 15–98. Tittoni's moderation toward Czechoslovakia might have been influenced by the overtures he received from Beneš: DDI, 6, 4, docs. 146 and 646, Tittoni to Lago, 23 July 1919, and Faralli to Tittoni, 24 October 1919.

46 The activity of the Commission for the exam of the Austrian counterproposals can be reconstructed through the following sources: FRUS, PPC, 7, appendix A, pp. 94–96, Report presented by the commission to the Council of the Head of Delegations, 10 August 1919; *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary 1919–1920*. Budapest : Royal Hungarian University Press, 1939, Vol. 1, doc. 14, Teleki to Sommsich, 23 Febru-

When the new version of the Supreme Council, the Council of the Heads of Delegation, reviewed proposals formulated by the experts, it agreed without hesitation that the Burgenland was to be ceded to Austria. Tittoni, who had just arrived in Paris, did not want to antagonize his colleagues and abstained from reiterating the Italian position. The Czechoslovak bridgehead, however, was a different matter. The second Italian plenipotentiary delegate, Silvio Crespi, could not stop from observing: “He could not see a reason to allow Czechoslovakia’s expansion beyond the Danube [...]. This would represent a permanent cause for dissent [...]. The possession of an isolated bridgehead had an offensive aspect both toward Austria and Hungary. The Italian delegation would prefer to give satisfaction to the Czechs in whatever other region.” Crespi also denied that the urban center beyond the Danube could be considered part of Pressburg and suggested that Czechoslovakia’s connection to the Adriatic be satisfied through trade agreements rather than through territorial changes. Nonetheless, the Italians ended up accepting a proposal by Tardieu, according to which Czechoslovakia would obtain the bridgehead but would have to keep it demilitarized. From the Italian perspective, this solution had the advantage of at least limiting the possibility that the bridgehead might be exploited militarily against Budapest and Vienna.<sup>47</sup>

In the same period, the Teschen issue came once again to the fore. In July the Joint Commission for Teschen acknowledged that the direct negotiations between Prague and Warsaw had been fruitless and resumed its activity, in an attempt to produce a solution that could still be included in the Austrian peace treaty.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime, the Inter-allied Commission physically present in Teschen drew up a new report supporting a partition at least partially considerate of ethnic considerations. The members of the Joint Commission could not help but notice the similarity between this new report and the minority position expressed in the last months by the Italians. All at once the British representative paid homage to the Italian clairvoyance, the American expressed his regret for not having supported the Italian thesis with enough determination in the past, and even the French delegate placed aside his Czechoslovakophile views momentarily. In this atmosphere, the Joint Commission approved unanimously a project that represented a compromise between the conflicting Czechoslovak and Polish aspirations. Specifically, Warsaw was to receive 171 thousand Poles and 10 thousand Czechs with about one third of the coal and coke mines, while Prague 105 thousand Czechs and 62 thousand Poles, with two thirds of the mines.<sup>49</sup>

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ary 1920; ASMAE, *Conferenza della Pace*, b. 3, Report drawn by the Italian representatives on the meeting of the commission of 6 July 1919; Stranieri to Tittoni, *Frontiere dello Stato Czecho-Slovacco*. As it is worth noting, Beneš intervened in advance with the French in order to make sure that the Burgenland question be solved coherently with Czechoslovak plans. As he wrote, “if the Conference did not want to satisfy our original demands [by creating the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav corridor], it is absolutely necessary, in Europe’s general interest, to think to a solution different from attributing this territory either to Hungary or to Austria.” As he explained, what he had in mind was that the Burgenland “be neutralized or put under the League of Nations’ administration.” Beneš also demanded the acquisition of the bridgehead beyond the Danube in consideration of “the struggle of the Czechoslovak nation against Vienna and Budapest”: DČZP, A, 2, 2, docs. 274 and 278, Beneš to Clemenceau, 3 and 10 July 1919.

47 FRUS, PPC, 7, pp. 94 and 97–100, Council of the Heads of Delegation, 10 and 11 July 1919.

48 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 32–33, Joint Commission for Teschen, 24 July 1919.

49 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 163–166, 167–170, 180–183, Joint Sub-commission for Teschen, 31 July, 12 August and 18 August 1919 (Nos. 7, 8, 10); pp. 40–43, Joint Commission for Teschen, 19 August 1919 (No. 6); pp. 51–58, Report of the Joint Commission for Teschen, 22 August 1919.

As a matter of fact, the French were not satisfied and began immediately to maneuver in order to subvert this solution. First they set up an audition of the Czechoslovak and Polish representatives by the Council of Heads of Delegations, then they insisted on charging the Joint Commission for Teschen with a new exam. Faced with such an anomalous procedure, Tittoni did not raise serious objections and limited himself to wishing for a balanced judgement. In this way, perhaps, he was also trying to show good-will to Beneš, who had specifically asked for his support for Teschen.<sup>50</sup> Under these circumstances, division among the members of the Joint Commission reemerged abruptly. The Italians, Americans and British remained favorable to an equitable division of Teschen, but the French resumed their traditional standpoint, preferring the attribution of most of the region to Czechoslovakia. The stalemate was overcome only by a proposal to determine Teschen's fate via a plebiscite. The proposal was approved by the Council of the Heads of Delegations after both the Poles and the Czechoslovaks had given their consent (for very different reasons though: the former hoped that a plebiscite would allow them to take advantage of the presence of a Polish majority, the latter simply wanted to gain time).<sup>51</sup> In the end, the plebiscite was never to take place. After a series of postponements, in the summer of 1920 the conflict with the Russian Bolsheviks and the advance of the Red Army to the gates of Warsaw forced the Poles to ask for an arbitrage by the great powers. In the critical juncture determined by conflict with the Russians, everyone was convinced that Poland did not have alternatives to appeasing Czechoslovakia at the price of substantial concessions regarding Teschen. Subsequently, the French proposal favorable to the attribution of most of the region and its coal basin to Prague was finally able to prevail.<sup>52</sup>

The last occasion to discuss the borders of Czechoslovakia was provided by the final round of talks concerning the peace treaty with Hungary in the first half of 1920. By then, Tittoni had already resigned, having realized that difficulties in Paris were much more complex than expected and that the goodwill he had tried to display toward both the great powers and the new East-Central European countries had not produced any positive effects.<sup>53</sup> Although Nitti replaced Tittoni at the Foreign Ministry with Vittorio Scialoja, this time the Italian premier reserved for himself the negotiations concerning the peace settlement. For him, this was an occasion to implement the ideas he had developed in recent months on the necessity to facilitate European economic and political recovery by moderating the system of the peace treaties and favoring cooperation with the defeated countries. There is

50 FRUS, PPC, 8, pp. 80–82, Council of the Heads of Delegation, 3 September 1919. For Tittoni's contacts with Beneš on the question of Teschen, see Tittoni to Lago, 23 July 1919, already mentioned.

51 *Recueil*, IV C 3, pp. 60–68 and 69–72, Joint Commission for Teschen, 10 September 1919, and annexed Report from 11 September 1919; FRUS, PPC, VIII, pp. 184–185, Council of the Heads of Delegation, 11 September 1919; Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome, Carte Nitti, b. 31, Tittoni to Nitti, 11 September 1919.

52 It is worth pointing out that, during this last phase of the discussions concerning the Teschen issue, the Nitti government substituted Colonel Tissi in the Inter-allied commission present in the region with an influential personality, a member of the House of Representatives and former Undersecretary of State Luigi Borsarelli. Instructed to follow a neutral line of conduct among the Czechoslovaks and the Poles, Borsarelli kept signaling the partiality of the French representatives and their Czechoslovakophile leanings: ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919-1930, b. 933, Borsarelli's report without date (but arrived at the Foreign Ministry on 28 April 1920), or Borsarelli to Scialoja, 27 May 1920.

53 Tittoni's lack of success was visible also in relation to Czechoslovakia. Even if the Italian delegation had moderated its approach toward the Czechoslovak claims, Beneš did not show any gratitude. On the eve of the signature of the Treaty of St. Germain, he announced the decision to open negotiations for an alliance with the Kingdom SCS in the following terms: "Now we are completely free in regard of the peace conference and completely free in regard to Italy, therefore it is necessary to take a more autonomous position." See DČZP, A, 2, 2, doc. 362.

no doubt that in this way Nitti also hoped to obtain some concessions for Italy and to reach a satisfactory solution for the Adriatic question.<sup>54</sup>

At the beginning of 1920, the Supreme Council delivered the peace conditions to the Hungarians and allowed them to present their counterproposals. For a moment, the great powers seemed to be more favorably disposed toward the Hungarians. At the inter-allied conference held in London in February-March 1920, British premier David Lloyd George recognized the gravity of the territorial sacrifices envisioned for Hungary and criticized the peace conditions for attributing a third of the Magyar nation to neighboring countries. Nitti followed suit: “The council could not accept that millions of Magyars were submitted to the sovereignty of other nations without further discussion. [...] At the moment there was a large number of Hungarians outside of their national territory and he urged the council not to forget that even the conquered peoples were entitled to justice.” Despite French protests, Lloyd George managed to have the Hungarian peace conditions re-examined in a specific meeting of the allied foreign ministers to be held in the following days, still in London.<sup>55</sup> In the meantime, in the internal discussions of the Italian delegation, Scialoja pointed out the difficulty of obtaining some concessions in Hungary’s favor. After Nitti insisted on the necessity to accomplish something, he expressed the opinion that Italy might have some prospect of success on the border with Czechoslovakia.<sup>56</sup>

When the foreign ministers met, however, the atmosphere had already changed. Pressed by the French and also by the members of the soon to be Little Entente, the British had become more cautious. In this atmosphere, Scialoja’s suggestion that the Supreme Council entrust the experts with a new examination of the Hungarian borders was met with sharp denial. The same happened when Vannutelli Rey, the Italian expert who assisted Scialoja, proposed reconsidering at least the Hungarian-Czechoslovak section of the border, mentioning specifically the Grosse Schütt and the area in proximity to Budapest. In the end, the foreign ministers excluded any changes before the signing of the peace treaty but admitted that afterwards the commissions charged with defining the details of the Hungarian border might suggest some minor changes to the League of Nations.<sup>57</sup>

A final discussion took place back in Paris within the Conference of the Ambassadors, the body created for regulating the last details of the peace treaties. After the Americans, who had not taken part in the conference of London, raised their confusion regarding the decisions concerning Hungary and asked for the detachment of Subcarpathian Ruthenia from Czechoslovakia, the Italian representative, Lelio Bonin Longare, gave his support “wholeheartedly”.<sup>58</sup> This attempt also did not bear any fruit, but Bonin did secure the possibility that future territorial changes in Hungary’s favor be mentioned in the letter which the victorious powers were to send with the text of the peace treaty to Budapest,

54 CACCAMO 2000, pp. 237–242; MICHELETTA 1999, 1, pp. 88–102.

55 *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (DBFP). London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, Series 1, Vol. 7, docs. 26 and 46, Conference of London, 25 February and 3 March 1920.

56 ACS, Carte Nitti, b. 32, Nitti to Scialoja, 8 and 9 March 1920, and Scialoja to Nitti, 8 March 1920.

57 DBFP, 1, 7, doc. 54, pp. 440–449, Conference of London, 8 March 1920; ACS, Carte Nitti, bb. 22 and 32, Scialoja to Nitti, 9 and 11 March 1920, Nitti to Scialoja, 10 March 1920, and Nitti to Bonin, 15 March 1920. The danger of Anglo-Italian collaboration in Hungary’s favor became one of the main incentives for the coordination of Czechoslovakia with the Kingdom of SCS and Romania and for laying down the foundations of the Little Entente: DČZP, A, 2, 2, docs. 539, 556, 568, 569, 570, 572, 578, 586, 603.

58 ASMAE, Conferenza della Pace, b. 277, Conference of the Ambassadors, 29 March 1920 (No. 26); ACS, Carte Nitti, b. 32, Bonin to Nitti and Scialoja, 30 March 1920.

the so-called *lettre d'envoi*. At least theoretically, the result was to leave the door open for a partial revision of the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>59</sup>

In this way, the debate concerning the shaping of Czechoslovakia was over. At the Paris Peace Conference, Italy had been the member of the victorious coalition that exhibited the most reservations about the territorial ambitions of the new state and was more intent in trying to avoid their complete fulfillment. This line of conduct was exhibited in the early phases of the conference by the Italian experts or technical representatives in the Commission on Czechoslovak Affairs and was reiterated for over a year, though with some discrepancies, by the various Italian plenipotentiary delegates alternating in the Supreme Council. In the end, the role played by the Italians can bring us to very different interpretations. We can agree with Masaryk, who, as early as the spring 1919, argued that Italy was destined to tie itself to the countries that had been defeated during the war, or with Beneš, who went so far as envisaging the outbreak of a new conflict where Italy and Czechoslovakia would take opposing sides. In this way, the Czechoslovak ruling group seemed to anticipate the scenario that would actually materialize twenty years later, with Mussolini's alignment with Hitler at the conference of Munich and the Italian-German alliance during World War II. But we could also reach a different conclusion. Had Czechoslovakia not taken such advantage of the position of "darling of the Entente" (*miláček Dohody*, according to the definition proudly employed by Beneš himself), and displayed more moderation toward its neighbors at the peace conference, as suggested by the Italians, perhaps it would not have found itself in such a critical situation at the end of the 1930s.

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59 ASMAE, Conferenza della Pace, bb. 277 and 278, Conference of the Ambassadors, 31 March and 12 April 1920 (Nos. 27 and 31); ACS, Carte Nitti, b. 47, Bonin to Scialoja, 31 March 1920, and Bonin to Nitti and Scialoja, 3 and 18 April 1920.

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# Italian-Hungarian Support for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO): A Case Study on the Hungarian Role in Italy's Aspirations towards the Balkan Region during the Interwar Period

Petra Hamerli

## Abstract

HAMERLI, Petra. Italian-Hungarian Support for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO): A Case Study on the Hungarian Role in Italy's Aspirations towards the Balkan Region during the Interwar Period. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the Great War changed the international order of Europe as new states were born and old ones had to adapt to transformed environments. Even the directives of the Paris Peace Conference could not satisfy every claim and the many expectations of all European countries. Regarding the victorious powers, the most unsatisfied with the new order of Europe was undoubtedly Italy. On one hand, it had joined the Entente powers due to the promise of gaining territories, including Istria and the Dalmatian Coast, which was eventually given to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 Yugoslavia), based on the principle of national self-determination. On the other hand, the main aim of Italian foreign policy regarding Europe – especially after Benito Mussolini came to power – was to gain influence in the Balkans, Central-Europe, and the Mediterranean. Yugoslavia posed an obstacle to these goals merely by its existence. As the Italian politicians were aware, Hungary – absent two thirds of its historical territory and losing the Voivodinian part to Yugoslavia – was also interested in weakening the South-Slavic state. The Italian government approached Hungarian leaders and offered their support of Hungary's revisionist claims. This led to strong cooperation between the two states, which included the common support of separatist movements organized within Yugoslavia, (Ustasha, Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization IMRO). This case study presents the Italian-Hungarian support given to the IMRO which is a lesser known chapter in the history of the Interwar Period.

**Keywords:** Hungarian-Italian Relations, Separatism in Yugoslavia, IMRO, Italian Fascist Foreign Policy, Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period

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## Yugoslavia's Role in Hungarian-Italian Relations

On 5 April 1927, the Hungarian and Italian prime ministers, István Bethlen and Benito Mussolini, signed the Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration, which strengthened cooperation between the two states. The published part of the treaty seemed to be a typical, generic document on diplomatic relations between the two countries, but a secret clause declared that the Hungarian and Italian governments would harmonize their policies regarding the issues in which both of them were interested.<sup>1</sup> In practice, this section clearly meant that in the future Italy would support Hungarian revisionism while Hungary would assist the Italian manoeuvres against the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia.<sup>2</sup>

1 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára – National Archive of Hungary (MNL OL), Budapest, K 64. 24. csomó. 23. tétel. 1927. 73 res. pol. 1927.

2 The South-Slavic state was founded in 1918 under the name “Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes”, but the term Yugoslavia was in common use, and in 1929 became official. In order to use the terms sequentially and for better understanding of related literature, the majority of historians use the term “Yugoslavia” in dis-

This shows that one of the key elements of Hungarian-Italian relations, mainly according to the Italian point of view, was the “Yugoslavian question”, i.e. Italian policy towards Yugoslavia. To understand Italian-Yugoslavian relations of the Interwar Period, the Treaty of London signed on 26 April 1915, needs to be mentioned first. In this secret agreement, the Entente Powers, namely France, Great-Britain and Russia, promised the area of South Tyrol, (Trentino), with Brenner Pass, Trieste, the Italian-inhabited part of the Dalmatian Coast and the Eastern part of Istria to Italy. Besides this, the treaty ensured Italy the sharing of the German colonies and guaranteed protectorate over Albanian territories in the case of Italian intervention into war in alliance with the Entente.<sup>3</sup> As the Italian government considered participation as an excellent opportunity to strengthen Italy’s position within international ranks, Prime Minister Antonio Salandra decided to intervene. The problem that later caused in the conflict with Yugoslavia was that the Serbian government – an ally of the Entente too – declared that in case of victory, it would claim the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Voivodinian Region, Croatia, Slovenia, Dalmatia and Istria.<sup>4</sup> As we can see, the latter two territories were partly promised to Italy as well. At the Paris Peace Conference, (1919), while arguing the ethnical principles laid out by American President Thomas Woodrow Wilson, decision-makers gave the major part of the two regions to the Yugoslavian state, which made Italy feel that its allies had betrayed them. In addition, the National Council of Fiume, (nowadays Rijeka), turned to the Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, with a petition expressing the willingness of the Fiumean-Italian citizens to join Italy.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the Italian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference claimed the city of Fiume as well, which meant another contested point with Yugoslavia.

From the Italian point of view, these territorial conflicts originated from the fact that the Italian government aimed at strengthening its influence in the Balkans, the Danubian region and the Mediterranean, (including Northern-Africa), and gaining hegemony in the Adriatic.<sup>6</sup> As well-known Italian historian Renzo De Felice writes in his monumental biography on Fascist leader Benito Mussolini, the Italian foreign policy goals can be summarized in two words: *sicurezza* and *espansione* (security and expansion); security in Central Europe (the Balkans and Danubian region), and expansion towards the Mediterranean and Africa.<sup>7</sup> Looking at the map of Europe in the Interwar Period, it is evident that Yugoslavia, merely by its existence, meant an obstacle to Italy in realizing these aspirations and therefore weakening Yugoslavia’s position was of primary interest to the Italian government.

In 1922, Mussolini was elected prime minister of Italy, which meant the beginning of the Fascist regime that shaped the Italian political system for more than two decades (1922–1943). During the first years, Mussolini concentrated on consolidating his power so he focused on domestic affairs rather than on foreign policy. The result was that in the first half of the 1920s, there were no significant changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the famous General Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Liberal Era, Salvatore Conta-

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cussing events before 1929 as well. I also follow this tendency.

- 3 MOSCA, Rodolfo (ed.) *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. Quinta serie, Volume 3*. Roma : Libreria dello Stato, 1953, Document 470, The Treaty of London, 26 April 1915.
- 4 HORNYÁK, Árpád. *Magyar–jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok, 1918–1927*. Novi Sad : Forum Kiadó, 2004, p. 11.
- 5 MOSCA, Rodolfo (ed.) *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani. Settima serie, Volume 4 – 16*. Roma : Libreria dello Stato, 1953, Document 134, Orlando to Bonin Longare, 13 November 1918. (Henceforward: DDI, Sesta serie).
- 6 CAROCCI, Gianpiero. *La politica estera dell’Italia fascista*. Bari : Editore Laterza, 1969, pp. 13-14.
- 7 DE FELICE, Renzo. *Mussolini il duce. Vol. I. Gli anni del consenso, 1929–1936*. Torino : Einaudi, 1974, p. 347.



rini, was able to keep his position in the ministry until 1926. He aimed at strengthening Italy's international position but believed that the establishment of sufficient relations with neighbouring countries was just as important. In order to develop a peaceful relationship with the Yugoslavian government, Contarini promoted an Italian-Yugoslavian agreement (the Treaty of Rome, 1924), to find compromises in their conflicts. In this pact, the government of Belgrade recognized the Italian annexation of Fiume. This act can be considered the last success of Contarini<sup>8</sup> as after some disputes he resigned (1926). A year before in 1925, a young Fascist, Dino Grandi, was appointed to Vice-Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Then in 1929, he became Minister of Foreign Affairs directing the institution for seven years until 1932. Grandi's and Mussolini's opinions were quite different on some questions but regarding the Yugoslavian policy, their thoughts were consistent: Yugoslavia's position had to be weakened.<sup>9</sup> This was not a new idea within Italian foreign policy, first appearing in 1918.<sup>10</sup> According to Mussolini's point of view, a possible way of diminishing Yugoslavia was to encircle it by those states which – like Italy – had conflicts with the South-Slavs. To realize this, he counted on the assistance of Albania, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary<sup>11</sup>, as these countries also had territorial conflicts with Yugoslavia.

From our point of view, it is important to see what Hungary could have benefited from support of the anti-Yugoslavian aspirations of Italy. With the Treaty of Trianon signed on 4 June 1920, Hungary lost two thirds of its historical territory, and – besides Austria, Czechoslovakia and Romania – Yugoslavia claimed and received former Hungarian lands, namely the Voivodina and Medjimurje areas, (the independence of Croatia from Hungary had been recognized earlier by the Hungarian government). As a result, the main aim of Hungarian foreign policy was a revision of the treaty and for this to happen, the support of the victorious powers was necessary. In 1921, a new prime minister was elected, István Bethlen, (1921–1931), who conceptualized Italy's role in Hungarian diplomacy. The main idea was that Hungary was in danger after losing the Carpathians as the countries of the Little Entente – an organization formed in 1920–1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia with the aim of obstructing revision of the treaty and a Habsburg restoration – and the Soviet Union encircled Hungary, which remained without any defence. That is why, argued Bethlen, the revision was of fundamental interest to the Hungarian government. Due to the abovementioned reasons, Italy was also unsatisfied with the Versaille System and was not interested in Slavic hegemony in Central Europe, therefore the Italian government could be considered as a natural ally of Hungary in gaining the treaty revision. Though, still citing Bethlen's point of view, Italy itself was not potential enough to gain practical support for realizing the Hungarian aspirations, so in the long run, a Hungarian-Italian-German block had to be established.<sup>12</sup>

8 DI NOLFO, Ennio. *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana (1919–1933)*. Padova : Cedam, 1960, pp. 46–48.

9 LEFEBVRE D'OVIDIO, Francesco. *L'Italia e il sistema internazionale. Dalla formazione del Governo Mussolini alla Grande depressione (1922–1929) Volume 1*. Roma : Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2016, p. 214.

10 For this, a plan was developed in 1918 that aimed to encircle the Yugoslavian state by its enemies and the promotion of its disintegration with the help of supporting separatist groups of Yugoslavia. The plan – despite that it was probably not created by him – was named after general Pietro Badoglio, the chief of staff of the Italian army. BUCARELLI, Massimo. *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia 1922–1939*. Bari : B. A. Graphis, 2006, p. 11.

11 HORNYÁK 2004, p. 27.

12 ORMOS, Mária. Bethlen koncepciója az olasz–magyar szövetségről (1927–1931). In *Történelmi Szemle*, 1971, No. 1 – 2, pp. 133–156.

Similarly to Bethlen, Mussolini was aware of the significance of Germany amongst the European international system, but initially he did not consider the possibility of an Italian-German alliance. Actually, Germany meant a possible rival in the Danubian Basin, the Balkans and in Africa as well, therefore, Mussolini aimed at establishing influence in these territories before Germany was able to strengthen its geopolitical position. Among these territories, Africa took priority in Mussolini's mind so he made some compromises in the Danubian-Balkan region.<sup>13</sup> The Hungarian political élite did not take into consideration these facts and hence overvalued Hungary's significance in Italian foreign policy.<sup>14</sup>

In 1926, Mussolini's target – as we could see – was to establish influence in Central Europe, the first step in realizing his full ambitions. For this, the cooperation of Hungary was necessary and Italy, represented by Dino Grandi and Ercole Durini di Monza, the Italian Ambassador to Budapest, offered to negotiate with the Hungarian government. By that time, Hungarian-Yugoslavian negotiations from the early 1920s had failed so Hungarian politicians were quick to sign a treaty of friendship with Italy.<sup>15</sup> For Mussolini, this treaty was a piece of the encirclement of Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> The Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship was preceded by a series of other agreements made by Italy with the anti-Yugoslavian states. The first was a pact of friendship and security with Albania signed in Tirana, (the First Treaty of Tirana). This declared that the two states would support each other to preserve Albania's political, judicial and geographic status quo.<sup>17</sup> One year later in 1927, Italy and Albania signed the second Treaty of Tirana, which was more obviously anti-Yugoslavian than the first one. As we have already mentioned, for realizing the encirclement of the South-Slavic state an alliance with Romania was necessary so in September 1926, the Italian-Romanian Treaty of Friendship on the two countries cooperation was signed. In the case of a conflict initiated by a third state, neutrality was agreed. Cooperation was also necessary from Bulgaria<sup>18</sup>, to which the road led through the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, which was founded with the aim of reaching autonomy for Macedonia or within a South-Slavic federation, or within Bulgaria.<sup>19</sup>

## Support for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization

The IMRO, in Macedonian, “Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionarna Organizacija, VMRO”, was founded in 1893 and led by Todor Alexandrov and Aleksandar Protogerov with the abovementioned goal of gaining the independence of Macedonia. The reason for establishing this organization was that in the late 1800s four states, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Romania, sought to acquire the territory of Macedonia as it did not have fixed frontiers. The region was strategically important because of Thessaloniki's harbour and the basin of the Vardar and Strumica rivers.<sup>20</sup> As the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the era of nationalism in Europe, and – like other non-independent nations of the continent – the Macedonians

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- 13 HORVÁTH, Jenő. Olaszország Kelet-Közép-Európa politikája 1918-tól napjainkig. In *Grotius 2006*, p. 20, [http://www.grotius.hu/doc/pub/YWJMAR/horvath\\_jeno\\_grotius\\_e-konyvtar\\_2006.pdf](http://www.grotius.hu/doc/pub/YWJMAR/horvath_jeno_grotius_e-konyvtar_2006.pdf) [last viewed on 20 June 2020]. A good example for that is the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty of friendship of 1937.
- 14 BRECCIA, Alfredo. La politica estera italiana e l'Ungheria 1922–1933. In *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 1980, No. 1, pp. 93-112.
- 15 HORNYÁK 2004, pp. 248-249.
- 16 BUCARELLI 2006, p. 11.
- 17 JUHÁSZ, Gyula. *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919–1945*. Budapest : Kossuth Kiadó, 1988, p. 105.
- 18 HORNYÁK 2004, pp. 236-237.
- 19 JELAVICH Barbara. *A Balkán története. II. kötet. 20. század*. Budapest : Osiris Kiadó, 1996, p. 87.
- 20 JELAVICH 1996, pp. 83-84.

wanted sovereignty so they decided to found the IMRO with the slogan “Macedonia for Macedonians”. The IMRO could imagine the independence of Macedonia in one of two ways; on one hand, as a nation-state within a South-Slavic federation, and on the other as an autonomous region within the Bulgarian state. In the case of the latter, the organization could exercise some influence on the Bulgarian Government.<sup>21</sup> The IMRO began to infiltrate into international affairs after the Revolution of Ilinden in 1903, which sought the independence of Macedonia from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup>

In 1912, the Bulgarians, Greeks and Serbs made bilateral agreements on helping each other in an eventual war against the Ottoman Empire. They settled on the division of Macedonia amongst each other and besides this, Greece and Serbia made a second agreement on the division of the Albanian territory as well, and then the first Balkan War broke out. After the war, the Great Powers decided to create an independent Albania. The Greeks and Serbs wanted compensation by acquiring the Bulgarian part of the Macedonian territories, which led to the second Balkan War in 1913. It was closed by the Peace Treaty of Bucharest, which left only Pirin-Macedonia to Bulgaria, while Greece got Aegean-Macedonia and Serbia gained Vardar-Macedonia<sup>23</sup>, so the region was divided into three parts.

In 1914, when the first World War started, Bulgaria decided on neutrality at the beginning. As both the Entente States and the Central Powers desired to involve the state into the war, the Bulgarian Government made claims to the whole of Macedonia in exchange for intervention. The Central Powers, namely the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Germany, promptly agreed on this promise to Bulgaria, which joined them in 1915.<sup>24</sup> During the war, the Macedonians continued their campaign for autonomy in neutral Switzerland<sup>25</sup>, where they founded the monthly paper *Macédonie*. As a member of the Central Powers, Bulgaria lost the war. It was not able to obtain the promised territory and Macedonia stayed divided.<sup>26</sup> The Macedonian question was not resolved and the activities of the IMRO continued.

The Yugoslavian State formed after the first World War aimed to unify the South-Slavic people living in Central Europe under the domination of the Serbian Karađorđević Dynasty. The new state was not ethnically homogenous. About a dozen ethnic groups lived together in the country differing from each other in both mother language and cultural heritage, and thus religion, traditions and history. The dominant Serbian nation made up only 40 % of the total inhabitants, there were also Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Dalmatians, Bosnians, Hungarians, Germans, Romanians, Italians and Albanians comprising the population of the country.<sup>27</sup> Among the Croats – the second largest group after the Serbs – and the Macedonians – who had already founded a national organization – the idea of separatism appeared just after the formation of Yugoslavia. Hungary and Italy supported both movements, but as I have already examined the Italian-Hungarian support for Croatian separatism in detail in two previously published studies of mine<sup>28</sup>, I will focus here on the IMRO.

21 JELAVICH 1996, p. 87.

22 ROSSOS, Andrew. *Macedonia and the Macedonians*. Stanford : Hoover Institution Press, 2008, p. 99.

23 FRUSETTA, James. *Bulgaria's Macedonia: Nation-building and State Building, Centralization and Autonomy in Pirin Macedonia, 1903–1952*. PhD thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2006, p. 156.

24 FRUSETTA 2006, p. 157.

25 ROSSOS 2008, p. 128.

26 ROSSOS 2008, p. 129.

27 ORMOS Mária. *Merénylet Marseille-ben*. Budapest : Kossuth Kiadó, 1984, p. 16.

28 HAMERLI, Petra. Magyar–olasz együttműködés a horvát szeparatisták támogatásában 1927–1934. In *Századok*,

The other process of weakening Yugoslavia was promotion of its inner, ethnic conflicts<sup>29</sup>, which actually meant supporting the separatists. As a first step, in 1924 Hungarian politicians thought to get in touch with the leaders of the IMRO. Ambassador András Hory<sup>30</sup> wrote in his memoir: “In the current situation, we have to get in touch with the enemies of our enemies and cordialize with them, he [Kálmán Kánya, deputy of the Minister of Hungarian Foreign Affairs] said. He turned my attention to the dissatisfaction of the Macedonians and ordered to me to cordially welcome the Macedonians who may turn to me and from who I can get valuable information.”<sup>31</sup> This shows Hory remembering Kánya’s suggestion, which in my opinion gives an exact summary of the IMRO’s role in Hungarian foreign policy. Relations with the IMRO could have been beneficial for Hungary for two reasons; on one hand, the IMRO’s activity could weaken the Yugoslavian State, which was one of the members of the Little Entente, and on the other hand, the Macedonians could provide precious information on Yugoslavian policy.

In 1925, Dr. Ewald Ammende, a German politician living in Estonia, proposed the organization of a congress at the Paris Peace Conference<sup>32</sup> where every minority group in Europe could represent themselves and express their opinions on the cultural autonomy and minority rights that had been agreed on by the decision-makers in Paris.<sup>33</sup> Concerning the Macedonians, Ammende suggested not to send any from Bulgaria as they had been engaged in acts of terror, but to represent themselves with Macedonians from other countries. On 19 May 1927, Ammende arrived in Sofia to meet János Kiss, the councillor of the Hungarian embassy in Bulgaria. They negotiated on the Macedonian question and Kiss offered mediation between Ammende and the Macedonians. The problem was that after seeing the proposal of Ammende, the Macedonians thought he wanted to exclude them from the congress.<sup>34</sup> This led to misunderstandings with Hungarian politicians as well so the new deputy of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sándor Khuen-Héderváry, ordered a suspension of the mediation between Ammende and the Macedonian group.<sup>35</sup> After this, in August 1927, one of the leaders of the IMRO, Naum Tomalewski, travelled to Budapest where he visited Khuen-Héderváry and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lajos Walko, to personally give a report on the situation of the Macedonians.<sup>36</sup> With these negotiations, Hungary got in touch with the IMRO.

Although the scientific literature says that Italy supported the IMRO from 1923<sup>37</sup>, archival sources and diplomatic documents reveal that Mussolini obligated himself to help the Macedonian organization only in 1927. His motivation was that Bulgarian Prime Minister Andrei Liapchev had communicated to Renato Piacentini, the Italian ambassador to

2017, No. 4, pp. 879-904; HAMERLI Petra. The Hungarian-Italian Support of Croatian Separatism between 1928 and 1934. In *West Bohemian Historical Review*, 2015, No. 1, pp. 51-70.

29 HORNYÁK 2004, p. 27.

30 In 1924 András Hory was the Hungarian ambassador in Belgrade, then from 1927 to 1934 in Rome.

31 HORY, András. *Bukaresttől Varsóig*. Budapest : Gondolat Kiadó, 1987, p. 131; My own translation, (as are all of the citations).

32 The Peace Treaties signed at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 included orders for the protection of minorities, which actually was not kept by the successor States.

33 EILER, Ferenc. Nemzetközi kisebbségi kongresszusok a két világháború között. In *Regio – Kisebbség, Politika, Társadalom*, 1996, No. 3, pp. 137-164.

34 MNL OL, K 64. 24. csomó. 16. a tétel. 49 pol. 1927. Kiss to Walko, 25 May 1927.

35 MNL OL, K 64. 24. csomó. 16. a tétel. Telegraph 5920. Khuen-Héderváry to Kuhl, 2 July 1927.

36 MNL OL, K 64. 24. csomó. 16. a tétel. 79 pol. 1927. Kiss to Walko, 19 August 1927.

37 SADKOVICH, James. Opportunismo esitante: la decisione italiana di appoggiare il separatismo croato: 1927–1929. In *Storia Contemporanea*, 1985, No. 3, pp. 401-426.

Sofia, that Bulgaria would have appreciated if the Italian delegates in the League of Nations sometimes protected Macedonian interests in front of its Council.<sup>38</sup> Italy was interested in having Bulgaria among its allies so Mussolini took the opportunity to strengthen Italian-Bulgarian relations, declaring that “from nowadays [from 1927] the Macedonians have the most cordial friendship of Italy”.<sup>39</sup> In this letter to Piacentini, Mussolini explained that the IMRO was appropriate to obstruct the Yugoslavian-Bulgarian approach and that is why the organization deserved special attention and support.<sup>40</sup> Thus Mussolini ordered Piacentini to contact the Macedonians, especially Tomalewski, and gain information from him.<sup>41</sup>

After that, Piacentini met Tomalewski more times but he did not approach other Macedonian leaders<sup>42</sup>, as Italy agreed with the statement of the other Great Powers, (France, Great Britain), which thought that the terror acts of the IMRO had endangered peace in Europe<sup>43</sup> as the Macedonians – especially the fraction of IMRO led by Ivan Mihailov<sup>44</sup> – had committed several crimes not only against Bulgarian politicians, but also against civilians. News of these cruelties was dispersed in the world press and some European public figures voiced their objections. For example, the famous French writer Henri Barbusse turned to the League of Human Rights with a petition in 1928 to direct the organization’s attention towards the IMRO’s actions<sup>45</sup>, while the British government – as we will see – expressed its condemnation in a memorandum sent to Bulgarian leaders. Nevertheless, Italian politicians were aware of the fact that the Macedonian question represented the most vulnerable point for Yugoslavia.<sup>46</sup> Italy followed a policy of *sacro egoismo* – saint egoism – where the weakening of Yugoslavia for them was much more important than peace in Europe and avoiding terrorism. At one of the Piacentini-Tomalewski meetings, Tomalewski suggested to Italy to communicate with the Croatian separatists as well and he asked for information about the Italian-Yugoslavian relations, but Piacentini did not say anything about it to the Macedonian leader<sup>47</sup> because he did not wish to discover that the IMRO was actually an instrument for the realization of Italy’s anti-Yugoslavian ambitions.

In January 1928, Tomalewski visited Hory as well. During the meeting, Tomalewski explained that the Macedonians had realized that Italy had been seeking to use them for its own purposes. He declared that the Macedonians would participate in a causal Italian-Yugoslavian conflict only if the Italians first convincingly supported the IMRO’s aims.<sup>48</sup> Hory tried to persuade Tomalewski to keep in touch with Italy, which makes it evident that Hungary’s role of mediator helped to establish relations between Italy and the IMRO.<sup>49</sup>

38 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 5, Document 369, Piacentini to Mussolini, 23 August 1927.

39 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 5, Document 446, Mussolini to Sola, 3 October 1927.

40 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 5, Document 446, Mussolini to Sola, 3 October 1927.

41 Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri – Historical Archive of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (ASMAE), Rome, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Busta 921. Fasc. Questione Macedone. No. 1487/358 R. Mussolini to Piacentini, 14 November 1927.

42 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 924. Telegramma 1642. Piacentini to Mussolini, 19 March 1928.

43 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 921. Telegramma 7244/1366. Bodrero to Mussolini, 12 October 1927.

44 See details in the next chapter of this paper.

45 ORMOS 1984, pp. 45–46.

46 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 921. Telegramma 7244/1366. Bodrero to Mussolini, 12 October 1927.

47 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 244, Piacentini to Mussolini, 11 April 1928.

48 MNL OL, K 64. 29. csomó. 16. a tétel. 7 pol./ 1928. Hory to Walko, 24 January 1928.

49 ORMOS 1984, p. 46.

All in all, the Hungarian and the Italian political elite considered the IMRO to be the major obstacle of cordial relations between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, and as they were both interested in hindering this approach, they supported the Macedonian organization. Additionally, the two states could gather precious information from the IMRO leaders about Yugoslavian policy. On the other hand – as the IMRO was famous for its terrorist acts – cooperation with the IMRO could be very compromising for its foreign supporters and that is why both Hungary and Italy were anxious about the activities of the IMRO and payed it special attention.<sup>50</sup> In 1928, their anxiety was confirmed.

### Compromising Acts and the End of Support

On 8 July 1928, one of the IMRO's leaders, Aleksandar Protogerov, was murdered and another Macedonian leader, Ivan "Vancho" Mihailov was suspected to be the killer. Hungarian councillor János Kiss reported that this suspicion could be verified by some well-known facts. First of all, witnesses confirmed that Mihailov had explained that he would take responsibility for the assassination and revealed his motivation at the congress of the IMRO. He said that the killing of Protogerov was justified revenge as in 1924, Protogerov had played a significant role in the assassination of Todor Alexandrov, Mihailov's predecessor. Secondly, Kiss continued his report, some politicians thought that the Bulgarian Secretary of War, Ivan Valkov, would have had a part in the assassination of Protogerov but in councillor Kiss' opinion, Valkov certainly could not have ordered the murder of Protogerov, but it could be possible that Valkov had given moral and financial support as the relationship between Valkov and Protogerov was bad. This idea could be confirmed by the fact that Valkov did not order an arrest warrant for Mihailov, and just before it happened Valkov left for an "unnamed place". Members of the IMRO blamed Mihailov and his ambitions for the killing<sup>51</sup>, Italy completely accepted the explanation of Mihailov.<sup>52</sup>

After the death of Protogerov, the IMRO broke into two factions: The Protogerovists led by Tomalewski were federalists who imagined the autonomy of Macedonia within a South-Slavic federation and the Mihailovists, also called centralists, who sought to unify the Macedonian territories within Bulgaria creating a "state in a state", naturally they enjoyed the official support of the Bulgarian government.<sup>53</sup> Actually, Mihailov thought about the possibility of independence as well, which can be seen in a Hungarian document written by Kiss: "The group of Mihailov actually aims at its [Macedonia's] full independence from the Bulgarian government. It clearly points out that Bulgaria does not have any more right to Bulgarian-Macedonia than Yugoslavia has for Serbian-Macedonia, or Greece has for Greek-Macedonia."<sup>54</sup> However, Mihailov was aware of the fact that total separatism could not be realized so he showed his approval for autonomy within Bulgaria.

Regarding to the two fractions, Kiss said that the Protogerovists were stronger but the Mihailovists more determined. The councillor had the impression that the Macedonians regretted not only the death of Protogerov, but also the fact that this case undermined

50 HAMERLI, Petra. *Magyar-olasz diplomáciai kapcsolatok és regionális hatásaik, 1927–1934. Doktori és Habilitációs Értekezések*. Budapest: Fakultás Kiadó, 2018, p. 125.

51 MNL OL, K 64. 29. csomó. 16. a tétel. 83 pol./1928. Kiss to Walko, 20 July 1928.

52 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 924. Telegramma 985/219. 24 August 1928.

53 JELAVICH 1996, p. 154.

54 MNL OL, K 64. 29. csomó. 16. a tétel. 118 pol. 1928. Kiss to Walko, 26 October 1928.

the international authority of the IMRO.<sup>55</sup> The Bulgarian state, as the main supporter of the IMRO was in a grave situation too. On one hand, the actions of the IMRO obstructed the Bulgarian-Yugoslavian approach and on the other hand, the neighbour states began to treat Bulgaria as an enemy which resulted in political isolation.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence, the effect that the IMRO had on the Bulgarian Government decreased and without this influence, Bulgaria was ready for an alliance with Yugoslavia. This meant that the main obstacle of a Serbian-Bulgarian approach had weakened, which made Hungary anxious.<sup>57</sup>

After the murder of Protogerov, the British Government demanded the tightening of control of the IMRO's activity from Bulgaria in a memorandum written on 3 August 1928 to the Government of Liapchev.<sup>58</sup> Great Britain called on the other Great Powers to join the memorandum but the Italian politicians really did not want to get involved in the domestic affairs of Bulgaria. Their real motivation for rejection<sup>59</sup> was certainly, as Piacentini explained in one of his letters, that the intervention "would hurt the feelings of our Macedonian friends because they would not understand why we Italians take solidarity with the plans of France, England, and especially of Belgrade against the IMRO".<sup>60</sup> Still, the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Atanas Burov, was ready to take measures to break up the IMRO because his British colleague, Austen Chamberlain, had promised earlier a loan for paying reparations laid out in the Peace Treaty of Neuilly after the first World War, (1919), and the memorandum declared that this loan would not be provided if Bulgaria did not fulfil what Great Britain was asking for concerning the IMRO.<sup>61</sup>

After the assassination of Protogerov, Hungary had relations with both of the factions but at the beginning Italy approached only the Protogerovists. In August, Tomalewski asked for financial support from Italy to consolidate the IMRO. He negotiated with Dino Grandi, explaining to him that he would not have asked for such a large loan from Italy – two million Italian Lira – if the party had not broken up.<sup>62</sup> In the meantime, Piacentini made a report on his impressions where he explained that the leaders of the two Macedonian divisions were unable to negotiate with each other seriously because their plans and ideas were so different that unity and cooperation was impossible.<sup>63</sup> For example, as Italian ambassador to Vienna Giacinto Auriti wrote to Mussolini, the Mihailovists planned to get rid of Burov, who was prepared for a Bulgarian-Yugoslavian accord as France and Great Britain had wished. Contrary to Mihailov, the Protogerovists were disposed to support Burov. The Italians thought that Tomalewski would be able to manage these conflicts<sup>64</sup> and that is why Italy assisted Tomalewski.

In December a fiducial of Burov, Bulgarian delegate Ivan Petrov, visited Piacentini. Petrov told him that in fact Burov had been an anti-Serbian patriot, but he wanted peace so he was forced to consolidate Bulgaria's relations with Yugoslavia. Besides this, Burov wanted cor-

55 MNL OL, K 64. 29. csomó. 16. a tétel. 83 pol. 1928. Kiss to Walko, 20 July 1928.

56 JELAVICH 1996, p. 154.

57 MNL OL, K 64. 29. csomó. 16. a tétel. 83 pol. 1928. Kiss to Walko, 20 July 1928.

58 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 547, Mussolini to Piacentini, 11 August 1928.

59 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 924. Telegramma 4146/227. Mussolini to Piacentini, 11 August 1928.

60 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 538, Piacentini to Mussolini, 8 August 1928.

61 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 549, Mussolini to Piacentini, 11 August 1928.

62 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 587, Grandi to Mussolini, 25 August 1928.

63 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 924. Telegramma 5156/228. Piacentini to Grandi, 28 August 1928.

64 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 6, Document 628, Auriti to Mussolini, 6 September 1928.

dial relations with Italy too so he hoped that their representation was willing to assist him in front of the League of Nations in his efforts to make an accord favourable for the Serbs.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the documents do not reveal how Italy accepted Petrov's approach.

On 6 January 1929, as a "Christmas gift", Yugoslavian king Alexander I introduced dictatorship in his country in an attempt to resolve the ethnic conflicts. In October, he changed the name "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" to "Yugoslavia" to emphasize the transnationality and unity of his empire.<sup>66</sup> The official Belgrade press, *Pravda*, declared that the leaders of the IMRO should drop its separatist ambitions and their campaign against Serbians because the new regime made the stabilization of the Yugoslavian State possible.<sup>67</sup>

Even so, the IMRO continued to struggle for Macedonian independence and it helped the creation of a new separatist party in Yugoslavia.<sup>68</sup> This was a Croatian party led by Ante Pavelić who enjoyed Mussolini's support and had founded the Ustasha Movement, (*Ustaša Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija*, Croatian Revolutionary Movement). On 20 April 1929, Pavelić and one of his followers, Gustav Perčec, travelled to Sofia to negotiate with Mihailov. According to Piacentini's report, the two Croatian leaders and Mihailov agreed that living as a minority under the Yugoslavian regime had been unbearable so the Croats and the Macedonians must unify their forces to gain independence.<sup>69</sup> The best known result of their cooperation was the assassination of Alexander I in Marseille on 9 October 1934. The IMRO was compromised in the action, despite the fact that the organization had already been dissolved by that time.

In December 1929, considering that the two factions of the IMRO would never be reunified, Italy decided to approach the Mihailovists. This did not mean leaving the Protogerovists but Grandi wanted to establish friendly relations with both of the Macedonian groups. With this approach, the relationship between the IMRO and Italy was consolidated.<sup>70</sup> Some months later, Hory and Mussolini negotiated on the Macedonian question, and Hory – by the order of the Hungarian Military attaché, Jenő Ruzskay – suggested to harmonize Hungarian and Italian policy regarding the Macedonian question and organize support from Budapest as Hungary had a longer history with the IMRO. However, seeing the disintegration of the party, Mussolini thought that Hungary and Italy should only observe the activity of the IMRO from a certain distance. Nevertheless, Mussolini formed a section in the Chigi Palace<sup>71</sup> with the function of monitoring Macedonian and Croatian affairs.<sup>72</sup> Hory tried to convince Mussolini to give more valuable support to the IMRO saying that this was the most appropriate organization to focus the world's attention on

65 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 924. Telegramma 132. Piacentini to Mussolini, 4 December 1928.

66 SOKCSEVITS, Dénes. *Horvátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*. Budapest : Mundus Novus Kiadó, 2011, p. 492.

67 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 927. Telegramma 1069/216. Liebmann to Mussolini, 11 September 1929.

68 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7, Document 574, Piacentini to Mussolini, 2. August 1929 and MNL OL, K 64. 34. csomó. 16. a tétel. 95 pol. 1928. Kiss to Walko, 27 August 1928.

69 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1919–1930. Bulgaria. Busta 927. Telegramma 2010/94. Piacentini to Mussolini, 24 April 1929.

70 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 8, Document 222, Grandi to Mussolini, 6 December 1929.

71 In 1922, it became the official residence of the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

72 MNL OL, K 64. 39. csomó. 16. a tétel. 23. res. szám. 1930. Hory to Walko, 7 February 1930.



the inner weaknesses of the Yugoslavian state.<sup>73</sup> According to Hory, the support of the separatists had to be directed by Italy.<sup>74</sup>

In 1930, Mihailov told Ruzskay that he was not satisfied with the relations between the IMRO and Italy. He thought that the Italian politicians preferred the Protogerovists so they did not want to stand behind Mihailov. Regarding the Hungarian support given to the Macedonians, Mihailov was absolutely satisfied.<sup>75</sup> However, a special event made Hungary reconsider support of the IMRO, namely the assassination of Tomalewski in his own garden in December 1930. Ruzskay disapproved the slaying, obviously because of political reasons, as it damaged the authority of the IMRO.<sup>76</sup> With Tomalewski's death, the Protogerovists lost their most valuable member. Tsar Boris called upon the two factions to end the assassinations, which were hurting not only the authority of the IMRO but also the international prestige of Bulgaria.<sup>77</sup> Italian sources emphasized that this killing had been the strangest as the victim was murdered at his own house.<sup>78</sup> The diminution of the IMRO's authority was contrarious with both Hungarian and the Italian interests because it could result that Bulgaria would approach Yugoslavia.

Supposedly Hungary and Italy were afraid of a causal Yugoslavian-Bulgarian approach because Belgrade was planning cooperation with the Balkan states, including Bulgaria. This cooperation would be mainly economic and from 1930, the Balkan states organized annual conferences together. These especially attracted Italy's attention as Balkan cooperation without them would have made the realization of Italian political ambitions in this region impossible. In actuality, Bulgaria was not really interested in this Balkan collaboration, so the fears of the Italian government were not justified.

At the beginning of 1931, assassinations within the IMRO continued. The Protogerovists killed Mihailovist Jordan Giurkov, whom Hungarian politicians had relations with as well. According to the Hungarian and Italian governments, this made peace between the two factions impossible.<sup>79</sup> Ruzskay commented on the events in this way: "As for myself, I regret that the reconciliation of the two factions failed. This fight is beneficial for the Serbs as the committee [the IMRO] concentrates with all its efforts on the inner conflicts instead of Macedonia. Hungarian policy is interested in conciliating the two parties."<sup>80</sup>

On 19 February 1931, Piacentini was glad to write to Grandi, who in the meantime had become Minister of Foreign Affairs (1929–1932), that the two factions had conciliated as the Protogerovists withdrew and recognized Mihailov as leader of the reunified organization.<sup>81</sup> However, one year later the fight began again when the confidant of Mihailov, Petrov was murdered.<sup>82</sup> After these assassinations, the IMRO's relations with Hungary and Italy became more and more estranged<sup>83</sup>, which can also be seen by the small number of

73 MNL OL, K 64. 39. csomó. 16. a tétel. 33. res. 1930. Report of Hory, 19 February 1930.

74 GULYÁS, László. *A Horthy-korszak külpolitikája 3. A Károlyi-és a Gömbös-kormány külpolitikája 1931–1936.* Máriabesenyő: Attraktor Kiadó, 2015, p. 35.

75 MNL OL, K 64. 39. csomó. 16. a tétel. 35 pol. res. 1930. Ruzskay to Walko, 9 September 1930.

76 MNL OL, K 64. 39. csomó. 16. a tétel. 50 pol. res. 1930. Ruzskay to Walko, 3 December 1930.

77 MNL OL, K 64. 45. csomó. 16. a tétel. 54 pol. res. 1930. Vörnle to Walko, 30 December 1930.

78 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931–1945. Busta 2. Telegramma 62/21. Piacentini to Mussolini, 6 January 1931.

79 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931–1945. Busta 2. Telegramma 1477/517. 18 March 1931.

80 MNL OL, K 64. 45. csomó. 16. a tétel. 8/ pol. res. 1931. Ruzskay to Károlyi, 10 February 1931.

81 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 10, Document 77, Piacentini to Grandi, 19 February 1931.

82 ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931–1945. Busta 5. Telegramma 3191/978. Cora to Mussolini, 24 September 1932.

83 DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 11, Document 300, Grandi to Cora, 17 March 1932.

Hungarian and Italian documents on the support of the IMRO between 1932 and 1934. Certainly, the relations fell apart because the IMRO's actions became embarrassing to the Bulgarian Government so the organization slowly lost the support of Sofia. The result was that the IMRO could not fulfil the role – the weakening of Yugoslavia – that Hungary and Italy had asked of it.<sup>84</sup>

In 1934, a political crisis caused by the effects of the Great Depression, the general economic crisis of 1929, resulted in the organization of rightist groups that sought to create an authoritarian regime in Bulgaria. In May 1934, republican general Kimon Georghiev took command by coup. He wanted to establish an authoritarian military state and as a first step decided to break up every organization which could damage the international prestige of Bulgaria. This meant the end of the official activity of the IMRO as well.<sup>85</sup>

The IMRO's name once again appeared in international relations in 1934. After the previously mentioned assassination in Marseille, the suspected killer of King Alexander I was an IMRO member named Vlado Chernozemski but some theories say that he could not have been the real murderer<sup>86</sup> based on the diary of Italian diplomat Pompeo Aloisi who writes that the assassination was committed by a Ustasha named Kortov.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the IMRO was already liquidated – at least officially – by the time of the assassination also verifies this idea, which will be the topic of another study.

To sum up, it can be said that both Hungary and Italy had intensive relations with the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization between 1927 and 1934. The primary role of the IMRO in their foreign policy and in Hungarian-Italian relations was weakening the Yugoslavian state in order to further its disintegration. Besides the support given to Macedonians, they watched the actions of the IMRO which could have an impact on Hungarian and Italian foreign policy. Certainly, the most significant event for the two countries was the assassination of Protogerov and the splitting of the party into two factions, but they also recognized the formation of Macedonian-Croatian relations and the consequences of other, politically important acts of terror. Between 1932 and 1934, Hungarian-Italian support was not significant as the actions of the IMRO became more and more compromising not only for them, but also for the Bulgarian government.

84 ORMOS 1984, p. 89.

85 PAVLOV, Plamen – JANEV, Jordan. *Bulgária rövid története a kezdetektől napjainkig*. Translated by Csíkhelyi Lenke. Budapest : Napvilág Kiadó, 2005, pp. 124-125.

86 ORMOS 1984, p. 134. And HAMERLI 2018, p. 125.

87 ALOISI, Pompeo. *Journal, 25 Julliet 1932 – 14 Juin 1936*. Paris : Plon, 1957, p. 225.

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# Italy's Great Power Strategies in Central-Eastern Europe Between the World Wars: Cultural Institutions and Political Propaganda

Stefano Santoro

## Abstract

SANTORO, Stefano. Italy's Great Power Strategies in Central-Eastern Europe Between the World Wars: Cultural Institutions and Political Propaganda.

This article addresses the issue of Italian penetration in Central-Eastern Europe in the interwar period, paying particular attention to the case of Czechoslovakia and covering primarily the tools used by Italy to assert its influence among the "heir countries" of the Habsburg Empire. Among these instruments, the article aims to highlight the importance of culture and propaganda, which alongside politics and economics, allowed Italy to compete with the other great powers for hegemony in Central-Eastern Europe. The other nations' strategies will be taken into consideration as well in order to highlight in a comparative way the role that cultural and propaganda institutions played in the policies of the great powers during this important period of reconstruction.

A complex of Italian cultural activities and institutions focused on the study of Central and Eastern Europe, which had been established during the First World War and continued to operate in the post-war period at the time of the last liberal governments, was then strengthened by the fascist regime. Fascism made full use of the potential offered by cultural diplomacy to reinforce its positions in Central and Eastern Europe. Mussolini's unrealistic great power ambitions, however, eventually rendered the network of cultural institutions responsible for the study of Eastern Europe useless as they finally collapsed with the fall of his regime.

**Keywords:** Italy, Central-Eastern Europe, Culture, Propaganda, Fascism

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During the First World War, Italy laid the foundations of a strategy to be fully developed in the coming years of political penetration into Central-Eastern Europe, a plan in direct competition with the Entente's allied great powers, France and Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> Like them, the Italian ruling class soon understood, as early as the war years, how cultural initiatives and propaganda were indispensable tools for complementing classic diplomacy in order to execute a policy of great power abroad. Italy then began to conceive of a scheme of establishing cultural institutions with the task of bolstering the image of Italy abroad, and starting collaborative relationships with the ruling classes of nations which were finally independent of the Habsburg Empire. During the last year of the war, the government's sensitivity around the topic of propaganda changed, with the turning point being the Italian defeat of Caporetto (Kobarid).

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This essay develops, integrates and updates research undertaken by the author in previous works, among them the book SANTORO, Stefano. *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918-1943*. Milano : FrancoAngeli, 2005.

1 SANDERS, Michael L. – TAYLOR, Philip M. *British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914-1918*. London : The Macmillan Press, 1982; TAYLOR, Philip M. Propaganda in international politics 1919-1939. In SHORT, K. R. M. (ed.) *Film & Radio Propaganda in World War II*. London; Canberra : Croom Helm, 1983; MESSINGER, Gary S. *British propaganda and the state in the First World War*. Manchester; New York : Manchester University Press, 1992.

Between October and December 1917, following changes in the top ranks of the government and army, there was a transition to a modern vision of the war effort where the rigid, top-down and coercive element gave way to a more democratic and persuasive approach. The aim was to create a consensus and gain acceptance for the grandiose effort, in terms of men and means, necessary to launch a counter-offensive and achieve victory against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For this purpose, a propaganda office active since 1916 was fortified and the publication of newspapers, leaflets and postcards started, aimed at reigniting the fighting spirit, hatred for the enemy and creating the atmosphere of a “sacred union” in defence of the homeland. Not only was propaganda directed towards the “internal front”, i.e. the civilian population, and the troops, but also towards enemy armies in order to leverage the concept of nationality and to portray Italy as a friendly nation. This would allow for destruction of the “Habsburg oppressor” and liberation of the “oppressed peoples” from Austria.<sup>2</sup>

Of great importance at this time was the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities held in the capitol of Rome in April 1918. The idea of such a council had initially started with some well-known journalists, like director of the *Corriere della Sera* Luigi Albertini, writer Giuseppe A. Borgese and Giovanni Amendola, both collaborators of Albertini's newspaper, who wanted to bring together capital representatives of the national movements of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Representatives of Central and Eastern European national movements attended the Congress of Rome (Romanian, Polish, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav delegations were present), who agreed to division of the Austro-Hungarian Empire according to nationality. Interventionist Italian politicians, both liberal-democratic and nationalist, joined with several parliamentarians, journalists and public figures belonging to the most diverse colour of irredentism, from Gaetano Salvemini to Benito Mussolini. Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino proved to be sceptical, maintaining his anti-Yugoslav position and considering the Italian and Yugoslav claims on the Adriatic incompatible. Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando demonstrated himself to be more accommodating for the moment, probably considering it useful at that stage not to hinder a policy of cooperation between Italy and the “oppressed nationalities” in respect to the war effort against the Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The *Corriere della Sera* celebrated the Congress, promoting Italy to the role of political and spiritual guide for the new nations that would achieve independence upon the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the name of Mazzini's teaching: “The commonality of the supreme vital reasons holds together the oppressed peoples of Austria-Hungary in the great crusade. Yesterday the President of the Conference, in greeting the delegations who came to Rome before the end of the work, remembered a great name: that of Giuseppe Mazzini. He was the prophet of this crusade and of the concord celebrated in these days.”<sup>4</sup>

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- 2 PISA, Beatrice. La propaganda e l'assistenza sul fronte interno. In LABANCA, Nicola (ed.) *Dizionario storico della prima guerra mondiale*. Roma; Bari : Laterza, 2014, pp. 218-229; CORNWALL, Mark. *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary. The Battle for Hearts and Minds*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- 3 CARTENY, Andrea. Il congresso di Roma, patto per le “nazionalità oppresse” dell'Austria-Ungheria (1918). In CARTENY, Andrea – PELAGGI, Stefano. *Stato, Chiesa e Nazione in Italia. Contributi sul Risorgimento italiano*. Roma : Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2016, pp. 163-191; LEONCINI, Francesco (ed.) *Il patto di Roma e la legione ceco-slovacca: tra Grande Guerra e nuova Europa*. Vittorio Veneto : Kellermann, 2014.
- 4 G. A. [AMENDOLA, Giovanni]. L'alleanza fra i popoli pel riassetto civile del mondo. In *Corriere della Sera*, 12. April 1918, p. 2.

Actually, the final resolutions of the Congress, which recognized “in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the instrument of Germanic domination and the fundamental obstacle to the realization of the [...] aspirations and [...] rights” of the peoples and “the need for a common struggle against common oppressors for each people to achieve total liberation and complete national unity in a free state unity”, were extremely vague in regard to the question of the Adriatic lands.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite these weaknesses, the Congress had an important promotional impact, placing Italy at the forefront of the movement of “oppressed peoples”. It was in this context that the Czechoslovak legion was formed, made up of Czech and Slovak prisoners of war from the Austro-Hungarian army in Italian prison camps, and organized by Milan Rastislav Štefánik in the model of the Czechoslovak army constituted in France in December 1917. Shortly after, a Romanian legion was formed by Romanian Transylvanian professor Simion Mândrescu, president of the Society of Romanians from Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, from the spring of 1918 a Polish company was established and recognized as a military unit part of the French army fighting alongside the Italian army.<sup>7</sup>

### Competition Among Victorious Nations in the First Post-war Period

At the end of the war, Central-Eastern Europe was completely transformed following the disappearance of the Habsburg, German and Russian Empires and, contrary to the expectations of the winning parties at the time of entering the war, new nations had arisen or had drastically reconfigured their boundaries over the entirety of that vast area.<sup>8</sup> In the post-war period with the Peace Conference still underway, the winning powers had to face a threat brought by Russian Bolshevism and attempts to export the revolution to Central-Eastern Europe where from March to August 1919, a Soviet republic was established in Hungary on the Russian Leninist model.<sup>9</sup> It was mainly France that launched a dual intervention policy in Europe, on one hand aimed at preventing the re-establishment of German influence, and on the other hand to stem the “Bolshevik contagion” in Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> France

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- 5 Impegni solenni e fiere dichiarazioni a Roma nel Convegno delle Nazionalità oppresse dall’Austria. In *Corriere della Sera*, 11. April 1918, p. 1.
- 6 GRITTI, Fabiano. La fine della missione militare italiana in Cecoslovacchia nel 1919 alla luce dei documenti d’archivio italiani. In *Studi italo-slovacchi*, 2018, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 96-109; SALZANO, Mario Giulio. Il campo di concentramento per prigionieri di guerra di Fonte d’Amore e la formazione della Legione cecoslovacca (1916–1918). In *Storia e problemi contemporanei*, 2016, No. 71, pp. 139-160; NECHVATAL, Martin. La naissance d’une armée tchécoslovaque en France. In *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 1993, No. 169, pp. 37-41; BRAUD, Emmanuelle. À l’origine de la création de l’armée tchécoslovaque en France: le général Milan Rastislav Štefánik. In *Revue historique des armées*, 2009, No. 255, pp. 79-83, <http://journals.openedition.org/rha/6790>; SANTORO, Stefano. I volontari romeni sul fronte italiano nella Prima Guerra Mondiale e la Legione romana d’Italia. In DINU, Rudolf – FIRȚA-MARIN, Aurora – LUCA, Cristian (eds.) *La Campagna di Romania (1916–1917): esperienze e memoria storica. Atti del Convegno di studi italo-romeno. Venezia, 13-14 ottobre 2016. Quaderni della Casa Romana di Venezia*, 2017, No. 12, Bucarest, 2017, pp. 149-162; CAPPELLANO, Filippo. La Legione Romana. In *Studi storico-militari*. Roma : Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 1998, p. 227-247.
- 7 SONDEL-CEDARMAS, Joanna. I polacchi dell’Impero austro-ungarico e il fronte italiano nelle memorie dei legionari. In CIAMPANI, Andrea – SALWA, Piotr (eds.) *La Grande Guerra e la Polonia in Europa. Atti del Convegno. Roma, 12-13 novembre 2015*. Roma : Accademia Polacca delle Scienze Biblioteca e Centro di Studi a Roma, 2016, pp. 87-103.
- 8 MACARTNEY, Carlile Aylmer – PALMER, Alan Warwick. *Independent Eastern Europe. A History*. London; New York : Macmillan, 1962.
- 9 LOMELLINI, Valentine (ed.) *The Rise of Bolshevism and its Impact on the Interwar International Order*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; FORNARO, Pasquale. *Crisi postbellica e rivoluzione. L’Ungheria dei Consigli e l’Europa danubiana nel primo dopoguerra*. Milano : FrancoAngeli, 1987; FORNARO, Pasquale. Una rivoluzione impossibile. Béla Kun e la Repubblica dei Consigli del marzo-agosto 1919. In BASCIANI, Alberto – RUSPANTI, Roberto. *La fine della Grande Ungheria fra rivoluzione e reazione [1918–1920]*. Trieste : Beit, 2010, pp. 71-96.
- 10 HOVI, Kalervo. *Cordon Sanitaire or Barrière de l’Est? The Emergence of the New French Eastern European Alliance Policy 1917–1919*. Turku : Turun Yliopisto, 1975; WANDYCZ, Piotr S. *France and Her Eastern Allies 1919–1925. French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*. Minneapolis : The University of

was also flanking its continental strategy to reaffirm its role as a great power in post-war Central-Eastern Europe with a series of coordinated cultural initiatives, the crux of which was the Institut d'études slaves in Paris. At the same time, alongside the consolidated network of Alliance française units abroad active since the 1880s<sup>11</sup>, a network of French cultural institutes, the Instituts français, began to be developed. In 1920, the French government decided to found the Service des œuvres françaises à l'étranger (SOFE), which within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had the task of coordinating the actions of French cultural institutes abroad – and therefore, in particular, the Instituts français.<sup>12</sup> Central-Eastern Europe was a privileged field for expansion also from a cultural point of view for France, which could benefit from a post-war German crisis and rely on the tight cultural relations that had been established with all those nations since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the war, France could therefore continue to play the role of “cultural capital” of Eastern Europe, at a time in which political and cultural influence became complementary and constituted two instruments of a vast hegemonic design that would truly unfold in the interwar period.<sup>13</sup>

It follows that since the end of the war, an open rivalry between Italy and France – which England also joined – for hegemony in Central-Eastern Europe began. Of crucial importance for Italy: the question of the border with the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia).<sup>14</sup> It was the Giolitti government, with Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza, that made a change in relations with Yugoslavia. For the time being, the option of an Italian-led, anti-Yugoslav block was abandoned and Italy signed the Rapallo treaty with Yugoslavia on 12 November 1920, obtaining Istria up to Monte Nevoso (Snežnik), Zara (Zadar) and some islands. In return they officially recognized the new Yugoslav state.<sup>15</sup> Sforza, an interventionist of Mazzinian ideals, was confident that Italy had the opportunity to take the place of the Habsburgs, but also of France in the Balkan balances and that to do this, it should carry out a policy of cooperation with the heir countries of the Habsburg Empire, starting with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In fact, an anti-Habsburg convention between Rome and Belgrade was added to the Rapallo treaty. Thereby Italy opened the way to the Sforza–Beneš note of 8 February 1921, with Czechoslovak accession to the anti-Habsburg convention of November 1920 and to the subsequent conference of the successor states of the Empire in Rome on 7 April 1921, which both the anti-revisionist countries as well as Austria and Hungary attended. More generally, Sforza's foreign policy

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Minnesota Press, 1962; BONDARENKO, Dmytro. Poland, Romania, Finland: The formation of cordon sanitaire, 1918–1920. In *Tyragetia*, 2019, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 195–204.

- 11 BRUÉZIÈRE, Maurice. *L'Alliance française. Histoire d'une institution*. Paris : Hachette, 1983; CORTIER, Claude. *Institution de l'Alliance française et émergence de la francophonie: politiques linguistiques et éducatives: 1880–1914*. PhD. thesis defended under the supervision of Norbert Dupont in 1998 at the University Lyon 2; CHAUBET, François. *La politique culturelle française et la diplomatie de la langue. L'Alliance Française (1883-1940)*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2006.
- 12 MARÈS, Antoine. Puissance et présence culturelle de la France. L'exemple du Service des Œuvres françaises à l'Étranger dans les années 30. In *Relations internationales*, 1983, No. 33, pp. 66–67.
- 13 LOWCZYK, Olivier. *La fabrique de la paix: du Comité d'Études à la conférence de la paix, l'élaboration par la France des traités de la première guerre mondiale*. Paris : Economica, 2010, pp. 17–126; DELAPERRIÈRE, Maria – MARÈS, Antoine (eds.) *Paris "capitale culturelle" de l'Europe centrale? Les échanges intellectuels entre la France et les pays de l'Europe médiane 1918-1939*. Paris : Institut d'études slaves, 1997.
- 14 LE MOAL, Frédéric. *La France et l'Italie dans les Balkans 1914–1919. Le contentieux adriatique*. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2006; ALLAIN, J.C. La France et les Balkans pendant l'entre-deux guerres (1920–1938). In *Relations Internationales*, 2000, No. 103, pp. 351–359 ; CACCAMO, Francesco. *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa». Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla conferenza di pace di Parigi (1919–1920)*. Milano; Trento : Luni Editrice, 2000, pp. 224–236, 282–293.
- 15 LEDERER, Ivo J. *La Jugoslavia dalla conferenza della pace al Trattato di Rapallo*. Milano : Il Saggiatore, 1966, pp. 324–356.

tended to impart a dynamic of cooperation between Italy and all the former Habsburg countries, including Poland and Romania.<sup>16</sup>

It was in those years that the Italian government led by Giovanni Giolitti deemed it appropriate to continue its work collaborating with the new ruling classes of the new nations. In particular, Italy looked at the heir countries of the Habsburg Empire, which due to their geographical proximity and traditional historical, economic and financial ties, constituted the preferred field for Italian expansion. They faced some formidable competition, however, especially from France but also from the other victorious powers like England and the United States, who also sought to strengthen their presence in the new nations. To this end, in addition to the usual political and economic penetration, each of these states began a new form of influence, experimented with during the war, which hinged on propaganda. In turn, in the first post-war period, a more refined form of propaganda was developed in an increasingly widespread manner, above all directed at the educated classes and the leadership circles. It was a more distinctly cultural propaganda, which took the form of a real cultural diplomacy. With this in mind, an institute was founded in Italy that would play a leading role in Italian cultural diplomacy. In January 1921, the Istituto per l'Europa Orientale, (IPEO, Institute for Eastern Europe), was born in Rome. The process that led to the creation of this institution shows the tight relationship between politics, diplomacy and culture during the first post-war period.

In effect, the initiative to found the Institute began with the head of the press office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Amedeo Giannini, a scholar of international relations and in particular of the new Central-Eastern European nations. He took steps to ensure that Italy had organizations specialized in the study of Eastern Europe similarly to other European powers, believing that only a close collaboration between the political and cultural milieus would allow Italy to keep its channels of collaboration with the successors of the Habsburg Empire alive.<sup>17</sup> The Foreign Minister Sforza, an assertor of decisive change of the Italian line in its relations with the former Habsburg nations, supported this initiative which he believed could bolster his policy of cooperation with the heir states on the cultural side. Moreover, Giannini included the main exponents of the nascent Italian Slavistics. It was this convergence between the interests of diplomacy and the interests of culture and politics that led to the establishment of the Istituto per l'Europa Orientale.<sup>18</sup>

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- 16 MELCHIONNI, Maria Grazia. La politica estera di Carlo Sforza nel 1920–21. In *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, 1969, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 558–570; MELCHIONNI, Maria Grazia. La convenzione antiasburgica del 12 novembre 1920. In *Storia e politica*, 1972, Vol. 11, No. 2-3, pp. 224–264, 374–417; BROGI, Alessandro. Il trattato di Rapallo del 1920 e la politica danubiano-balcanica di Carlo Sforza. In *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 1989, No. 1, pp. 3–46; BRACCO, Barbara. *Carlo Sforza e la questione adriatica. Politica estera e opinione pubblica nell'ultimo governo Giolitti*. Milano : Unicopli, 1998; MONZALI, Luciano. La politica estera italiana nel primo dopoguerra 1918–1922. Sfide e problemi. In *Italia contemporanea*, 2009, No. 256–257, pp. 397–399.
- 17 SANTORO, Stefano. La diplomazia italiana di fronte all'epurazione. Il caso di Amedeo Giannini. In *Italia contemporanea*, 1999, No. 216, pp. 529–540; MONZALI, Luciano. Amedeo Giannini e la nascita della storia delle relazioni internazionali in Italia. In *Storia contemporanea*, 1994, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 493–525.
- 18 Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), Rome, fond Ministero della Cultura Popolare, b. 304, f. Istituto per l'Europa Orientale, 1921–24, Statuto dell'Istituto per l'Europa Orientale; SANTORO, Stefano. Cultura e propaganda nell'Italia fascista: l'Istituto per l'Europa Orientale. In *Passato e presente*, 1999, Vol. 17, No. 48, pp. 55–78; MAZZITELLI, Gabriele. Il fondo Ipeo nella biblioteca dell'Istituto di Filologia Slava dell'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma. In *Slavia*, 1994, Vol. 3, No. 4, pp. 181–213; MAZZITELLI, Gabriele. *Le pubblicazioni dell'Istituto per l'Europa orientale. Catalogo storico (1921–1944)*. Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2016, pp. 27–56.

## Cultural Institutions as a Complement to Political and Economic Penetration

An additional component of Italian cultural diplomacy taking shape then was a network of cultural institutes that gradually took hold in Central and Eastern Europe, and served as a framework for the successful cultural penetration effort of Italy between the two World Wars. The institutes were initially called “Institutes of Italian Culture”, but the names were changed in the mid-1930s, redefining themselves as “Italian Institutes of Culture” – this slight alteration being evidence of the fascist desire to underline the Italian core of these institutes. They served as outposts of Italy in the countries where they operated, becoming “cultural ambassadors” for the homeland. Initially, the Institutes sprang up spontaneously thanks to autonomous initiatives by Italians connected to academic circles abroad, and supported in turn by Italian diplomatic authorities – and by the Foreign Ministry – who viewed the increased cultural commitment of Italy with a positive eye.

The first Institute of Italian Culture in the former Habsburg area – and, apparently, the first ever<sup>19</sup> – was founded in Prague in October 1922 after several months of preparation. It was the result of a policy of opening up to the heirs of the Habsburg Empire desired by Foreign Minister Sforza.<sup>20</sup> From a financial point of view, Italian banks and insurance companies immediately seized new opportunities offered by the new markets, resuming a penetration policy that had already begun at the beginning of the century. After WWI, Italy's economic strategy progressing eastward experienced a revival, always benefiting from the support of the major Italian banks. From Comit to Credito Italiano, to Banca Italiana di Sconto, they were ready to finance, in particular, the opportunities that opened up to some Italian business groups regarding the exploitation of raw material. Besides banks, insurance and shipping companies such as Assicurazioni Generali, Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà (RAS) and Lloyd Triestino, were opening new branches throughout the former Habsburg area.<sup>21</sup>

In the immediate post-war period, Czechoslovakia played a strategic role for Italian trade, especially the port of Trieste. At the Peace Conference, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had confirmed that the Czechoslovak delegation would not contest the “Italian-ness” of Trieste and Pola (Pula), while the Czechoslovak minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš, had expressed to Sonnino the hope that Trieste would continue to be as in the past: “the southern outlet of Czechoslovak trade.”<sup>22</sup> M. R. Štefánik played an equally important role in regard to the establishment of closer economic and commercial relations between Italy and Czechoslovakia in those same years until his death.<sup>23</sup> However, from the first

19 VIDOSSI, Giuseppe. “Necrologi”: Bindo Chiurlo. In *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 1944, Vol. 122, No. 364, p. 107.

20 SANTORO, Stefano. *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda 1918–1943*. Milano : Franco-Angeli, 2005, p. 88.

21 WEBSTER, Richard A. Una speranza rinviata. L'espansione industriale italiana e il problema del petrolio dopo la Prima guerra mondiale. In *Storia contemporanea*, 1980, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 219-281; DI QUIRICO, Roberto. Il sistema Comit. Le partecipazioni estere della Banca commerciale italiana tra il 1918 e il 1931. In *Rivista di storia economica*, 1995, No. 2, pp. 175-217; DI QUIRICO, Roberto. *Le banche italiane all'estero 1900–1950. Espansione bancaria all'estero e integrazione internazionale dell'Italia negli anni tra le due guerre*. Firenze : European Press Academic Publishing, 2000; COSTANTINI, Emanuela – RASPADORI, Paolo (eds.) Prove di imperialismo. Espansionismo economico italiano oltre l'Adriatico a cavallo della Grande guerra. In *Quaderni monografici di “Proposte e ricerche”*, No. 41, Macerata : Eum, 2017; STANCIU, Laura. Italian multinational banking in interwar east central Europe. In *Financial History Review*, 2000, Vol. 7, pp. 45-66; IACOPINI, Alessandro. L'espansione della Banca Commerciale Italiana in Europa orientale durante il fascismo. In *Diacronie*, 2013, Vol. 3, No. 15, <https://doi.org/10.4000/diacronie.528>.

22 BOLECH CECCHI, Donatella. *Alle origini di un'inimicizia. Italia-Cecoslovacchia 1918–1922*. Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino, 2008, pp. 65-66.

23 CACCAMO, Francesco. L'ultima missione di Milan Rastislav Štefánik alla luce delle nuove fonti. In CAPUZZO,



post-war period, the French presence in Czechoslovakia was instantly considerable and well regarded by the government of Prague. In fact, France was the only great power capable of guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the country and preventing a Habsburg revival in Hungary. At the same time, bilateral Italian-Czechoslovak relations went through a cooling period due to the growing closeness between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in the name of common Slavic heritage, plus Prague's overall solidarity with Belgrade on the Adriatic problem.<sup>24</sup>

In this setting, the French position was much more condescending towards Czechoslovak requests and as such, increasingly bolstered at the expense of the Italians. This led to positive outcomes for Paris in the industrial and commercial fields. In addition, France made massive use of culture to support its penetration policy in Czechoslovakia and throughout former Habsburg Europe by sharply coordinating the activities of its *Instituts français*. The *Institut français* of Prague, founded in 1920 thanks to the contributions of the famous linguist Antoine Meillet, did not come to be accidentally in the capital of a country which was the cornerstone of the Little Entente: an anti-revisionist alliance comprised of Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia and supported by Paris through a system of alliances with the contracting countries.<sup>25</sup> The *Institut français* in Prague had experienced success with the Czechoslovak people from the outset and counted numerous members. It offered free French courses, created scholarships for Czechoslovak students in France, set up libraries and organized conferences. For its endeavours, the French Legation was provided with adequate funds to support the cultural activities of the Institute and the diplomatic staff was supported by an academic scholar whose specific task was developing cultural activities.<sup>26</sup>

The new plenipotentiary minister of Italy in Prague, Antonio Chiaromonte Bordonaro, who in October 1919 replaced *chargé d'affaires* Mario Lago, aware of the difficult Italian situation as compared to France had strengthened the Italian press agency in Prague and established an information service between the two capitals. During Sforza's tenure as Foreign Minister, Italy intensified its initiative in order to contend France's positions, taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the Czech-Polish rivalry for the Teschen area – and therefore also the French difficulties in creating an anti-communist alliance with both countries – and rapprochement between France and Hungary, which was frowned upon by Prague, naturally. The possibility of resuming dialogue with the Slavic countries seemed to reappear, ideally similar to the experience of the Pact of Rome.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of establishing an Italian Institute of Culture in Prague met the favour of Amedeo Giannini and could count on the support of the exponents of Italian culture residing in the Czechoslovak capital, including the renowned writer from Trieste, Giani Stuparich, and the Friulian scholar Bindo Chiurlo, both lecturers at the Charles Universi-

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Ester – CREVATO-SELVAGGI, Bruno – GUIDA, Francesco (eds.) *Per Rita Tolomeo, scritti di amici sulla Dalmazia e l'Europa centro-orientale II*. Venezia : La musa talia, 2014, pp. 208-228; KŠIŇAN, Michal. *L'Homme qui parlait avec les étoiles. Milan Rastislav Štefánik, héros franco-slovaque de la Grande Guerre*. Paris : Eur'ORBEM, 2019.

24 PERMAN, Dagmar. *The Shaping of the Czechoslovak State. Diplomatic History of the Boundaries of Czechoslovakia 1914–1920*. Leiden : Brill, 1962, pp. 18-25.

25 WANDYDZ 1962; IORDACHE, Nicolae. *La Petite Entente et l'Europe*. Genève : Institut Universitaire de Hautes Études Internationales, 1977.

26 CHEVALIER, Jean-Claude. Diffusion du français en Europe de l'est: 1920–1939. In KOK ESCALLE, Marie-Christine – MELKA, Francine (eds.) *Changements politiques et statut des langues. Histoire et épistémologie 1780–1945*. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA : Editions Rodopi B.V., 2001, p. 137.

27 BOLECH CECCHI 2008; CACCAMO 2000, pp. 89-100; PERMAN 1962, pp. 228-233.

ty of Prague. On the other hand, awareness that culture was an important tool on which to focus was also shared by the Italian finance world in Czechoslovakia. The local branches of Assicurazioni Generali and RAS contributed to the development of the Institute, as well as the shipping company Lloyd Triestino. From an ideal point of view, the Institute was born based on the Italian-Czechoslovak friendship which was strengthened during the last phases of the war in the common struggle against the Habsburg Empire; ideal references to the Czechoslovak legion in Italy were constant. In spite of anti-Slavic positions shown by Italian nationalism, this strand of Italian-Czechoslovak friendship had prevailed within interventionist circles.<sup>28</sup> The policy of collaboration between the two countries – and more generally with the heirs of the Habsburg Empire – also continued at the beginning of Mussolini's government. At first, it brought forward Sforza's policy thanks to the influence of the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry Salvatore Contarini, who was linked to Sforza and continuator of his anti-Habsburg cooperation policy.<sup>29</sup>

It was in this context that Mussolini surprisingly pursued Sforza's idea of collaborating with the Slavs. In January 1924, the Treaty of Rome was signed in which Italy and Yugoslavia committed themselves to supporting an anti-revisionist policy, defending the status quo produced by the treaties of Saint-Germain, Trianon and Neuilly. In exchange, Italy could obtain the city of Fiume (Rijeka).<sup>30</sup> The Italian-Czechoslovak anti-revisionist collaboration agreement of July 1924 marked a continuation of this policy, and at the same time encapsulated the moment of the greatest proximity of fascist Italy to the Little Entente, whose foreign ministers delighted in the signing of this treaty.<sup>31</sup> The Italian minister in Prague reported: "Benés [Beneš] informed the allies of the conclusion of the pact of cordial collaboration with Italy. Foreign ministers welcomed this by noting that this agreement lays on the line of conduct of the Little Entente and Duca [the Romanian Foreign Minister] declared in this regard that economic divergences with Italy will soon be settled."<sup>32</sup> However, the Italian-Czechoslovak friendship treaty did not seem to bear fruit from the beginning, which was also due to strained relations between Mussolini and Beneš. In any case, the Italian-Romanian treaty of friendship of 1926, which was part of Mussolini's attempt to form a "Danubian-Balkan Locarno", could therefore still be included in this context, whereby Italy as a great power would have to guarantee the stability of the countries of that area. Romania was probably the one country of the Little Entente that had better relations with Italy and less prejudice against the fascist regime, and whose support it needed to obtain Italian recognition of the annexation of Bessarabia at the end of the war. From that moment on, however, the policy of collaboration with the heirs of the Habsburg Empire went into crisis from the end of the 1920s, and Mussolini decidedly took the path of support for revisionist requests present in Central-Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup> The general change in

28 SANTORO 2005, pp. 81-88.

29 CAROCCI, Giampiero. *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista (1925-1928)*. Bari : Laterza, 1969, pp. 18-31; ANASTASI, Matteo. *Salvatore Contarini e la politica estera italiana (1891-1926)*. Roma : Aracne, 2017.

30 BUCARELLI, Massimo. *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922-1939)*. Bari : Edizioni B.A. Graphis, 2006, pp. 27-34.

31 Documenti. Pacte de collaboration cordiale entre le Royaume d'Italie et la République Tchécoslovaque. In *L'Europa Orientale*, 1924, Vol. 4, No. 8-11, p. 589.

32 Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (DDI), Series 7, Vol. 3, No. 387, The minister in Prague, Pignatti, to the president of the Council and minister of Foreign Affairs, Mussolini, T. 4394/274, Prague, 14. July 1924.

33 RICCARDI, Luca. Il trattato italo-romeno del 16 settembre 1926. In *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 1987, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 39-72; CASSELS, Alan. *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*. Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 175-184; CAROLI, Giuliano. *La Romania nella politica estera italiana 1919-1965. Luci e ombre di un'amicizia storica*. Milano : Edizioni Nagard, 2009, pp. 99-110; CACCAMO, Francesco. Italia e Cecoslovacchia negli anni Venti. In *Nuova storia contemporanea*, 2000, No. 2, pp. 59-76; BURGWIN, H. James. *Il revisionismo fascista*.

Italian foreign policy towards the Balkans was greatly influenced by the reigniting of the Italian-Yugoslav rivalry over control of Albania, which between 1926 and 1927 became increasingly closely linked to Rome at a time when the removal of Contarini from his position as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1926 and the arrival of Dino Grandi led to a further fascistization of the Ministry and also caused the definitive abandonment of cooperation with the heir states and the start of the revisionist option.<sup>34</sup>

### Culture as an Instrument of Fascist Italy's Great Power Ambitions

The ties of anti-Habsburg collaboration between Italy and the Central-Eastern European national movements in the last phase of the war, which climaxed with the “brotherhood of arms” of the legions, had provided the ideal driving force around which Italian political and cultural penetration initially developed in the former Habsburg area. It is therefore no coincidence that the only other properly titled “Institute of Italian Culture” in Central-Eastern and Danubian-Balkan Europe until the mid-1930s was, in addition to that in Prague, in Bucharest. It was founded in the early 1920s with a similar dynamic: the support of the Italian political and business world was superimposed on an initiative launched by advocates of culture.<sup>35</sup> Relations with both countries proved difficult in the following years as mutual interests conflicted. With Romania however, the myth of “Latinity” which Italian cultural diplomacy was articulated and implemented around, allowed Italy to maintain a solid presence – at least from a cultural point of view – despite everything else that was happening.<sup>36</sup>

Regarding Yugoslavia, although political relations had improved in 1924 for a short period of time, cultural relations were never particularly easy either, having to face decades of Italian-Slav conflict starting from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>37</sup> Until the mid-1930s, Yugoslavia was subject to the destructive attention of Italian publications, emphasizing Italian rights in Dalmatia and condemning Serbian centralizing policy towards the Slavic Catholics, Slovenians and Croats. Despite this, a considerable part of the Italian diplomatic personnel – for example the Italian ambassador in Belgrade in the early 1930s, Carlo Galli, and Dino Grandi, Italian Foreign Minister from 1929 to 1932 – was more willing to reach an agreement with Belgrade, considered convenient to Italy, and similar ideas were shared in parts of the Italian north-eastern business world.<sup>38</sup> It was in the second half of the 1930s that, especially with Milan Stojadinović coming to power, being the latter well disposed towards Mussolini, relations between the two countries improved. Following the Italian-

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*La sfida di Mussolini alle grandi potenze nei Balcani e sul Danubio 1925–1933.* Milano : Feltrinelli, 1979; COLLOT-TI, Enzo. *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922–1939* (with the collaboration of Nicola Labanca and Teodoro Sala). Milano : La Nuova Italia, 2000, pp. 37-38.

34 BORGOGNI, Massimo. *Tra continuità e incertezza. Italia e Albania (1914–1939). La strategia politico-militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'Operazione "Oltre Mare Tirana"*. Milano : FrancoAngeli, 2007, pp. 86-99.

35 SANTORO 2005, pp. 114-115.

36 SANTORO, Stefano. L'Italia e la Romania fra diplomazia e cultura, 1918–1943. In *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations*, 2004, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 61-95.

37 CATTARUZZA, Marina (ed.) *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale 1850–1950.* Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino, 2003; KIRCHNER REILL, Dominique. *Nationalists Who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste and Venice.* Stanford : Stanford University Press, 2012; CATTARUZZA, Marina. *L'Italia e il confine orientale.* Bologna : il Mulino, 2007; MONZALI, Luciano. *Italiani di Dalmazia 1914–1924.* Firenze : Le Lettere, 2007, pp. 1-24.

38 MONZALI, Luciano. La Jugoslavia e l'assetto dell'Europa centrale nella politica estera dell'Italia fascista (1922–1939). In GUIOTTO, Maddalena – WOHNOU, Helmut (eds.) *Italien und Österreich im Mitteleuropa der Zwischenkriegszeit / Italia e Austria nella Mitteleuropa tra le due guerre mondiali.* Wien; Köln; Weimar : Böhlau Verlag, 2017, pp. 158-159.

Yugoslav friendship treaty of March 1937<sup>39</sup>, the two countries also signed a cultural agreement, which provided for the creation of an Institute of Italian Culture in Belgrade. It was established in October 1939 and inaugurated in February 1940. Subsequently, in April 1940 an institute of culture was opened in Ljubljana, while another was present in Zagreb since February. In particular, the institutions of Zagreb and especially Ljubljana carried out the crucial task of pushing Italian propaganda towards the Slavic element after the occupation of Yugoslavia by Axis forces and the creation of the “province of Ljubljana” in April–May 1941.<sup>40</sup>

From the second half of the 1930s, Italian cultural diplomacy was put at the service of the revisionist policy of fascist Italy in Central-Eastern Europe, oriented in an anti-Yugoslav sense, and supported the clerical-fascist and nationalist movements in Austria, Hungary, Croatia and Bulgaria in order to weaken the Yugoslav kingdom. Anti-Habsburg solidarity had now given way to the myth of Latinity and Rome as the sentinel of civilization against the assaults of Asian Bolshevism.<sup>41</sup> In terms of propaganda and cultural penetration, the slow decline of French influence, begun well before June 1940, had given way to a new formidable rival of fascist Italy: the Third Reich. Nazi propaganda showed great organization immediately and could count on huge state funding as well as on large German Volksdeutsche communities scattered in all the former Habsburg countries.<sup>42</sup> To respond to the intense competition exercised by Nazism among the so-called moderate bourgeoisies and right-wing nationalist and radical circles, Mussolini decided to strengthen the Italian cultural institutes, centralizing their organization with an office created ad hoc at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In actuality, the function of the Italian cultural institutes had already been regulated in 1926, especially concerning the foundation rules of these institutions which otherwise risked developing in an impromptu and uncoordinated way, essentially by individual initiatives as happened for the Institutes of Italian culture in Prague and Bucharest in the early 1920s.<sup>43</sup> Under the direction of Galeazzo Ciano, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decidedly focused on the Institutes of Italian Culture in the former Habsburg territories, increasing their funding and issuing guidelines in the second half of the 1930s explicitly recommending underlining the primacy of Italy as a dispenser of civilization among the peoples of Eastern Europe. In the mid-1930s, Institutes of Italian Culture were established in all capital cities of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with a network of affiliates operating in provincial towns. Moreover, in the second half of that decade, through a growing centralization of cultural and propaganda activities abroad, Italy aimed to stem German propaganda, asking the Institutes to underline the spiritual superiority of Christian Italy towards “Teutonic racist paganism”.

39 BUCARELLI, Massimo. Gli accordi Ciano-Stojadinović del 25 marzo 1937. In *Clio*, 2000, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 327-395.

40 SANTORO, Stefano. La diplomazia culturale italiana in Jugoslavia durante il fascismo. In *Annales. Anali za istrske in mediteranske študije. Series Historia et Sociologia*, 2003, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 125-148.

41 SANTORO, Stefano. The Latin “Frontier of Civilization”: Italian Cultural Policies and Fascist Propaganda Towards Central and Eastern Europe in the Interwar Period. In MOGA, Valer – ARHIRE, Sorin (eds.) *Frontierele Europei Central-Estice între geografia politică și mitologia națională (secolele XIX-XX)*. *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, 2015, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 155-168.

42 LUMANS, Valdis O. *Himmler's Auxiliaries. The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933–1945*. Chapel Hill; London : The University of North Carolina Press, 1993; KOMJATHY, Anthony Tihamer – STOCKWELL, Rebecca. *German Minorities and the Third Reich. Ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the Wars*. New York; London : Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980.

43 FOSCHI, Franco. *Sugli Istituti italiani di cultura all'estero. Note e riflessioni*. Firenze : Vallecchi, 1980; BAISTROCCHI, Massimo. *Elementi di politica culturale estera*. Roma : Armando, 1985; CAVAROCCHI, Francesca. *Avanguardie dello spirito. Il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero*. Roma : Carocci, 2010.

The Institute of Italian Culture in Vienna played a strategically important role here in the time of rapprochement between fascist Italy, Austria, and Hungary formalized through the Rome protocols of March 1934. In this way, Mussolini planned to contain German expansionism towards Danubian-Balkan Europe and especially towards Austria.<sup>44</sup> Even in this case, the means offered by culture flanked traditional diplomacy. In February 1935, Italy signed cultural agreements with Austria and Hungary that would lead to the founding of Italian cultural institutes in Vienna and Budapest. Direction of the Institute in Vienna was entrusted to the Istrian historian Francesco Salata, plenipotentiary minister in the Austrian capital in 1936–1937 and a deep connoisseur of the Austrian world. He was on good terms with Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg – who took over for Dollfuss in July 1934 after his assassination at the hands of the Nazis – and a staunch supporter of Austrian independence. The Institute then carried out the important function of guarding the Italian presence in Austria and Central Europe. Following the Italian-German rapprochement resulting from the Ethiopian war and the international sanctions to which Italy was subjected, Italy's role in Austria declined and the Institute charted a similar descending parable, underlined by the dismissal of Salata.<sup>45</sup>

### The Crisis of Mussolini's Hegemonic Project in Central-Eastern Europe

Italy therefore had to gradually give up its political-economic expansion towards Danubian-Balkan Europe, preferring to concentrate on the Mediterranean and colonial sector. This was due also to the consequences of the economic crisis that had affected the entire area in the early 1930s. The Italian financial and commercial retreat, in fact, gave way to powerful German economic penetration<sup>46</sup>, however, it is significant that this did not entail cultural abandonment for Italy, which was an attempt to counter the creation of a new German-led central Europe, at least on a propaganda level. In order to support these pursuits, which increasingly took on political flavour with conferences on the achievements of fascism (corporatism, land reclamation, “battle of wheat”, policies in favour of birth), other institutions were deployed such as the CAUR (Action Committees for the Universality of Rome), which aimed to unify intellectuals and politicians of the European right around the myth of Latinity played in an anti-Nazi key.

This was the golden age of “fascist international”, which in the name of a frequently unclear pan-fascist ideology and of the myth of the “Third Rome” aimed to confederate all European fascist and corporate movements as well as parties under the direction of Italian fascism.<sup>47</sup> At the heart of this strategy was still the use of Italian culture and history for

44 PETERSEN, Jens. *Hitler e Mussolini. La difficile alleanza*. Roma; Bari : Laterza, 1975, pp. 291-297; BURGWYN, H. James. La troika danubiana di Mussolini: Italia, Austria e Ungheria, 1927–1936. In *Storia contemporanea*, 1990, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 617-686; RÉTI, György. *Hungarian–Italian Relations in the Shadow of Hitler's Germany, 1933–1940*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2003.

45 RICCARDI, Luca. Per una biografia di Francesco Salata. In *Clio*, 1991, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 660-664; RICCARDI, Luca. Le carte Salata: quarant'anni tra politica e storia. In *Quaderni giuliani di storia*, 1991, Vol. 12, No. 1-2, pp. 80-81, 90-91; RICCARDI, Luca. *Francesco Salata tra storia, politica e diplomazia*. Udine : Del Bianco, 2001.

46 BEREND, Iván T. – RÁNKI, György. *Lo sviluppo economico nell'Europa centro-orientale nel XIX e XX secolo*. Bologna : il Mulino, 1978, pp. 287-337; GRENZEBACH, William S. Jr. *Germany's Informal Empire in East-Central Europe: German Economic Policy toward Yugoslavia and Rumania, 1933–1939*. Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 1988; KAISER David E. *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War. Germany, Britain, France and Eastern Europe 1930–1939*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1980; OVERY, Richard J. *Business in the Grossraumwirtschaft: Eastern Europe, 1938–1945*. In JAMES, Harold – TANNER, Jakob (eds.) *Enterprise in the Period of Fascism in Europe*. London; New York : Routledge, 2017, pp. 151-177.

47 CUZZI, Marco. *L'internazionale delle camicie nere. I CAUR, Comitati d'azione per l'universalità di Roma 1933–1939*. Milano : Mursia, 2005; LEDEEN, Michael Arthur. *L'internazionale fascista*. Roma; Bari : Laterza, 1973; LONGO,

propaganda purposes, for example through the recovery of the Mazzinian myth representing Italy as a spiritual guide for nations of the former Habsburg Europe. As previously mentioned, this myth was at the centre of the first post-war initiatives and remained the ideal point of reference for many intellectuals operating in Italian cultural institutes. It is interesting that one of those institutes, founded in 1937 by the publicist Pietro Gorgolini, was called Istituto Europa Giovane and evidently still referred to Giuseppe Mazzini with its name. Adhering to the Institute of Fascist culture, this establishment referred to corporatism and opposed communism and “Asiatism”, while its program aimed to “reinvigorate in the intellectuals the awareness of the great Western civilization, essentially Greek-Roman, Catholic, Fascist”.<sup>48</sup>

Between the end of the 1930s and the war years, Italian cultural institutes in the former Habsburg space, and more broadly in Central-Eastern Europe, came to be on the front line and were increasingly involved in the war effort. German authorities often saw the Italian institutes as dangerous competitors for propaganda and attempted to limit their activity. In October 1938, Ettore Lo Gatto, Slavist and professor of Italian literature at Charles University of Prague since 1936, was appointed director of the Institute of Italian Culture in Prague. Lo Gatto, who enjoyed undoubted esteem in local intellectual circles – and who was the first Slavist to direct the Institute – managed to relaunch the institute, though he soon found himself in a very difficult phase after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. In particular, after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, German authorities showed a growing diffidence towards the activities of the Institute, which appeared to be enjoying great success, and also of Lo Gatto himself, perceived as a natural “friend” of the Slavs, whereby the German authorities let the Italians know that they would prefer a “non-Slavist” as director. Lo Gatto returned to Rome in October 1941, officially for health reasons but probably also because the Italian diplomatic authorities of the protectorate wanted to avoid friction with the Germans, and was replaced by an Italianist.<sup>49</sup>

This “surrender” of Italian cultural diplomacy to the Germans in Prague can be considered paradigmatic of the overall exhaustion with the experience of cultural penetration of fascist Italy in the former Habsburg territories. Whilst the appeal of alma mater Rome and of the myth of Latinity in Central-Eastern Europe had undoubtedly allowed Italy to win the sympathies of a part of the local educated and bourgeois classes, overall, Italian cultural diplomacy showed its objective limits compared to the much more aggressive German propaganda machine, which could rely on the impressive economic and military resources of Third Reich.

In the early second post-war years, Italy would attempt to continue its presence in Central and Eastern Europe, also through cultural institutions even within a radically changed political framework, reopening numerous Institutes of Italian Culture between 1947 and

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Gisella (ed.) I tentativi per la costituzione di un'internazionale fascista. Gli incontri di Amsterdam e di Montreux attraverso i verbali delle riunioni. In *Storia contemporanea*, 1996, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 475-567; BLINKHORN, Martin. *Fascism and the Right in Europe 1919–1945*. New York : Routledge, 2013.

48 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome, fond Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, b. 74, f. 494, Istituto “Europa Giovane”, *Istituto scientifico-letterario Europa Giovane aderente all'Istituto nazionale di cultura fascista del P.N.F. Programma attività adesioni 1937–38–39*, supplement No. 3 of *Nazionale*.

49 SANTORO 2005, pp. 390-394; MAZZITELLI 2016, pp. 220-221; GHETTI, Maria Cecilia. La cattedra padovana di Filologia Slava: i primi cinquant'anni (1920–1970). In MINGATI, Adalgisa – CAVAION, Danilo – CRIVELLER, Claudia (eds.) *Uomini, opere e idee tra Occidente europeo e mondo slavo. Scritti offerti a Marialuisa Ferrazzi*. Trento : Università degli Studi di Trento, 2011, pp. 292-293.

1948. However, it was clear that the rhetoric of Latinity, which had been the basis of Italian cultural activities, would find a great obstacle in the Soviet presence leveraging the theme of pan-Slavism and aiming to Slavicize – culturally speaking – even non-Slavic nations like Romania. It was also clear that after WWII, Italy would no longer be in a position to pursue a policy of great power in general, and even less towards Central and Eastern Europe. From the main target of Italian expansionist policies in the interwar period, former Habsburg Europe became an almost marginal and forgotten area by both the Italian ruling classes and public opinion, while all attention was focused on the birth of the new bipolar equilibrium.<sup>50</sup> According to available documentation, by 1948 in Central-Eastern Europe, Italian cultural institutes continued to operate in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania, while the Institute of Vienna was being reconstituted. Furthermore, regarding Italian chairs and language classes in foreign universities and schools between 1947 and 1948, they were working, albeit in small proportions, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the Italian will to keep these cultural institutions alive, the beginning of the cold war and especially the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950 saw a hardening by the USSR and satellite countries towards the presence of western cultural institutes, and consequently of Italian institutions, which were forced to close.<sup>52</sup> Only the Italian Institute of Culture in Budapest was allowed to continue, while the others were only reopened starting from the 1960s with the beginning of the détente between East and West.<sup>53</sup>

- 50 VIGEZZI, Brunello. De Gasperi, Sforza, la diplomazia italiana e la politica di potenza dal trattato di pace al patto atlantico. In DI NOLFO, Ennio – RAINERO, Romain H. – VIGEZZI, Brunello. *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1945–50)*. Milano : Marzorati, 1990, pp. 3-6; BIANCHINI, Stefano. L'opinione pubblica e l'immagine dell'Europa danubiano-balcanica: dalla fine del conflitto alla guerra fredda. In DI NOLFO, Ennio – RAINERO, Romain H. – VIGEZZI, Brunello. *L'Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1945–50)*. Milano : Marzorati, 1990, pp. 447-449.
- 51 BRUSASCA, Giuseppe (ed.) *Il Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Al servizio del popolo italiano (1943–1949)*. Roma : Tipografia riservata del Ministero degli affari esteri, 1949, pp. 154-155.
- 52 GORI, Umberto. *La "diplomazia" culturale multilaterale dell'Italia. Elementi per uno studio sistematico dell'azione italiana nel quadro di una teoria delle relazioni internazionali*. Roma : Bizzarri, 1970, p. 58, footnote 56.
- 53 MEDICI, Lorenzo. *Dalla propaganda alla cooperazione. La diplomazia culturale italiana nel secondo dopoguerra (1944–1950)*. Milano : Cedam, 2009, pp. 144, 165-168.

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# Yugoslav Ruling Of Rijeka (Fiume) in 1918, Seen by Stanislaw Krakow

Biljana Stojić

## Abstract

STOJIĆ, Biljana. Yugoslav Ruling Of Rijeka (Fiume) in 1918, Seen by Stanislaw Krakow.

This paper discusses a short but very important episode of First World War history concerning the Yugoslav ruling over Rijeka (Fiume) in 1918 as seen through the war experience and writings of Stanislaw Krakow. In the interwar period, Krakow became one of the most known representatives of Expressionism while at the same time a prominent journalist, philatelist, numismatist, art collector, movie director, etc. As a writer, he dedicated a few works to the Rijeka events where he participated as an officer in the Serbian battalion sent from the Thessaloniki front to “cross over every Yugoslav province in order to bring them freedom and to announce unification of Southern Slavs.” Krakow spent one month in Rijeka, arriving on 15 November, but when the Serbian army withdrew two days later he stayed as a Serbian representative within the international mission of French General Andre Tranié. During the month spent in Rijeka, Krakow was witness to many conflicts among pro-Italians and pro-Yugoslavs amid a tense atmosphere with diplomatic clashes between great powers. Describing the early phase of Rijeka’s crisis, Krakow added his own unique angle to the events and we believe that perspective and his extraordinary life story are worthy of presentation to the public appreciation. For the purpose of this paper we rely on his writings as a base for our research, accompanied by documents stored in the Archive of Yugoslavia, the National Library of Serbia, relevant historiography works and newspapers.

**Keywords:** Stanislaw Krakow, Franchet d’Espèrey, First World War, Rijeka (Fiume), Serbia, Italy, Yugo Slavism, 1918

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General Franchet d’Espèrey, the third and last commander of *L’Armée d’Orient*, came to Thessaloniki in June 1918. Unlike his predecessors, Generals Maurice Sarrail and Adolphe Guillaumat, d’Espèrey immediately decided to change the existing war strategy. Instead of sending armies into smaller attacks, he pooled his resources into one large strike targeting a penetration of the frontline. Along with other allied commanders, he assessed that continuing the previous tactic of local attacks was and will be counterproductive because “causes for the bravest getting killed and a huge amount of ammunition is going to waste”.<sup>1</sup> The other characteristic that distinguished d’Espèrey from Sarrail and Guillaumat was his trust in the Serbian army. From first sight he recognized that Serbs have the most motivation in the ongoing war since only victory will bring them back to their homeland. After noting this, d’Espèrey trusted them to lead the entire Allied army into a final breakthrough. He needed only a few meetings with Serbian Regent Alexandre Karadjordjević and Chief of General Staff Živojin Mišić to reach an agreement and all three together drafted the final strategy.<sup>2</sup> From the military point of view, the plan was ready at the beginning of July but from the point

1 D’EPERE, Luj Franše. *Memoari. Solunski front, Srbija, Balkan, Centralna Evropa 1918–1919*. Edited by Vojislav Pavlović. Novi Sad : Prometej, 2018, p. 62.

2 *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1918. g., 1918. godina, III period rovovske vojne. Pripreme za ofanzivu, XXVI*. Glavni Đeneralštab : Beograd, 1935, pp. 96-97; D’EPERE 2018, p. 59; KRAKOV, Stanislav. *Naše poslednje pobede*. Beograd : Vreme, 1928, p. 7.



of view of politics the entire operation was far from completion. D'Espèrey's emissaries spent one month getting diplomatic approval from Paris, London and Rome. The most hesitant towards the Thessaloniki front and the planned operation was French President of the Government and Minister of War Georges Clemenceau, who gave his consent on 10 September, just five days prior to the scheduled attack. Even after authorization was given, Clemenceau remained suspicious and clearly stated his concerns to d'Espèrey, underlining that the operation will be conducted entirely under his responsibility.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of such distrust, General d'Espèrey scheduled artillery preparation for 14 September, following with an infantry attack the next day. Three Serbian armies supported with two French divisions and French artillery started breaching the frontline on 15 September at 5:30 am.<sup>4</sup> The front was penetrated the same day with Allied armies advancing ferociously without rest. The Serbian army liberated the entire country in just 45 days. The initial phase of the operation ended when the first Serbian army entered the capital, Belgrade, on 1 November.

### Life Road of Stanislaw Krakow and his Place in the Serbian Army

At the beginning of the final operation, Sub-lieutenant Stanislaw Krakow was an adjutant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment within the Second Serbian Army under the command of General Stepa Stepanović.<sup>5</sup> Like all Serbian soldiers, Krakow cheerfully welcomed the announcement of the offensive, describing the moment as “accomplishment of all our long-lasting hopes. For other armies' operation in September 1918 will be just one of many while for the Serbian army it will be a ‘to be or not be moment’ which the outcome will either bring us back home or turn into defeat until last living soldier”.<sup>6</sup>

He was only 22 in 1918, but behind him was already seven long years of warfare. He signed up to the army as a volunteer in the Balkan Wars, (October 1912 – August 1913) at 17.<sup>7</sup> From those wars he emerged as a famous child-soldier. The magazine from Novi Sad, *Illustrated War Chronicles*, dedicated a long article to Krakow which described that he returned from the First Balkan War with Zeki-Pasha's coat and rifle, (commander of Turkish army in Kumanovo battle), while in the Second he got his first war wound.<sup>8</sup> Until the end of the Great War, he was wounded 14 times in total, along with suffering from mumps (1913), cholera (1915), malaria (1916) and Spanish flu (1918).<sup>9</sup> For his

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- 3 STOJIĆ, Biljana. Georges Clemenceau and creation of Yugoslavia. In RASTOVIĆ, Aleksandar – MILKIĆ, Miljan (eds.) *End of the Great War – The Road to New Europe*. Belgrade : Institute of History; Strategic Research Institute, 2020, pp. 235-256.
  - 4 *Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1918. g., 1918. godina, knj. 26, III period rovovske vojne. Pripreme za ofanzivu, Naređenja (izveštaji) Vrhovne komande Aktom Str. Pov. OBr. 26543 od 8. jula 1918 god – Komandantu II armije*, p. 112.
  - 5 General Stepa Stepanović was originally the creator of the operation plan which he presented to d'Espèrey in June 1918. D'Espèrey approved the plan, but made some minor changes on 24 August in order to simplify it and make it more effective. Originally General Stepanović predicted that armies from the second line would start marching only after the frontline was already breached. D'Espèrey noticed that the distance between the first and second line was 12 thousand – 13 thousand meters, which meant four to five hours of marching and that the enemy could use that time to recover and regain lost positions. This was the same mistake that France made in the Marna battle. To avoid that scenario, D'Espèrey planned for troop commanders from the first and second lines to share the same headquarters and that the second line follows the first without additional orders. This small change allowed the Yugoslav division at the head of the Serbian army to quickly seize the peak of the mountain Kozjak and with that enabled Germans and Bulgarians to react and send help. D'EPERE 2018, p. 81.
  - 6 KRAKOV, Stanislaw. *Život čoveka na Balkanu*. Beograd; Lausanne; Zemun : Naš dom; L'Age d'Homme; Fleš, 2009, p. 224.
  - 7 STOJIĆ, Biljana. *Francuska i balkanski ratovi (1912–1913)*. Beograd : Istorijski institut, 2017.
  - 8 Narodna biblioteka Srbije (NBS, National library of Serbia), Rukopisno odeljenje (RO), Arhiva Stanislava Krakova (ASK), Ratni dnevnik 1912–1913, R 707/I/16–1; R 707/I/1b–11; KRAKOV 2009, pp. 32-33, 35, 38.
  - 9 KRAKOV 2009, pp. 11-12.

contributions, he was awarded 18 medals, three of which were foreign: *L'Officier de l'ordre de la Couronne le Roumanie* (1922); *Palme d'Officier de l'Instruction Publique* (1930) and *Ordre du Phénix de la Grèce* (1935).<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1. Stanislaw Krakow

The volunteer experience from the Balkan Wars, and even more his family background, predestined young Stanislaw Krakow for a military career. His father Sigismund (Zigmund) Krakow was a military doctor. He was born and raised in Poland, but after one of many unsuccessful rebellions against Russian supremacy he escaped to France. At the beginning of the war against Bulgaria in 1885, Serbia extended a call for foreign military medics and Sigismund applied for the position. When the war ended in 1886, Sigismund decided to stay in Serbia and start a family with Persida Nedić and Stanislaw was born in Kragujevac on 29 March 1895.<sup>11</sup>

His mother was also from a military family. All three of Persida's brothers, Milan, Milutin and Božidar, were highly ranked officers in the Serbian, and later Yugoslav army.<sup>12</sup>

The oldest of the trio, Milan, was a general and governor in occupied Serbia under the Nazi regime 1941–1944. He had the biggest influence on his nephew since Stanislaw lost his father at young age, (1910), and his uncle(s) became the father figure in his life.<sup>13</sup> Krakow began to study at the Military Academy in September 1913, as a second ranked cadet. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the First World War (WWI), he spent only half a year at the Academy. Serbia was desperately lacking soldiers so even with only a few months of study, Krakow was considered a professional soldier and as such was sent into the trenches. In autumn 1915, he was positioned on the South-East border with Bulgaria when his battalion was attacked by the Bulgarian army. During the fighting he was severely injured but managed to recover before the withdrawal of the army in November–December 1915. After reorganization and transfer of the army from Corfu to Thessaloniki in April–May 1916, Krakow was immediately assigned

<sup>10</sup> NBS, RO, ASK, R 707/III/14, No. 990, Ministerul Afacerilor Străine – Cancelaria ordinelor, Accusé de Réception, Belgrade, le 25 mars 1922; NBS, RO, ASK, R 707/III/13, Légation de France Belgrade, le 12 septembre 1930.

<sup>11</sup> Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ, Archive of Yugoslavia), Fond Stanislava Krakova, 102–1–1, Izvod iz knjige venčanih srpske pravoslavne crkve Nove Kragujevačke, tek. br. 33, 4. maj 1938.

<sup>12</sup> KRAKOV 2009, pp. 19, 21.

<sup>13</sup> KRAKOV 2009, pp. 24, 29.

to the first frontline. His division was destroyed during the battle for Kajmakčalan, (summer–autumn 1916), while he received another severe injury.<sup>14</sup>

Through many battles Krakow demonstrated obvious bravery, however, in wartime he displayed another, very peculiar talent. He began to keep a diary in the Balkan Wars, writing down all the events he witnessed personally or heard along the road. In an interview for *Illustrated War Chronicles*, he announced his intention to publish these notes after the Wars but that did not happen, most likely due to the outbreak of new war.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, throughout the entire WWI he continued to write at every free moment. At the Thessaloniki front, writing became his “way out from cruel reality”. There in the trenches in 1916, he launched a satirical newspaper called *Rovovac*.<sup>16</sup> He was the author of all articles and illustrations and paid a battalion scribe to make ten additional copies. The universal theme of *Rovovac* was mocking the absurdity of the war. The newspaper drew widespread attention among soldiers and gained immediate popularity. Nonetheless, his superiors were not thrilled with his daring approach and prohibited the paper after only four issues.<sup>17</sup> Even so, he did not feel discouraged by this failure. By summer 1918 he managed to finish his first novel *Kroz buru* (Through a Storm), published under the same title in 1921). Three doctors in his battalion read the manuscript, approved its quality and declared that “Sub-lieutenant Krakow is talented for writing”. Encouraged by their praises, he quickly began work on a second novel *Krila* (*The Wings*, 1922), which he conceived as a “story about adventures in Thessaloniki and deaths of comrades”. He did not have time to finish the manuscript because Headquarters announced an order for the final operation.

### Pro-Yugoslav Movement in Croatia and Rijeka

In the Dobro polje battle, Krakow led a unit of volunteers from Dalmatia and Croatia.<sup>18</sup> It was at the Second Army’s head, advancing quickly from the start, and at some point Krakow referred to them as “lost” since they had been mostly disconnected from the rest of the army. The unit was the first that entered the city of Veles in Macedonia. His unit arrived in Kragujevac on 26 October, marking the end of “a life cycle” for Krakow as he returned to the beginning of his journey. Kragujevac was the city where his parents met, where he was born and from where he left for the war. Though personally important for Krakow, Kragujevac was just one stop for the Serbian army. The entire way marching he was referring to rivers as some imaginary borders in that triumphal endeavor: “We crossed Vardar and Morava, only Sava left to be conquered.”<sup>19</sup> The same day when the First Serbian army arrived in Belgrade, Krakow’s Second army liberated Šabac, a city at the Sava River and reached the border with Austria-Hungary.<sup>20</sup>

14 NBS, RO, ASK, P 707/I/1–21; KRAKOV 2009, pp. 161,184-185,190.

15 Ilustrovana ratna kronika, “Stanislav Krakov”, 2/15 December 1912, No. 14, p. 16.

16 Journal *Rovovac* available at <http://velikirat.nb.rs/items/show/4033>

17 The four publications appeared on 2, 8, 18, and 25 December 1916. Krakow wrote that the paper was forbidden because of one article *A protest* where he satirically described the protests of mules, horses and bulls at the frontline. His superior officers found it an insulting reference to soldiers that were fighting and dying every day. KRAKOV, Stanislav. Jedan miting. In *Rovovac*, 8 December 1916, pp. 4-6.

18 KRAKOV 1928, p. 8.

19 KRAKOV 1928, p. 56.

20 KRAKOV 2009, p. 263; KRAKOV 1928, p. 57.

From the beginning of the War, Serbian Headquarters and the Regent had been aware of strong Pro-Yugoslav feelings amongst South Slavs in Austria-Hungary. With the help of prominent Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian intellectuals, Serbia was helping this great potential to be shaped into a movement. Dissatisfaction with central power started to increase in 1917 and took many forms, the most important was a mass desertion of soldiers. One estimation says that in 1918 there were over 200 thousand deserters, collectively known as *Zeleni kadar*, because they were hiding in forests and mountains. The majority of the *Zeleni kadar* movement was located in the southern parts of the Habsburg Empire – Dalmatia, Kordun, Lika, Banija, etc.<sup>21</sup> The great success of *L'Armée D'Orient* in September 1918 was a crucial cue for Southern Slavs in Austria-Hungary to start an open rebellion against authorities. At the beginning of October, all over Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, groups of Croats, Slovenes and Serbs began to organize associations of power – National Councils, which replaced officials. The decisive step was the proclamation of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (The State of SCS) in Zagreb on 29 October 1918.<sup>22</sup> The president of the State of SCS was Anton Korošec, a Slovenian, while there were two vice-presidents, a Serb, Svetozar Pribičević, and a Croat, Ante Pavelić Senior. The newly founded state immediately expressed a desire to be united with Serbia.<sup>23</sup>

The pro-Yugoslav movement in Rijeka started to mature during 1917 when the most prominent proponents met regularly in Rijeka's city library to coordinate their actions with like-minded pro-Yugoslavs in Zagreb and all around Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia. In January 1918, Rijeka's pro-Yugoslavs started a petition indicating that Rijeka should be part of a future Yugoslavia and by 25 January, 6 012 signatures had been gathered. Local newspapers also wrote more often about the necessity to create a national state which will bring together Croats, Slovenes and Serbs.<sup>24</sup>

The breakthrough of the Thessaloniki front accelerated the course of events in Rijeka and by mid-October, the situation had high patriotic implications. The town of 54 570<sup>25</sup> was divided into three fractions: pro-Italians, pro-Yugoslavs and an autonomous movement.<sup>26</sup> Italy had been expressing tension toward Istria ever since the unification of the country in 1870, mainly regarding annexing Istria's capital Trieste, but Rijeka was no less important for Rome. Both cities had a tradition of irredentism, which WWI additionally ignited.

21 ČULINOVIĆ, Ferdo. Raspad Austro-Ugarske i postanak jugoslavenske zajedničke države. In ČUBRILOVIĆ, Vasa et al. (eds.) *Naučni skup povodom 50-godišnjice raspada Austro-Ugarske monarhije i stvaranja jugoslavenske države*. Zagreb: Jugoslovenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti (JAZU), 1969, pp. 17-59.

22 The State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was created on the ruins of Austria-Hungary and existed only briefly (29 October–1 December 1918) i.e. in the interim between the disappearance of Austrian power and the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The State was unrecognized internationally, only being acknowledged by the Kingdom of Serbia. Regarding territory, the State consisted of former parts of Austria-Hungary, (Slovenia, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rijeka). The state's name is often confused with the name of Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The difference is that the State of Slovenes was listed as a first constitutional nation, while the Kingdom of Serbs was mentioned first. Also, the State did not have a clearly defined constitutional organisation, it was led by the National Council. The Council's delegation, led by Vice-president Svetozar Pribičević, issued the decision to blend the State of SCS into the Kingdom of SCS proclaimed in Belgrade on 1 December 1918.

23 EKMČIĆ, Milorad. *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918, Vol. 2*. Beograd : Prosveta, 1989, p. 806.

24 MARJANOVIĆ, Milan. Rijeka od 1860 do 1918. In RAVLIĆ, Jakša (ed.) *Rijeka : geografija – etnologija – ekonomija – saobraćaj – povijest – kultura* (below Rijeka). Zagreb : Matica Hrvatska, 1953, p. 248.

25 According to the census from 1910 the national composition of the population of Rijeka was: 48.61 % Italians; 25.95 % Croats; 4.69 % Slovenes; 13.03 % Magyars and 4.64 % Germans; in total 49 806 people. HOREL, Catherine. Trieste et Fiume, deux aspects de l'irredentisme Italien 1867–1914. In PAVLOVIĆ, G. Vojislav (ed.) *Italy's Balkan strategies 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Belgrade : Institute des études balkaniques, 2014, p. 125.

26 BARBALIĆ, Fran. Pitanje narodnosti u Rijeci. In *Rijeka*, pp. 15-34.

Regarding the Yugoslav question, Italy maintained two opposing views: the first was denying rights to Slavs or any other nations, i.e. preaching for the total domination of Italy in the Adriatic Sea and notions of territorial expansion on the Eastern coast, and the second was calling for compromise with the Southern Slavs, the political collapse of Austria-Hungary and the creation of ethnic states on its ruins in the traditional spirit of Risorgimento and Mazzini.<sup>27</sup>

The turning point in Rijeka occurred on 21 October when soldiers from the 79<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment *Ban Jelačić* decided to replace the Austrian flag with a Croatian one and to free all political prisoners. Aside from institutions, the new flag was displayed everywhere, including on steamships like the *Adrie* and the *Ungaro-Croate*.<sup>28</sup> The proclamation of the State of SCS in Zagreb triggered the creation of a Rijeka national council on the same day. The Council in Rijeka was headed by Andre Bakarčić, a lawyer and advocate of Ante Starčević's Party of Rights. The National Council took power from the last Hungarian Governor, Zoltan Jekelfalussy, while as he and the rest of the Austro-Hungarian authorities fled the city.<sup>29</sup> This was the *de iure* and *de facto* end of Hungarian power over Rijeka.<sup>30</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Petar Teslić, a former Austrian officer, took over command of the military. He gathered prisoners and the *Zeleni kadar* and incorporated them into the city's police force. However, the situation began to get complicated when the Italians and their supporters founded *Consiglio Nazionale di Fiume*. Dr Antonio Grossich, a local medic who interned in Vienna during the War, was elected its president. The creation of an Italian council was the manifestation of local patriotism felt since the London Treaty (signed on 26 April 1915), where Rijeka was excluded from Italy's sphere of interest. Since it was not part of the London Treaty, tension in the city with Italy led to the slogan: "The Treaty of London plus Fiume."<sup>31</sup> On 30 October, Bakarčić opened negotiations with city commissioner Dr Antonio Vio Jr. and with Dr Grossich. They reached a deal the same day by which Rijeka was proclaimed a part of new the State of SCS in Zagreb and all city power was transferred to the National Council.<sup>32</sup> After an intervention from Zagreb, Bakarčić was replaced by Dr Ricardo Lenac. Despite the agreement, Italians made an official request the following day to Rome that Rijeka be united with Italy. The reason for such action was a strong belief that the London Treaty must be honored as a prize for declaration of war against Austria-Hungary and all endured war efforts. Starting in early October 1918, the Italian army commenced taking Dalmatia, mainly following the borders stipulated by the Treaty. However, during its stay the Italian army crossed that imaginary border on several locations, aiming to apply military pressure upon the ongoing Paris Peace Conference.<sup>33</sup> Counting on the London Treaty, Italians from Rijeka called upon an Italian fleet anchored nearby in Pula to support their claim. On 2 November, before the Italians arrived at Rijeka's dock, one flotilla of American war ships and one squadron of French and British army soldiers appeared. All three commanders declared that they recognize the National Council of the SCS and the following day they organized an improvised Inter-allied command over Rijeka

27 LATINOVIĆ, Goran. *Yugoslav-Italian economic relations (1918–1941)*. Banja Luka : Univeristy of Banja Luka; Faculty of Philosophy, 2019, p. 13.

28 BARBALIĆ, A. Radojica. Brodarstvo Rijeke kroz vijekove. In *Rijeka*, p. 110.

29 MARJANOVIĆ 1953, p. 251; KLEN, Danilo – STRČIĆ, Petar (eds.) *Povijest Rijeke*. Rijeka : Tipograf, 1988, p. 285.

30 HOREL 2014, p. 122.

31 LATINOVIĆ 2019, pp. 13-14.

32 MARJANOVIĆ 1953, p. 225.

33 LATINOVIĆ 2019, p. 13-14.

in the name of General Franchet d'Espèrey, confirming military command to Lieutenant-Colonel Teslić and his battalion.<sup>34</sup>

When Admiral Giuseppe Reiner Bichat appeared at Rijeka's dock on 4 November, the situation in the city started to worsen. He boarded the warship *Emanuele Filiberto* and three more ships following. The Italian fleet arrived just a day after a signed armistice in Villa Giusti firmly determined to uphold every point of the London Treaty.<sup>35</sup> Initially, the arrival of another ally was greeted cordially by all of Rijeka's citizens. Twenty-five thousands people organized a parade in their honor and as a sign of good will, the Italian flag was displayed side by side with the Croatian at the castle. Nonetheless, Admiral Reiner instantly objected, asking that the Croatian flag be removed from the castle and steamships arguing that by naval rules, neither Croatian nor Yugoslav flags were internationally accredited. He proposed that Dr Lenac return the Austro-Hungarian flag – still official, or to display an Italian as flag one of the Allied powers. Dr Lenac declared that returning the Austrian flag is out of the question. Reiner then acted on his own and displayed the Italian flag without his consent. The move created a tense situation between the National Council and Admiral Reiner, and directly caused mutiny among sailors, mostly Slavs, who refused to sail under an Italian emblem.<sup>36</sup> Reiner remained firm and ignorant toward the sailor's dissatisfaction, instead continuing to take additional measures which clearly indicated preparation for Rijeka's unification with Italy. Despite the open intentions, for time being Reiner decided not to disembark the army from any ships in order to avoid direct conflict with Teslić's battalion and the other armies in Rijeka. Meanwhile, the National Council started to express some anxiety that Teslić's battalion will not be enough protection from the far outnumbered Italian army. Therefore, Dr Lenac called upon help from Zagreb and Serbian Headquarters. Along with an appeal from Rijeka, a special delegation of the State of SCS arrived in Belgrade on 8 November where they met Regent Alexandre two days later. They requested that Serbia send around 500 soldiers to Rijeka as protection from the Italians, 1 000 soldiers to Zagreb to implement orders of the National Council, and additional troops to Bačka and Banat to create a barrier against Hungary. The delegation stayed in Belgrade until 12 November and as soon as they left the city, Serbian Headquarters issued orders for two battalions to start marching towards Zagreb and Rijeka.<sup>37</sup>

### **Krakov's Last Wartime Adventure – Over the Austro-Hungarian border**

Calling the Serbian army came naturally since it had already crossed the border with Austria-Hungary. The first unit was to cross the Sava River on 5 November. The decision was made promptly after group of Serbs came to Šabac and invited the Serbian army claiming that Austria had withdrawn its troops. The task was assigned to Stanislaw Krakow and the 34 soldiers under his command. The Serbian army was unprepared for such a duty,

34 SUČIĆ, Ivo. Rijeka 1918 – 1945. In *Rijeka*, p. 285.

35 The main target was Dalmatia where the Italian army was arriving on the day of the armistice. By 13 November, the entire Dalmatian coastline and islands were seized by Italians. The idea was to promptly control all Austrian territories and stored ammunitions, and with it to force the Allies to accept Italian rule over the Eastern Adriatic coast as *fait accompli*. GULIĆ, Milan. Stupanje srpske vojske na područje Dalmacije, 1918. godine. In RASTOVIĆ, Aleksandar – MILKIĆ, Miljan (eds.) *End of the Great War – The Road to New Europe*. Belgrade : Institute of History; Strategic Research Institute, 2020, pp. 37-58.

36 BARBALIĆ 1953, p. 110.

37 GULIĆ 2020, pp. 42-43.

proof of the fact was that Krakow and his unit had only fishing boats at its disposal.<sup>38</sup> Later, Krakow described the crazy feeling that he had, “I was sent to conquer an Empire with only a handful of people”.<sup>39</sup> Krakow’s unit had been part of a battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ljubomir Maksimović, known among soldiers by the unique nickname *Ljuba the God*.<sup>40</sup>

The first town Krakow’s unit reached was Ruma. There, Serbian soldiers were welcomed by 600 Czech Legionnaires which sang the pan-Slavic anthem *Hey, Slavs* in their honor.<sup>41</sup> Describing the euphoria in the city, Krakow wrote that they felt “Ruma as some triumph gate trough which we entered into Yugoslavia”.<sup>42</sup> The next ten days, Krakow crossed the entire Fruška Gora region along with some prominent locals. On that journey they did not encounter any Austrian soldiers, only locals thrilled to see Serbian soldiers wearing *šajkača* a Serbian national cap. For them, *šajkača* was a symbol of freedom.<sup>43</sup> Until 12 November Krakow and his group crossed almost the entire Srem and Bačka regions when he received an order from Serbian Headquarters to redirect their actions towards Zagreb and Rijeka.<sup>44</sup>

Before they crossed Croatia’s border, Regent Alexander and Chief of Headquarters Vojvoda Mišić consulted General Franchet d’Espèrey on the matter. D’Espèrey gave them the green light. That decision was riskier because it had the implication of a possible open conflict with an ally’s army – the Italians. For that reason, the mission was classified as top secret with the main goal that the army reach the Adriatic coast before the Italians do and to put the entire Adriatic seaboard under the control of *L’Armée D’Orient*. This task was given to the battalion under command of Lieutenant Colonel Maksimović with Stanislaw Krakow, upgraded to Lieutenant, his deputy commander. The battalion set off on 12 November.<sup>45</sup>

Even though the mission was classified as top-secret, the battalion was given a special train fully decorated with flowers and Serbian flags. Soldiers were cheerful, singing with fifes and trumpets all along the way.<sup>46</sup> Such a decorated and noisy train drew attention wherever it went. In each city the train passed through, locals cheerfully welcomed the Serbian soldiers. The warm receptions evoked the most excitement among soldiers, wrote Krakow, and even the Spanish flu could not spoil their happiness. The first stops on their journey were Vinkovci and Slavonski Brod. In Slavonski Brod, a local National Council organized parade most warmly greeting Serbian soldiers “as those who bringing peace and liberation”. The train arrived in the Croatian capital, Zagreb, on 14 November but the atmosphere was much colder than in previous locations.<sup>47</sup> Only a few members of the National Council and the State of SCS led by Svetozar Pribićević were at the train station as it arrived in the early morning. There was no parade or joyful locals. Krakow’s impression was equally cold as the reception, he was not even impressed with the famous Pribićević, describing

38 KRAKOV 1928, p. 58.

39 AJ, 102–4–9, Govor S. Krakova na svečanosti povodom 20. godina od oslobođenja Rume, 5–6 November 1938.

40 Maksimović’s battalion was excluded from the Yugoslav Volunteer division, which was under the command of General Vojislav Živanović at that time. KRAKOV 2009, pp. 260-261; KRAKOV, Stanislav. *Naše poslednje pobede. Od Kajmakčalana do Rijeke na čelu jurišnog voda*. Beograd : Društvo Nova Iskra; Slava, 2010, p. 81.

41 KRAKOV 2009, pp. 266-267.

42 AJ, 102–4–9, Govor S. Krakova na svečanosti povodom 20. godina od oslobođenja Rume, 5–6 November 1938.

43 KRAKOV 2010, pp. 85-86.

44 KRAKOV 2009, p. 274.

45 KRAKOV 2009, p. 274.

46 KRAKOV 1928, p. 62.

47 TEŠIĆ, Gojko (ed.) *Crveni pjero i druge novele*. Beograd; Arandjelovac : Filip Višnjić; Napredak, 1992, p. 89.

him as “a gloomy fanatic with dangerous ambitions”.<sup>48</sup> After a short break, the train continued towards its final destination arriving on the 15<sup>th</sup> early in the morning. The moment the soldiers saw Rijeka and the sea there was an eruption of happiness, they were cheering and singing and it “was so hard to restrain them not to shoot in the air”.<sup>49</sup> Krakow noted that it was a moment of great historic significance for all of them and he truly believed that if it were required of them to confront the entire Italian army in the fight for Rijeka, they would be unstoppable. The reception in Rijeka for the Serbian soldiers was the most festive. At the train station they were greeted by a delegation comprised of Dr Lenac, members of the Rijeka and Istria National Councils, an orthodox priest and Lieutenant Colonel Teslić. All of them had ribbons around arms in the colors of the Serbian and Croatian flags.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 2. Arrival of the Serbian army in Rijeka. Source: MUO-019629/01 <https://repositorij.muo.hr/?pr=i&id=52173> [last viewed on 14 June 2021]

The arrival of the Serbian army pushed an already tense situation in the city to almost open conflict. Admiral Reiner was shocked when heard that they had come directly from the Thessaloniki front. He repeated continuously that is not possible. Like was done for Italian army, Rijeka's citizens organized a welcome parade for Serbian army. According to Krakow, the occasion brought over 30 thousand people to Rijeka's streets. However, the celebra-

tion did not last long. Reiner immediately requested to disembark the Italian army since the Serbian army was already there. This demand led him into a dispute with Maksimović. An almost inevitable clash between them was prevented by French, British and American officers. Krakow wrote that Captain Georges Durand-Viel, commander of French torpilleur *Touareg*, had the most important role, “he was some sort a buffer between Maksimović's stubbornness and Reiner's arrogance”. Aiming to settle the differences among Serbs and Italians, allied officers scheduled some sort of inter-allied conference for 17 November. Meanwhile, one British and one American battalion arrived from the Piave River and those officers joined the meeting. At the conference, the officers decided to temporarily put Rijeka under the protection of the Entente, thus Maksimović was advised to withdraw his soldiers to Kraljevica at the Croatian coastline. The idea was that only French, British and American soldiers stay in the city. Until the final decision, Reiner promised that the Italian army will not enter Rijeka. At 3:45 pm on 17 November, two ships with the Serbian army left Rijeka's dock. Maksimović kept his word, but as soon as the ships embarked, Reiner gave the signal for army landing.<sup>51</sup> Simultaneously, one infantry division under

48 KRAKOV 2009, p. 300.

49 KRAKOV 1928, p. 64.

50 KRAKOV 2009, p. 274.

51 KRAKOV 1928, p. 67. Regardless of the fact that the Serbian army had withdrawn to Sušak, this location was also questionable. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes got right over this harbour in 1922 by an agreement in Santa Margherita. The Italian army left Sušak in March 1923 when Yugoslavia put the city under its control. BARTULOVIĆ, Željko. Talijanska okupacija Sušaka 1918–1923. In JURKOVIĆ, Ivan (ed.) *Zbornik u čast Miroslava Bertoše*, Vol. 3. Pula : Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2013, pp. 159-178.



the command of General Di San Marzano appeared from the north and 25 thousand fully armed soldiers marched into the city and in just few hours the Italians took full control of Rijeka.<sup>52</sup> This ended the very short Serbian control of Rijeka, lasting only two days. Including the pro-Yugoslav ruling, it was 18 days in total.

Reiner's disloyal and disrespectful act caused great bitterness within the Serbian army and pro-Yugoslavs in the city. In the following days and months, the situation escalated into open fights between Italians and Yugoslavs in the city's streets. The state of affairs aggravated people not only in Rijeka, but in Italy as well. All around the country there were organized demonstrations against Croats and Yugoslavs, while Rijeka been transformed into a "martyr city". Hatred was directed against Serbia as well with the justification that Italy contributed the most during the operation to save the Serbian army in 1915 and that Serbia is now ungrateful with their posturing towards the Adriatic coastline. Nationalists of every sort were calling people to stand up for the rights of Italians. The loudest was prominent *poeta-soldato* Gabrielle D'Annunzio, who had a link with Serbia long before Rijeka. After the defeat of the Serbian army in November 1915, he dedicated *Oda alla nazione serba* to Serbia. In the poem, he praised Serbian bravery and its affection towards the Serbian people. The poem was translated by prominent Serbian poet Milutin Bojić and published in the *Serbian newspaper* in Corfu at the beginning of 1916.<sup>53</sup>

With the crisis around Rijeka, D'Annunzio's affection towards Serbia vanished. At the protests, he came up with the famous mantra "Fiume o morte", which was immediately converted into Rijeka's version as "Italia o morte".<sup>54</sup> In the following months, Non-Italians in Rijeka changed the saying into "Italia è morte", and referred to Italian rule as "terror".<sup>55</sup> The official transfer of power come about on 7 December when *Consiglio Nazionale* declared itself an independent body with "governmental power".<sup>56</sup> Benito Mussolini arrived in Rijeka on 20 December and gave a speech in the city theatre, but the general impression of that address was very mild.<sup>57</sup> When it comes to other great powers, France supported from the Yugoslav standpoint from the beginning of the crisis because it was better to deal with a smaller state like Yugoslavia instead of letting Italy control the entire Adriatic Sea. Before the Italians managed to seize the city, the French tried to take control of Rijeka with the support of the Yugoslav National Council but the attempt failed and they gained only one small harbor.<sup>58</sup>

Leaving Rijeka on 17 November was the end of Maksimović's mission, but not the end for Stanislaw Krakow. When his comrades left Kraljevica few days later, Krakow returned to Rijeka as a representative of the Serbian army with a new mission from French General Charles Tranié, commander of the 122<sup>nd</sup> French division at the Thessaloniki front. This mission was created under the authority of General D'Esperèy. Tranié arrived shortly after the Serbian battalion, also directly from Thessaloniki front, at the head of a battalion taken from the 11<sup>th</sup> French colonial division. Acting in the name of General D'Esperèy, Tranié was commander of all international allied forces located in Rijeka. Besides the French

52 KRAKOV 2009, p. 282.

53 KRAKOV 2009, p. 291.

54 SUČIĆ 1953, pp. 277-304.

55 SUČIĆ 1953, p. 287.

56 MARJANOVIĆ 1953, p. 251.

57 SUČIĆ 1953, p. 289.

58 SUČIĆ 1953, p. 289.

battalion, it included a British and an American regiment. He personally drew the hatred of Italians who accused him of being the “biggest protector of Croatian rights over Rijeka”. According to Krakow, Tranić’s role was merely symbolic because in reality, the Italians controlled everything.<sup>59</sup> Krakow was part of Tranić’s mission until 20 December after which, by order of the Serbian Headquarters, he was relocated to Zagreb. At departure he expressed the deepest sense of “anxiety and uncertainty” and closure, “Rijeka was our last triumph and the first defeat at the same time”.<sup>60</sup>

## Krakow’s Relations Toward Italy in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was officially proclaimed in Belgrade on 1 December 1918. According to opponents, such unification was conducted in haste without profound discussion or preparation. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Srem and Vojvodina, as parts of former Austria-Hungary had referendums about unification, but Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia and Slovenia did not have that option. In their case, the union was accepted by a special delegation of the State of SCS led by Svetozar Pribićević, which was sent to Belgrade at the end of November with the task of negotiating the conditions of unification with Regent Alexander. Talks lasted only one day as Pribićević acted hastily and agreed to all proposed terms without consultation with Korošec and the Council in Zagreb. The main conditions were that the state be organized as a hereditary and centralized monarchy with the Karadjordjević dynasty at the head, and all previous historical differences will be annulled, including national assemblies. In the new state, there will be just one Assembly in Belgrade, the Serbian dinar will serve as the official currency and all armies will be unified and organized under the standards of the Serbian army.

When these conditions were disclosed in a public proclamation of the new state it caused great discontent in Croatia. People had the impression that they were being treated as defeated. Dissatisfaction with the conditions reached the highest level in Zagreb and a rebellion occurred on 5 December (*Petoprosinačka pobuna*) five days after the proclamation.<sup>61</sup> The main request of the protestors was independence for Croatia. During the unrest, republican protestors got into a fight with soldiers from the 25<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry regiments along with volunteers from Dalmatia and members of *Sokol*. Thirteen people were killed, nine of them republicans while 17 in total were injured. The Serbian army did not help in suppressing the rebellion but afterwards it seized the opportunity to put Zagreb under its control and to dismiss all pro-republican officials from governing. This rebellion was later praised by Ustashi during the Second World War (WWII) as the first reaction against Great-Serbian hegemony, while the rebellion’s victims became martyrs. In order to ensure safety in Zagreb and to ease the transition of Croatia into a new state, Serbian Headquarters created a mission for Colonel Pribićević, Svetozar’s brother. Krakow arrived in Zagreb to join this mission as a liaison officer just two weeks after the rebellion. In February 1919,

59 SUČIĆ 1953, p. 292.

60 TEŠIĆ 1992, pp. 87-92; BABIĆ, Dragan. Putujuća tragedija : Prvi svetski rat i novele Stanislava Krakova. In DEMIĆ, Mirko (ed.) *Stanislav Krakov – avangarda, margina, nasleđe. Zbornik radova o stvaralaštvu Stanislava Krakova (1895–1968)*. Kragujevac; Indija : Narodna biblioteka Vuk Karadžić; Komazec, 2015, pp. 53-68.

61 GEIGER, Vladimir – BARIĆ, Nikica. Odjeci i obilježavanja 5. prosinca 1918. u Nezavisnoj državi Hrvatskoj. In *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 2002, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 833-850.

the Pribićević mission was replaced with new one headed by Colonel Milan Nedić, Krakow's uncle, where he held the same position.<sup>62</sup>

From Zagreb, Krakow continued to follow Rijeka's state of affairs. He was familiar with more frequent confrontations in the city streets and that Yugoslavs were forced to move to other areas.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, Rijeka became very appealing for Italian nationalists seeking to extend the war. Rijeka's crisis was transformed from a local issue into a question of national pride for every Italian. Tensions continued to increase month by month which forced the Allies gathered at the Peace Conference in Versailles to intervene and they made the decision to dismiss *Consiglio Nazionale*. This was followed by the limitation of Italian soldiers in Rijeka to just one brigade while the rest were replaced with a mixed English-American squad in the capacity of international police. Their arrival was scheduled for 12 September but Colonel Gabrielle D'Annunzio entered the city a few hours before the foreign forces. He arrived with a "group of volunteers", calling this maneuver poetically "*Santa entrada*" and instantly proclaimed Rijeka's annexation to Italy. With this proclamation, Rijeka once again became *corpus separatum*. Officially, Rome did not accept the city's annexation declaring that "*Santa entrada*" was an individual act. Nonetheless, in the following months there was no doubt that D'Annunzio acted with approval from officials. Italy started a diplomatic operation in order to persuade other great powers to acknowledge Rijeka as a "*pillow state*" under protection of the League of Nations.<sup>64</sup> Negotiations regarding the status of Dalmatia and Rijeka began in March 1920 and went through several phases. The first concluded with an agreement signed on 12 November 1920 in Rapallo near Genève where the Italians agreed to withdraw the majority of their troops from the larger part of Dalmatia. By the Treaty of Rapallo, Italy recognized the Yugoslav state and admitted the possibility of cooperation between the two countries. The second phase of negotiations was resolved with the Brioni Conventions in September 1921, which regulated fishing in the Adriatic Sea. This was the beginning of the final phase.<sup>65</sup> Rijeka's status was definitively resolved by Rome's contract, i.e. the pact of friendship between Yugoslavia and Italy concluded on 27 January 1924. With Rome's contract, Yugoslavia renounced its claims and gave freedom to Italy to integrate Rijeka into its borders. The seizure of power by Fascists in Italy at the end of October 1922 paradoxically led to an improvement of relations, owing to Mussolini's efforts towards international consolidation. One of the points of the fascist program created in the manner of "new and dynamic foreign policy" was "reconciliation and balance with the Yugoslav state".<sup>66</sup>

Krakow stayed in Zagreb until May 1919, after which he was reassigned to other tasks. By 1924 his life had completely changed. After suicide attempt in 1921, he retired from the army the following year and started a career as a writer and journalist.<sup>67</sup> In that time,

62 KRAKOV 2009, pp. 300, 308-309.

63 In Dalmatia, there were many conflicts between the Serbian and Italian armies, mostly in places outside the imaginary border drawn up in the London Treaty. In these confrontations, the Italians outnumbered the Serbian army and were far better armed. Serbian Headquarters issued an order on 30 December to its troops to avoid any open clash with the Italians. The difference between Istria and Dalmatia was that in Istria, there was not any Serbian army presence and the sporadic conflicts occurred between pro-Yugoslav civilians and the Italian army. GULIĆ 2020, 54-57.

64 ČULINOVIĆ, Ferdo. Rijeka u državnompravnom smislu. In *Rijeka*, p. 271.

65 LATINOVIĆ 2019, p. 16.

66 LATINOVIĆ 2019, p. 17.

67 The public speculated widely regarding the reasons for his suicide attempt. During the investigation, he declared that he had felt humiliated by his position in the army after the war, mostly because the state accepted the military

Krakov got closer to the extreme right movements in Yugoslavia like ORYUNA and ZBOR.<sup>68</sup> The leader of ZBOR, Dimitrije Ljotić, was his best friend from the Thessaloniki front. Both organizations enlisted former soldiers and were considered defenders of unitary Yugo-Slavism, i.e. an ideology which considered Serbs, Croats and Slovenes parts of the same people but with three different names and two religions. This ideology was accompanied by a belief that if three constitutive nations and over 20 different nationalities live in a firm unitary system, eventually all will transform into one nation – the Yugoslavs. Opposing official ideology was the idea of a federal or system promoted by Croats and Slovenes during the War. After Yugoslavia was made pro-federalist, it started favoring decentralization and campaigning that centralization is just camouflage for a Great Serbian imperialism. In order to suppress opponents, the King decided to impose dictatorship in 1929. This act was accompanied by his memorable statement: “We created Yugoslavia, and now is the time to create Yugoslavs.” As former soldier, monarchist and patriot, Krakow strongly believed in Yugoslavia and that his task was to protect the country no matter what. He did not hesitate if needed to physically defend the state and its ideology. He was one of leaders of bully groups in ZBOR known for getting into fights with opponents.<sup>69</sup>

Under such tense political circumstances, it seems that the loss of Rijeka due to the Roma agreement did not affect Krakow much. As a journalist, in 1926 his interview with Mussolini was published in the daily newspaper *Vreme*. Neither of them mentioned Rijeka in the interview, but Krakow was highly impressed with *Il Duce*'s appearance and character, stressing that he is the most impressive person that he had met in his entire life. He even underlined the fact that after the meeting he clearly understood why Italians trusted him to lead them. For Krakow “He was a politician who clearly knows what he wants and how to achieve his goals”. Because of these remarks, he was severely criticized in public opinion as pro-fascist. Even so, Krakow's admiration for Mussolini did not last much after the interview. When the Italian press started a ferocious campaign against Yugoslavia over quarrels in the League of Nations, Krakow felt personally insulted and started to respond with equal hostility in *Vreme*. In his articles, he was mostly mocking Italian heroism in the War. He went so far that Rome placed him on the black list and from 1932, he was officially a *persona non grata* in Italy. The last and harshest article *Heroji sa Kaporeta* (Heroes from Caporetto) was published by Krakow on 9 September 1934.<sup>70</sup> The article was released a month before

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ranking of former Austro-Hungarian soldiers and placed them in an equal category as those from Serbia. Even though he was a supporter of Yugoslavia, he identified himself first as a Serb. Another version was unrequited love for some lady. He wrote a short story about it titled “*How I Killed Myself*”. KRAKOV, Stanislav. Kako sam se ubio. In *Vreme*, 1926, No. VI/1456, pp. 6-8, 25; POTREBIĆ, Milan. Dva opisa samoubistva u pripoveci “*Kako sam se ubio*” i memoarima Život čoveka na Balkanu Stanislava Krakova. In *Zbornik Matice srpske za slavistiku*, 2018, Vol. 93, No. 1, pp. 265-283.

68 ORYUNA – The Organisation of Yugoslav Nationalists existed from 1921 until 1929 as an extreme-right political organization influenced by Fascist ideology. It was the most influential in Dalmatia and Croatia and ideologically fought against Croatian separatism. As such, it was forbidden in the dictatorship. BARTULOVIĆ, Niko. *Od Revolucionarne Omladine do Orjune. Istorijat jugoslovenskog omladinskog pokreta*. Split : Direktorium Orjune, 1925, pp. 104, 106, 108; GLIGORIJEVIĆ, Branislav. Organizacija jugoslovenskih nacionalista (Orjuna). In *Istorija XX veka*, 1963, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 330, 353-357. ZBOR – The United Militant Labour Organisation was founded in 1935. It was a pro-fascist party which was supported financially by the Nazis. In elections 1935–1938 they garnered 1 % of total votes. In the period 1941–1944, it was part of the puppet government of Milan Nedić. Ljotić died in an automobile accident in 1945 in Slovenia where he had escaped with a majority of his followers. *Osnovna načela i smernice Jugoslovenskog pokreta “ZBOR” : 1935–1991*, Jugoslovenski narodni pokret “ZBOR”, 1991.

69 NIKOLIĆ, Kosta. *Komunisti u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji. Od socijal-demokratije do staljinizma 1919–1941*. Gornji Milanovac : LIO, 2000, p. 159.

70 BERIC, Nebojša. Stanislav Krakov: jedna biografija. In *Zbornik Matice Srpske za društvene nauke*, 2016, Vol. 157/158, pp. 637-668.

King Alexandre was assassinated in Marseilles. After the assassination, there was speculation that Krakow has provoked Fascists with this article to collude with Ustashi against the Yugoslav King, but those claims were never verified.<sup>71</sup> Another unsubstantiated rumor was that Krakow neglected contact with Fascists when found the link with Nazis. The fact was that he had exclusive rights to write opinion pieces about Germany during the 1930s and that he traveled there frequently where he met some of the most prominent Nazis. In Serbian archives there is no proof that he was on some Nazi favorite list as was claimed by his enemies.

As a cinephile, Krakow worked closely with the most prominent German actors and directors. According to Krakow's daughter, Fritz Lang was a family friend. In the inter-war period he made a few movies but only one has been preserved *For the Fatherland's Glory* a depiction of Serbia's war experience from the outbreak until the end of WWI.<sup>72</sup> Explaining the process of film making, Krakow wrote that he was asked by a film studio to arrange many short original videos they had from the war period. He described that work as "putting together some fragmented mosaic as a putting together memory for all comrades and thousands of combatants alive and dead, known and unknown heroes".<sup>73</sup> Along with those materials, Krakow managed to find original short movies made by French, British, American, German and Austrian war filmmakers. In one film made by a French filmmaker, he had the starring role in the liberation of Veles in Macedonia.<sup>74</sup> The premier of *For the Fatherland's Glory* was held on 2 May 1930. The first version was without sound, though later the movie was upgraded and the film with audio was released to the public in 1938.<sup>75</sup> When WWII broke out, Krakow hid the movie by burying it near the town of Mionica. It was discovered by OZNA (Odjeljenje za zaštitu Naroda, Department for People's Protection) in 1944 after Krakow escaped the country and placed in the collection of forbidden movies where it was forgotten until 1992. In March 1992, Krakow's movie was discovered and presented to the public under the new title *Golgotha of Serbia*. An interesting fact is that the movie was meant to be inspirational and raise people's spirits towards the new war. The Yugoslav Film Archive restored the movie and classified it as a part of national cultural heritage. It is listed as one of the most important documentary movies, registered under number 106.<sup>76</sup> Besides an affection towards cinema, during the inter-war period Krakow was a passionate collector of books (his private library had 10 thousand books), philatelist, numismatic and one of the biggest collectors of Serbian medieval arts.<sup>77</sup>

Though his writing career was short (1919–1931) during that period he published six novels: *Kroz Buru* (Through a Storm, 1921); *Krila* (The Wings, 1922); *Kroz Južnu Srbiju*, (Through Southern Serbia, 1926); *Naše poslednje pobede* (Our last victories, 1928); *Plamen četništva* (The Chetniks Flames, 1930) and *Prestolonaslednik Petar* (Crown Prince Petar, 1933). Besides those six, in emigration he published two more novels, both dedicated to his

71 BERIC, Nebojša. Stopama Stanislava Krakova. In *Bratstvo*, 2017, No. 21, pp. 163-204.

72 KRAKOV-ARSENIJEVIĆ, Milica. Sećanje na oca. In TEŠIĆ, Gojko (ed.) *Život čoveka na Balkanu*. Beograd : Naš dom; L'Age d'Homme, 2009, p. 8.

73 KRAKOV, Stanislav. *Za čast otadžbine (Scenario za film). Požar na Balkanu (Lista natpisa za istorijsko-dokumentarni film)*. Edited by Gojko Tešić. Beograd : Narodna knjiga; Alfa, 2000, pp. 7-9.

74 KRAKOV 1928, p. 29-37.

75 KRAKOV, Stanislav. U Beogradu se izrađuje veliki film "Za čast otadžbine", koji će najbolje izraziti naše napore i borbu za slobodu. In *Vreme*, No. 2887, 6 – 9 January 1930, p. 5; KRAKOV 2000, pp. 85-88.

76 <https://www.blic.rs/kultura/vesti/zabranjivani-i-skrivani-film-golgota-srbije-stanislava-krakova-u-petak-u-san/hg2vem2> [last viewed on 14 June 2021]

77 KRAKOV-ARSENIJEVIĆ, 2009, p. 8.

uncle Milan Nedić and his own role in occupied Serbia 1941–1944: *General Milan Nedić, I – II* (1963, 1968).<sup>78</sup> In emigration he had the intention to publish his memoirs but died before finishing the manuscript. His daughter, Milica Arsenijević Krakow, gathered his notes and with Gojko Tešić published the memoirs in 1997 under the title *Život čoveka na Balkanu* (The Life of a Man in the Balkans). Besides novels, he published mostly short stories in various literary magazines and daily papers. His universal inspiration was WWI, so most of his works had a historical connection with personal experience. To the Rijeka episode he dedicated the novel *Our Last Victories*, the short story *Pobednik* (Victor) and part of the memoirs (1997). Despite the fact that Krakow's writing career was brief, nowadays he is considered one of the most important Yugoslav representatives of Expressionism. His writing style has been described as “modern, vanguard and in accordance with modern tendency in European prose”.<sup>79</sup>

The outbreak of a new war in 1941 turned Krakow's life upside-down. Overnight the country he had fought for and believed in disappeared. Young King Peter II and the government left the country after he signed a letter of capitulation. Nonetheless, Krakow stayed in the country and stood by his uncle's side. When Milan Nedeć was assigned as Serbia's governor under Nazi occupation, Krakow was in charge of public relations. He was editor of propaganda newspapers *Novo Vreme*, *Obnova*, *Tribina* etc., though he was not satisfied with the role he played. After the war, he wrote that he did not have any choice but to act according to the circumstances. He was arrested five times by the Gestapo under the accusation being Jew<sup>80</sup> and every time he was saved from prison by his uncle and friend Djordje Roš, the general consul of Norway. When Nedić's regime collapsed in autumn 1944, he managed to escape the country with his wife and daughter and for the next two decades, went into hiding in Austria, Switzerland and France under a false name and nationality. In his absence, he was sentenced to death three times while all his properties, including a collection of antiquities, were confiscated by new Communist authorities. According to Krakow's daughter, the biggest unfulfilled wish of her father was to return and die in Serbia. He never stopped moaning over Yugoslavia's unfortunate fate and strongly believed that the state he bled for had been destroyed due to wishes of western powers.<sup>81</sup>

The place of Stanislaw Krakow in contemporary history and collective memory is still ambiguous. Some researchers believe that he was a hero of WWI who turned into a traitor and quisling in WWII. Others think that he was unjustly stigmatized by Communists and that they are responsible for such a negative image of him.<sup>82</sup> He personally considered himself

78 KRAKOV, Stanislav. *General Milan Nedić. Na oštrici noža (1)*. München : Iskra, 1963, p. 318; KRAKOV, Stanislav. *General Milan Nedić. Prepuna čaša čemera (2)*. München : Iskra, 1968, p. 497.

79 KRAKOV, Stanislav. *Pobednik*. In *Radikal*, No. I/38, 27 November 1921, pp. 2-3.

80 The accusation of Jewish heritage was launched by Stjepan Radić, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party in 1926. From the first moment of their interaction in Zagreb in 1919, Krakow was described by Radić as a “semi-blind, and always dissatisfied rebel”. They were opponents until Radić's death in 1928. Krakow claimed that he was not a Jew and that his father was a Catholic converted into Protestantism in order to be eligible for a second marriage with his mother. He had a brother from father's side living in France with whom he kept contact. In the interwar period, Krakow travelled several times to Poland and researched his family lineage. Today in his fund stored in Archive Yugoslavia, there are a few documents written in Polish which indicate the Jewish origin of the Krakow family. AJ, Fond Stanislava Krakova, No. 102; KRAKOV 2009, p. 295.

81 KRAKOV-ARSENJEVIĆ 2009, p. 7.

82 Half a century after death Krakow continues to intrigues contemporary writers, he appeared as character and inspiration in two recent novels *Pustolovine Bačkog Opsenara* (The Adventures of the Bačka's Illusionist) and *Veliki*

misunderstood: “a travelling disaster, a lost man from the lost generation, just one of many unfortunate heroes from the 25<sup>th</sup> hour.” Stanislaw Krakow died on 15 December 1968 in Saint-Julien-en-Genevois, on the border of Switzerland and France.<sup>83</sup>

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*juriš* (The Big Rush): DEMIĆ, Mirko. *Pustolovine Bačkog Opsenara*. Beograd : Dereta, 2018, p. 228; VLADUŠIĆ, Slobodan. *Veliki Juriš*. Beograd : Laguna, 2018, p. 481.

83 KRAKOV, Stanislaw. Uvodna reč, u Parizu, 1968. godine. In *Život čoveka na Balkanu*, 2009, pp. 11-13; KRAKOV-ARSENJEVIĆ 2009, p. 9.

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# Hungarian POWs in Italy and Their Future Prospects After WWI

Balázs Juhász

## Abstract

JUHÁSZ, Balázs. Hungarian POWs in Italy and Their Future Prospects After WWI.

For many Hungarian soldiers in Italy, 3 and 4 November 1918 meant not the armistice and a return home, but the beginning of a prolonged stay in one of the Italian prison camps. It is widely known why these soldiers fell into captivity, but their prospects of returning home are still somewhat unclear. The topic is particularly interesting since some of the Hungarian soldiers were to return to a different country from the one they left given that from 1918–1919 onward, their native land now belonged to one of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The issue of ethnicity was entwined with various political and ideological concerns in regard to which ethnic groups returned home first and for what reasons. In fact, there were some attempts made by Hungarian counter-revolutionary groups in Vienna, Arad and later in Szeged, to demand the release of Hungarian POWs so they could be enlisted in a war against the Hungarian Republic of Councils. The situation in Italy should not be overlooked as well, given that prisoners were generally an important labour force for them. We must mention also the Paris Peace Conference which addressed the future of these POWs. In view of the abovementioned, the topic cannot be viewed only from the Italian or Hungarian perspective. This study deals with the various aspects of Hungarian POWs' returning home after the Armistice of Villa Giusti.

**Keywords:** Italy, Hungary, POWs, escape, bolshevism, intervention, WWI

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In November 1918, after the end of the First World War, several hundred thousand prisoners of war were waiting in Italy to return to their home countries. Most came from the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which had been dissolved during their absence. Many became prisoners on the last day of the war due to some discrepancies in the interpretation of the armistice, and a large amount did not realize that their status as prisoners of war may cause their return home to be delayed for up to one and half years. During this time, the hinterland was undergoing continuous change. The successor countries of the monarchy fought for territories and resources, a fact that had become obvious not only for the participants of the Paris Peace Conference, but also for the various affected populaces given that several armed incidents – even a prolonged war in Hungary – caused unrest in the civil sphere. The situation was further aggravated by the spread of Bolshevik ideology towards the West, which resulted in the establishment of a few Republics of Councils in several Central European countries. Of these, the Hungarian Republic of Councils is special, among other reasons, because ideological tensions were mixed with a fundamentally nationalist war fought for territorial integrity.

The POWs had access to assorted press reports and therefore had the opportunity to follow events in their home countries. Of course this led to many prisoners moving to take action as the hopelessness they faced in captivity was further aggravated by an



uncertainty surrounding the fate of their relatives at home. It is not possible to characterize all the opinions of prisoners as no survey was taken at the end of the war and the scarcity of preserved documents does not allow for research in this domain. There are, however, enough resources that allow for the sketching of some trends. These are interesting not only because they show the behaviour model of a well-defined group in a crisis situation created by wartime captivity, but also because large-scale politics and diplomacy attempted to exploit their endeavors. Thus, impetus coming from the bottom and from the top met at certain points. In this context, this study examines the opportunities for repatriation of the Hungarian prisoners of war and also presents the reactions of large-scale politics to the requests made by prisoners of war to return home.<sup>1</sup>

Sergeant Leonhard Scuber, Sergeant Bernát Lindner, Sergeant Jozef Singer, Commander Pál Röhling and Ensign Mihály László wrote a farewell letter before they fled the Italian labour corps in late May 1919. In it, they justified their decision by claiming that they could not remain passive while the spreading of Bolshevism and the Romanian attack<sup>2</sup> threatened their home country. They decided to flee for no other reason than to save Hungary and according to surviving documents, the fugitives were never captured. This case may be considered a curiosity as there were plenty of instances when prisoners of war escaped but it seems that none of them left such ideologically justified farewell letters. Today, the letter can be found in the Historical Archive of the Italian Army Staff in Rome.<sup>3</sup> It was handwritten in German in pencil on the back of a table containing a list of prisoners of war, which was also in German. The document was filed with an accompanying letter numbered 623 Pers, dated 31 May 1919, written by Colonel de'Medici, Chief of Staff of the Hinterland Commissariat, along with an Italian translation of the farewell letter written in pen and submitted to the High Command's Office of Mobilisation and Organization. The accompanying letter states that the fugitives fled from Labour Corps no. 609. The entire batch of documents was forwarded on 7 June 1919 by Brigadier General Ago, Head of the High Command's Office of Mobilisation and Organization, with an accompanying letter to the secretary where the matter was probably closed.

According to a document dated 10 August 1918, the 609<sup>th</sup> Prisoner of War Labour Corps was subordinated to the Hinterland Commissariat.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of 1919, the Labour Corps consisted of 353 Hungarian prisoners of war stationed and working in the town of Ghertele and gathering military materials under the direction of the Seven Towns Plateau and the Grappa County Recycling Office. According to a side-note, collecting military items was the only task the prisoners were given for the entire duration of their stay.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 For the collapse of Hungary after the First World War, see ORMOS, Mária. *From Padua to the Trianon, 1918–1920*. Budapest : Akadémiai, 1990; For Hungarian prisoners of war in Italy see: RESIDORI, Sonia. *Nessuno è rimasto ozioso*. Milano : FrancoAngeli, 2019; BAJA, Benedek – PILCH, Jenő – LUKINICH, Imre – ZILAHY, Lajos (eds.) *Hadifogoly magyarok története*. Vol. I – II. Budapest : Athenaeum, 1930.
  - 2 Almost immediately after the signing of the Armistice of Belgrade, Romanian forces advanced on the territory of the Hungarian state, occupying territories up to the line of the river Tisza. The Romanian forces then joined the Entente forces attacking the Hungarian Republic of Councils, their advance halted only at the western border of Hungary. We do not know exactly what the fugitives meant by the “Romanian attack”. They could have been referring to the occupation of Transylvania, but also the attack on the Republic of Councils.
  - 3 Archivio Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (AUSSME), Rome, Fond F-11, bundle No 129, File no. 5.
  - 4 AUSSME, Rome, Fond F-11, bundle No 126, 1. Lieutenant Colonel Barbasetti to the Mobilisation and Organisation Office of the High Command. 10 August 1918, ser. n. 92532.
  - 5 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 2. Situazione P[rigionieri di]. G[guerra]. comunque dipendenti Armate e G[randi]. U[nità]. divisi per nazionalità – località lavoro. N° distintivo delle compagnie L[avoro]. P[rigionieri]. e Centurie. [1919]. Without any signature, serial number or date.

Given that the number of POWs in labour corps generally declined over time, the statement above was probably made at the beginning of the year. By 1 May 1919, the labour corps consisted of only 258 Hungarian soldiers who collected military materials under the supervision of the Lusiana Route Commandership by order of the Breganze Recycling Office.<sup>6</sup> The escape probably took place from this area. The Labour Corps was dissolved on 16 October 1919 at the site established in Val di Non.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, it was not possible to find out which camps the prisoners had come from, at what date they had been captured or when they were able to return home after the Labour Corps was dissolved. There is no record of the commanders either, all we know is that he was apparently well-liked by the writers of the letter. On the other hand, the mandate of the Labour Corps is stated in a surviving document. On 11 November 1918, Luigi Meschinelli, president of the Vicenza County Department of Agriculture, requested 9 000 POWs from the Ministry of War to be distributed as follows:

- 4 000 prisoners to the Seven Towns Plateau, (Altopiano dei Sette Comuni)
- 1000 – 2 000 to the western slope of Monte Grappa
- 1 000 to Brenta Valley
- 500 to the Rio Freddo and Posina valleys
- 500 to the Tonezza Plateau
- 500 to the Astico Valley
- 500 to the Leogra Valley and Novegno

The prisoners of war were responsible for filling war trenches, collecting scrap metal and explosives and preparing the land for agricultural production. If all of these could not be carried out quickly enough, the applicant considered that the land should at least be brought to a condition suitable for grazing. The Ministry of War most likely provided only 4 000 prisoners of war to work on the Seven Towns Plateau and on 8 January 1919, the department protested about the withdrawal of said workforce while urging for 9 000 labourers in total to be allocated.<sup>8</sup> Based on the description of activities performed by the 609<sup>th</sup> Prisoner of War Labour Corps, the fugitives had also been involved in restoration work.

According to the farewell letter, the detainees refrained from escaping for a long time out of respect for their commander until the uncertainty of their repatriation made them convinced that it was time to act. Commanders were indeed punished for both successful and unsuccessful escapes.<sup>9</sup> The process of returning home may have seemed truly unpredictable for the average prisoner of war. In April and May 1919, repatriation started<sup>10</sup>, but during the first period it only applied to those who were unfit for work:

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- 6 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 2. Intendant Service: Specchio indicante i reparti lavorativi di guerra, Compagnie e Centurie L. P. comunque presenti nel territorio di propria giurisdizione alla data 1 Maggio 1919. Without any serial number.
- 7 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 2. Command of the territorial army corps of Verona: Elenco dei servizi e stabilimenti dipendenti nella seconda quindicina di ottobre 1919. Verona, 31 October 1919, serial number 8832R.S.M.
- 8 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 128, 3. Luigi Meschinelli to the Ministry of War, 11 November 1918, serial number 612; AUSSME, f. F-11, 128, 3. Luigi Meschinelli to the Mobilisation and Organisation Office of the High Command. 8 January 1919, serial number 30.
- 9 See SZÖLLÖSY, Aladár. *Szerb hadifogság. Szerbia, Albánia, Itália 1914–1918. Szöllösy Aladár naplója*. [Budapest], 1925. pp. 89-90.
- 10 More specifically: it resumed, as the repatriation of persons unfit for work may be perceived as a continuation of the exchange of severely ill patients that began during the war. See also KEGLOVICH, Rita. Lo scambio dei prigionieri tra Italia e Ungheria durante e dopo la Prima guerra mondiale. In *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi Nuova Serie*, 2016, Vol. 30, No 15. pp. 88-100.

- Invalids who needed no care at all
- Invalids and sick POWs who were able to be transported according to the general prescriptions of the exchange of the “grand blesses”
- Any sick or invalid POW whose affliction had lasted for at least two months<sup>11</sup>
- All invalid POWs in hospitals were to be sent home without additional medical control
- Persons held in prison camps but fulfilled the criteria of the exchange of “grand blesses” had to go to Calci first for an official medical examination.<sup>12</sup>

The following is an account of prisoners of war who died or were sent home due to their inability to work. The list is broken down by major administrative units and by nationality:<sup>13</sup>

Tab. 1. An account of prisoners of war who died or were sent home due to their inability to work.

	Italian front		Albanian front		Macedonian front	
	dead	taken home	dead	taken home	dead	taken home
Austrians	55	247	118	1	-	-
Hungarians	25	1 105	22	-	-	-
Polish	1	44	4	-	-	-
Italians	-	62	-	-	-	-
Ruthenians	25	140	11	-	-	-
Yugoslavs	33	813	12	-	-	-
Romanians	3	18	1	-	-	-
Czechoslovaks	-	83	9	-	-	-
Ukrainians	3	5	5	-	-	-
Russians	-	4	-	-	-	-
Bulgarians	-	-	-	-	8	158
Total	145	2 521	182	1	8	158

As it may be seen, quite a number of sick Hungarian prisoners of war were able to return home at this time. Nevertheless, comparing the data in the account to the total number of prisoners shows that the amount repatriated at this time was rather insignificant. This fact is also shown by an account dated 1 May 1919, according to which the number of prisoners in the war zone<sup>14</sup>, and generally under control of the Italian authorities, were distributed by nationality as follows:<sup>15</sup>

11 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 5. POW Office to the High Command, 12 March 1919, serial number 5757.

12 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 5. Circular telegram of Caviglia. 13 March 1919, serial number 52222/9-A. On Calci see: GIOLI, Antonella (ed.) *La Certosa di Calci nella Grande Guerra. Riuso e tutela tra Pisa e l'Italia*. Florence : Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2015.

13 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 126, 5. Brigadier Ago to the Army Staff, 28 July 1919, serial number 92403; The chart lists “normal” prisoners of war, members of national legions were treated separately. It is important to clarify this detail since a significant number of Czechoslovak soldiers, volunteers among the Czechoslovak POWs, were sent home throughout the spring.

14 Following the Caporetto breakthrough, the war zone was extended to a significant part of Northern Italy and included, for example, the Messina Strait in addition to the Adriatic coast. The war zone also included an area in the Balkans controlled by Italian soldiers. PROCACCI, Giovanna. *La società come una caserma. La svolta repressiva degli anni di guerra*. In BIANCHI, Bruna (ed.) *La violenza contro la popolazione civile durante la Grande guerra. Deportati, profughi, internati*. Milano : Unicopli, 2006, p. 293.

15 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 132, 1. Colonel Carletti to the POWs Office of the Army Staff, 11 May 1919, serial number 16120.

Tab. 2. An account dated 1 May 1919, according to which the number of prisoners in the war zone, and generally under control of the Italian authorities, were distributed by nationality as follows.

	Italian Hinterland			War zone			Total
	POW camps and hospitals	National legions	Total	Italy	Balkan	Total	
Italians	838	-	838	-	122	122	960
Austrians	52 750	-	52 750	37 996	7 073	45 069	97 819
Hungarians	50 528	-	50 528	27 318	4 026	31 344	81 872
Czechoslovaks	3832	37 617	41 449	-	139	139	41 588
Romanians	5 754	17 873	23 627	-	11	11	23 638
Yugoslavs	21 440	-	21 440	18 972	946	1 918	41 358
Polish	3889	8 659	12 558	-	400	400	12 958
Ruthenians	25 123	-	25 123	11 337	2 482	13 819	38 942
Others	15 255	-	15 255	485	22	507	15 762
Total	179 419	64 149	243 568	96 108	15 221	111 329	354 897

It must be mentioned that the Italian authorities had difficulties creating the headings of nationality records on the basis of the successor states. The account above is fairly well-written, but in other copies we find separate categories for people of Carnian and Tyrolean nationality, also the Austrian-German rubric and so on. It is more important that by the time of the escape, the original number of nearly 350 thousand prisoners of war had been reduced by only about 0.85 %. This extremely insignificant repatriation rate caused an understandable sense of insecurity among the captives, which was exacerbated by news arriving from their home country given that the prisoners of war had access to newspapers and could learn about all important details published in the Italian and even foreign press. The officers were exempt from work so they had even more time to process the news.<sup>16</sup> The aforementioned letter also attests to the fact that some privates took an interest in politics as well. It is interesting to note the way the escaped members of the homogeneous Hungarian labour force responded to the Romanian advance; they were not the only ones who had nationalist sentiments intensified as a result of their experiences during the war.

There are no surviving records that document all of the escapes, so no summaries of failed attempts were compiled either. However, we do know that the number of successful escapes soared in 1919 to an extent that caused concern among the Italian authorities, so much that they started to keep accounts. The list below contains data for prisoners of war who were fugitives for the six months before the end of June 1919:<sup>17</sup>

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- 16 Some prisoners of war held on Asinara Island found time to document the history of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, mainly by translating Italian and French articles. KISS, Antal. *Adalékok a magyarországi bolsevizmus történetéhez. Összegyűjtve az asinárai olasz hadifogságban, olasz és francia lapok híradásai nyomán*. Budapest : Páros Print, 2009, pp. 23-176; The same officer also created excerpts of articles published in the journals *Corriere della Sera*; *Giornale d'Italia*; *Il Messaggero*; *Oberrheinische Nachrichten*; *Le Petit Parisien*; *Il Tempo*; *Temps*; *La Tribuna*.
- 17 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 129, 5. Fugitive POWs for six months and still in hiding, 26 June 1919, serial number 91720, forwarded by the telegraph of Pietro Badoglio of 22 July 1919, serial number 92314R.S.

Tab. 3. Prisoners of war who were fugitives for the six months before the end of June 1919.

Italian Hinterland and War Zone 26 <sup>th</sup> June 1919	Dalmatians	Austrians	Yugoslavs	Ruthenians	Hungarians	Ukrainians	Czechoslovaks
1st Army		138	53	24	82		
3rd Army	65	18	31		6		
4th Army		24	17	42	13		
8th Army		27	8		23	2	
Navy Command of Venice		23	31				
Intendant Service		72	31	23	51		
Air Force High Command					1		
Engineer High Command		67	86	10	61	11	12
Albanian Army Command		4	4	1	1		1
Eastern Expeditionary Corps							
Total	65	373	261	100	238	13	13

Tab. 3 Continued.

Italian Hinterland and War Zone 26 <sup>th</sup> June 1919	Polish	Serbs	Romanians	Bulgarians	Germans	Slovenes	Total
1st Army							297
3rd Army		2			10		132
4th Army							96
8th Army	3					1	64
Navy Command of Venice							54
Intendant Service	3		1				181
Air Force High Command							1
Engineer High Command	4	1					252
Albanian Army Command		4	1				16
Eastern Expeditionary Corps				204	1		205
Total	10	7	2	204	11	1	1 298

When we organize the numbers above by countries existing between the two world wars, in descending order, the data looks as follows:

Tab. 4. Prisoners of war by countries existing between the two world wars, in descending order.

Austrians	Yugoslavs	Hungarians	Bulgarians	Ukrainians	Czechoslovaks	Germans	Polish	Romanians
373	334	238	204	113	13	11	10	2

Instead of concentrating them in labour corps, the Italian government typically placed Polish, Romanian and Czechoslovak prisoners of war in legions formed on the basis of nationality. Escape from these legions was indeed rather difficult, and in the case of these nationalities, it is understandable why the number of successful escapes was so low. There were few German prisoners of war in the Italian camps, but all other nationalities were represented in high numbers which means that escape was a common phenomenon in every group. In light of this, we can see it was not only the Hungarian prisoners of war who wanted to return home as soon as possible. Typically, escape was easier for prisoners who were assigned to labour corps and placed into less strictly guarded prison camps.

The necessity to step up and fight against Bolshevism also prompted some Hungarian officers to apply for permission to return home and be admitted into an expeditionary army

with the sole purpose of suppressing the Hungarian Republic of Councils. For example, on 4 April 1919, Lieutenants Dr. Miklós Szemes and Dr. Viktor Kálnoky filed a petition with the Italian Ministry of War on behalf of the Hungarian POWs in San Benigno. The petition was answered ten days later: “Italy does not wish to interfere in Hungary’s affairs. If we see the need for this in the future, we will utilize all necessary tools.”<sup>18</sup> Nine Hungarian prisoners of war held in Sandhill Park, England, also requested the establishment of an expeditionary army to crush the Hungarian Republic of Councils and even submitted a request for arms, ammunition and some financial support. They did not receive an answer, even though they had the opportunity to speak to a senior general of the British Army about their aspirations.<sup>19</sup> These efforts also fell in line with the wishes of certain Hungarian political circles.

Hungarians had asked the Entente forces for military intervention even before the Hungarian Republic of Councils was established. For example, György Szmrecsányi, the former head of the County of Pozsony, (Bratislava), first asked for the help of the Entente to suppress the People’s Republic led by Károlyi Mihály, and later to suppress the Hungarian Republic of Councils.<sup>20</sup> These petitions were repeatedly ignored by Italian authorities, particularly after Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando requested the Italian press to emphasize the “nationalistic” reasons behind the events in Hungary.<sup>21</sup> Orlando did not sympathize with Bolshevism at all. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs believed, however, that the Hungarian Republic of Councils might inadvertently create an opportunity for Italy to gain Hungary as an ally after the formerly pro-French country was let down by France. This thinking seemed perfectly logical within the context of the Italian-French rivalry to fill the power and economic vacuum in Central Europe.

Of course, Italian foreign policy advisors also sought contact with opponents of the Hungarian Republic of Councils but their endeavours were too late. By May 1919, the leading figures had come under French influence<sup>22</sup> and Italy had no choice but to seek cooperation with the Hungarian Republic of Councils.

Ironically, just like the Károlyi governments had done previously on several occasions, the Hungarian Republic of Councils also requested the release of Hungarian prisoners of war.<sup>23</sup> As they were considered an important labour force, the Italian government could not be easily convinced to release the labourers involved in production, or at least in

18 “Italia non puo intrometterse [Sic!] nelle cose dell’Ungheria” Olaszország nem kíván beleavatkozni Magyarország belügyeibe. Magyar hadifogoly-tisztek akciója a kommün letörésére 1919. április 4-én, (Italy does not want to interfere in Hungary’s internal affairs. Action on Hungarian prisoners of war on 4 April 1919 to break the commune). In *Eger Gyöngyösi Újság*, 4 February 1934, p. 2.

19 UDVARY, Jenő. Angol fogságban (Captivity in Britain). In *Magyar Katonai Közlöny*, 1921, Vol. 9, No. 7–8, p. 500.

20 MOSCA, Rodolfo (ed.) *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani Sesta Serie 1918–1922*. Vol. I. Rome : Libreria dello Stato, 1956, No. 884, pp. 471–472; GRISPO, Renato (ed.) *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani Sesta Serie 1918–1922*. Vol. III. Rome : Libreria dello Stato, 2007, No. 10, p. 9.

21 MOSCA Rodolfo (ed.) *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani Sesta Serie 1918–1922*. Vol. II. Rome : Libreria dello Stato, 1980, No. 937, p. 701.

22 GRISPO 2007, No. 649, pp. 663–666.

23 Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE), Rome, fond: CP, 7. Sonnino to Orlando and Diaz, Paris, 26 February 1919, serial number 480; Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives) (MNL OL), Budapest, fond K73, Hadifogoly osztály, bundle No 18/79. The Hungarian People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to the Spanish Consul in Budapest, Budapest, 17 April 1919, serial number 2005; MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 4/28, The Hungarian People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to Bíró Samu, president of the Alliance of the relatives of the POWs in Italy, Budapest, 20 May 1919, serial number 50188.

the restoration of war damage.<sup>24</sup> The Italian Prime Minister even opposed the establishment of a committee meant to examine the issue of repatriation at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>25</sup>

The establishment of an anti-Bolshevik expeditionary army was also hindered by the fact that some prisoners of war actually supported the Hungarian Republic of Councils. This fact is supported, for example, in Jenő Udvary's memoirs. According to the writer, "the 'Hungarian' officers predominantly declared the area around Dob Street, [part of the Jewish quarter in Budapest] as their narrower homeland".<sup>26</sup> That is, he essentially labeled these officers Jews. Udvary wrote his memoirs after returning home, in the Horthy era when the narrative of "Jews are to be blamed for the Republic of Councils" was already widespread. In this light, it is not clear whether Udvary was expressing his own beliefs or was influenced by the spirit of the times. In our case, however, his reasons for supporting the Hungarian Republic of Councils are only a matter of details, the bottom line is that some people agreed with the regime's objectives.

There was a plan, though, based on the return of Hungarian prisoners of war from Italy which came to be considered by the Italian authorities. Gyula Gömbös, the next prime minister of Hungary, who then operated under the aegis of the Hungarian Anti-Bolshevik Committee, (ABC), in Vienna, developed a plan at the end of March 1919 in which he:

- requested recognition of the Hungarian Anti-Bolshevik Committee by the Entente, as well as the authorization of its resettlement from Vienna to Darda.
- asked the Entente to allow a Hungarian committee to go to Italy and help organize and repatriate the prisoners of war.
- asked the Entente to provide money and military material to equip two divisions, six armored trains and a fleet of ground and air force vehicles.
- requested Italy to contribute to the arming of Hungarian prisoners of war and to support the anti-Bolshevik intervention with Italian troops and armored trains along the Graz-Fehring line.

One of the plan's many weaknesses was that Gömbös wanted mobilization to take place in Čakovec, Pécs and Sombor. As some of these towns were situated in the territory of Yugoslavia, the Italian authorities could not accept the proposal. In addition, Gömbös could offer nothing to compensate for the assistance; he had no decisive political influence, so any promise of an Italian-friendly foreign policy could be considered nothing more than an unsecured statement. Also, even after the robbery of the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna, the ABC could not amass enough money to equip an entire army.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is not

24 In mid-October 1918, the Ministry of Agriculture even suggested that due to the chronic shortage of labour in undeveloped lands, the available prisoners of war would not be enough and they would have to ask the Allies to provide an additional 100 thousand prisoners. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Rome, fond PCM Prima Guerra Mondiale, 100. Giovanni Battista Miliani to Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Rome, 15 October 1918, serial number 9652; Orlando, however, immediately rejected the proposal for strategic reasons. ACS, f. PCM Prima Guerra Mondiale, bundle No 100. V. E. Orlando to G. B. Miliani, Rome, 21 October 1918, serial number 3228.

25 ACS, fond Carte Orlando, bundle No 79, 1618, 5. Orlando to Petrozziello, Paris, 24 May 1919 1:30, without any serial number.

26 UDVARY 1921, p. 500.

27 GÁBOR SÁNDORNÉ. Az 1919-es bécsi magyar ellenforradalmi emigrációról (On the Hungarian counter-revolutionary migration in Vienna in 1919). In *Párttörténeti Közlemények*, 1964, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 114-155.

surprising that after an exchange of letters in which France prohibited the organization of a powerful Hungarian army, the Italians decided to close the matter.<sup>28</sup>

In mid-July, István Bethlen, the head of the ABC and the next prime minister of Hungary, repeated his request for a counter-government envoy to visit prisoners of war in Italy as well as the repatriation of the prisoners. On 21 July 1919, Luigi Vannutelli Rey, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, jotted the following hand-written note on a document discussing Bethlen's application: "The Min[istry] would support this thing in principle, but the most appropriate [implementation] modalities still need to be specified." There is a second note underneath in someone else's handwriting, also in black pencil, which states: "Vannutelli [Rey] has no objection from a political point of view – [Arturo] Ricci-Busatti – no legal difficulty."<sup>29</sup>

The Italian authorities issued an authorization in which they gave consent to mass repatriation, although not necessarily to Gömbös's plan as well. It cannot be excluded with certainty, however, that the Italian authorities specifically intended to revive the plan for the expeditionary army on the basis of family memory. The Italians even asked Lieutenant Rezső Schamschula, the highest-ranking Hungarian POW in Italian hands, to accept command of a unit organized from prisoners of war. Schamschula refused, saying that he would not lead a war against his own country.<sup>30</sup> The proposal could not have been made in April 1919, since at that time everyone on the Italian side opposed Gömbös's suggestion. Therefore, the most likely possibility is that the sudden reconsideration of the idea happened at the end of July of the same year.

This attempt for intervention, otherwise entirely unviable, can only be explained by the desperate efforts of Italian authorities to improve their relationship with the counter-government of Szeged during the last days of the Hungarian Republic of Councils, when only the date but not the fall itself, was still uncertain. By that time, Italian influence in the Danube basin had diminished considerably after the Italian military mission in Czechoslovakia was terminated at the end of May 1919. Under these circumstances, it was important to keep Hungary in the Italian sphere of interest considering that Italy held positions only in Romania at this time. It is certain that this insignificant attempt failed to improve the relationship between the Szeged counter-government and the authorities in Rome.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Romanian army proved sufficient to overthrow the Hungarian Republic of Councils and by the end of August 1919, the mass repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war began.<sup>32</sup>

28 ASDMAE, f. CP, bundle No 9, 18. Macchioro Vivalba to Sonnino, Vienna, 9 April 1919, arrived on 15 April, serial number 01436/422; ASDMAE, f. CP, bundle No 9, 18. De Martino to Macchioro Vivalba, Paris, 4 May 1919, serial number 01456.

29 ASDMAE, f. CP, bundle No 23, 3. Borghese to Vannutelli, 19 July 1919 14:10, arrived on 20 July 9:00, serial number 1498.

30 KAJON, Árpád – SUSLIK, Ádám. *A Monarchia katonája. Schamschula Rezső tábornok élete* (A soldier of the Monarchy. The life of Rezső Schamschula). Budapest : Magyar Napló, 2019, p. 337.

31 This culminated in open hostility by mid-August 1919. ASDMAE, f. CP, bundle No 7. Borghese to Vannutelli Rey, Vienna, 13 August 1919 20:30, arrived on 14 August 10:00, serial number 2586/1790.

32 MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No. 4/28. Takács-Tolvay to the POWs Office of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vienna, 19 September 1919, serial number 1534/hdf; By this time, repatriation of the "oppressed" nationalities had been largely completed but persons returning to the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia were repatriated only after most of the Hungarian and the German-speaking prisoners had already gone home. TORTATO, Alessandro. *La prigionia di guerra in Italia 1915-1919*. Milano : Mursia, 2004, pp. 145-161.



In an ironic twist of fate, an event took place on the way home that would have been almost unimaginable in the prison camp: the prisoners of war were “endangered” by left-wing ideas. Mimicking similar attempts by the Károlyi and Berinkey governments, the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Republic of Councils wanted to send a Red Cross delegation to visit Hungarian prisoners of war in Italy but the Italian authorities never authorized any visits.<sup>33</sup> The journey home of the prisoners, however, was led through Austria and here, according to the memoirs of a Hungarian officer who had received the first group of prisoners of war at Villach, Captain Milán Szekulits<sup>34</sup>:

- The state and spirit of the returnees was good. They were enjoying a good order and trusted the officers. The prisoners of war manifested surprisingly good political judgment and the officer did not find any Bolshevik or communist elements in the first shipment, 44 persons.

- On the other hand, the Socialists and Communists employed strong propaganda among the Austrians. The Austrian headquarters in Villach opposed the matter but could not take effective action against the propaganda. In Hungary, Szekulits suggested that the returnees should be quarantined, citing a threat of contagion or lice infestation, and he also suggested submitting the former prisoners of war to counter-propaganda, which he thought should begin while they were still in Italy.<sup>35</sup>

The Austrian left-wing agitation was intended to prevent returnees from entering the National Army, but its effectiveness was greatly overestimated by some Hungarian soldiers.<sup>36</sup> In light of past experience, the Hungarian authorities finally decided not to ask for permission to deploy a preventive Italian agitation committee and the Hungarian officers managed to curb the cross-border agitation on their own. The transfer took only about three hours, so the disturbance was not likely to cause significant damages.<sup>37</sup>

The Italian authorities dealt with repatriation in a rather improvisational way, proven among other ways by the fact that they only requested a map showing the new borders from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in mid-September, almost one month after the repatriation had been begun.<sup>38</sup> This delay is inexplicable considering that until 20 March 1919, military authorities had requested in advance a list of those prisoners of war from Transylvania that wished to return to their homeland in spite of knowing that Transylvania was no longer under Hungarian rule. Therefore, it is undoubtable that the complex ethnic composition of the area and the shifting of borders was known to the Department of War prisoners of the Ministry of War.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the omission occurred and as a result in September 1919, the Hungarian authorities received some POWs whose homeland was

33 See also MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 5/29. The Direction of the Red Cross to the Hungarian People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 3 May 1919, serial number 477.

34 Earlier he was also a POW in Forte Procolo (Verona), he returned to Hungary in 24 July 1919. ASDMAE, f. GPO 1915–1918, bundle No 381. Lieutenant Colonel Giovanni Zanghieri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 26 August 1919, serial number 39885.

35 MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 14/55. Captain Milán Szekulits to Lieutenant Colonel István Pawlas, Warmbad-Villach, 14 August 1919, serial number 50870.

36 Colonel Kamilló Kárpáthy, head of the Ministry of War, Group I, wanted to raise the issue to the ceasefire Entente missions as well. MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 14/55. Colonel Kamilló Kárpáthy to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Budapest, 25 October 1919, serial number 17166/el.n./.-1919.

37 MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 14/55. Minister Haller to József Somsich, Budapest, 10 October 1919, serial number 35/Kat.eln; and the answer dated 17 October 1919.

38 ASDMAE, f. CP, 23, 3. Galli to Albricci, Paris, 28 September 1919, serial number 03433.

39 AUSSME, f. F-11, 126, 5. POW Office to the High Command, 12 March 1919, serial number 5757.

on the other side of the new Trianon border. The relationship between the authorities and these returnees was rather ambivalent. After leaving Villach, the prisoners had to be transported to the camps of Zalaegerszeg and Csót, where they were divided into “reliable” and “unreliable” groups. The “reliable” prisoners from Szeged, Transdanubia and the Slovak highland — still unoccupied at that time — were classified as “ready to be drafted” after two months of rest. Persons from occupied territories, on the other hand, could only be enrolled on a voluntary basis. The “unreliable” ones from Szeged, Transdanubia and “the unoccupied Slovak highland” were retained in the camps of Zalaegerszeg and Csót, while the National Army handed over returnees from the rest of the country to the occupying army.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, there were some prisoners of war who stayed in Italy but only a handful of such cases are known. The decision to remain was usually due to a lack of relatives in Hungary<sup>41</sup> or starting a family in Italy.<sup>42</sup> One exceptional case among the prisoners remaining in Italy after World War I is that of former Lieutenant in the Marines Gergely Markó, who became a monk.<sup>43</sup>

The fate of the former POWs who stayed in Italy is unknown at this point, but it is likely that they fared well in their new country. Italian military authorities stipulated that only those prisoners of war whose good military behavior was certified by the military authorities could remain in Italy and any person permitted to stay had to prove within a month that they were living on their own income, otherwise they were expelled immediately. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested a certificate from their original residence stating that the applicants had a clean criminal record prior to the war.<sup>44</sup> The Department of War Prisoners of the Ministry of War published an even stricter order on 3 January 1920 stating that cases pending would continue to be processed according to the previous selection criteria, but no further applications for stay would be accepted. The reason for this decision was that due to the mass discharge of Italian soldiers, even employment of the domestic workforce became difficult and the authorities did not want the release of the prisoners to turn into a competition. At the same time, deserters and all internees who could not return home for legitimate reasons continued to be permitted to emigrate to a third country.<sup>45</sup>

40 MNL OL, f. K73, bundle No 4/28. Miklós Horthy to József Takács-Tolvay, Siófok, 6 September 1919, serial number 1112/III.a.

41 See the case of Béla Román, a Hungarian born in Budapest, who was a prisoner of war in Bitonto. Both his parents had died and he had no other relatives so he opted to acquire Italian citizenship and stay in Italy. ACS, f. Min. Int. Dir. Gen. PS, Profughi e internati di guerra, 1311, Román Béla. POWs Office signed by General Giuseppe Maladra to the Internal Security High Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Rome, 3 May 1919, serial number 12290.

42 See the case of Polish private Michele Kopeling, who fell in love with a local girl during his captivity in Calabria, married her and did not return home. AIELLO, Giovanni. Prigionieri austro-ungarici in Calabria. In LEONCINI, Francesco (ed.) *Il patto di Roma e la legione Ceco-Slovacca*. Vittorio Veneto : Kellermann, 2014, p. 170; It is an interesting detail that this latter possibility had already been considered before; see Giovanni Verga's novel *Sulle lagune*, published in the magazine *La Nuova Europa* in Florence during 1862–1863, which tells the love story of Hungarian officer Stefano de Keller and Giulia, a girl from Venice, while also depicting the Austrian oppression in Veneto and Mazzinian ideals. MADARÁSZ, Imre. Risorgimento italoungherese nel romanzo di Giovanni Verga “Sulle lagune”. In NEMETH PAPO, Gizella – PAPO, Adriano (eds.) *Unità italiana e mondo adriatico-danubiano*. Trieste : Luglio Editore, 2012, pp. 59-64.

43 Hadtörténelmi Levéltár, Budapest, fond I. vh, bundle No 4361. Veterinarian Lieutenant József Kukuljevič: Report on his captivity in Serbian and Italian hands.

44 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 132, 1. Circular letter of Minister of War Albricci, Rome, 10 September 1919, serial number 41888.

45 AUSSME, f. F-11, bundle No 132, 1. Circular letter of Minister of War Albricci. Rome, 3 January 1920, serial number 1077.

It can therefore be seen that some Hungarian prisoners of war who had access to fairly up-to-date information on the changes in Hungary sympathized with the Hungarian Republic of Councils, while others wished to fight against it. Based on escape statistics, there is no doubt that this and similar political or “nationalism” reasons had little effect on the desire of the prisoners of war to leave. In 1919, everyone who was able wanted to go home, and many were not afraid to attempt to flee if they saw no other opportunity.

Several Hungarian administrations also attempted to exploit the case of the prisoners of war for their own purposes, but the interests of the great powers did not allow this intention to materialize. Thus, other than a few exceptional cases, the mass repatriation of Hungarian prisoners of war was not possible until August 1919, and at this time they were faced with the desire for control by the domestic authorities. The post-war transition to peaceful civilian life of soldiers captured on the Italian front was thus considerably delayed, and due to the many conflicting interests, they were only able to return to their former lives and occupations in 1920.

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# Italy's Endeavour to Take Over the Central European Railway Network, 1919–1923

Anne-Sophie Nardelli-Malgrand

## Abstract

NARDELLI-MALGRAND, Anne-Sophie. Italy's Endeavour to Take Over the Central European Railway Network, 1919–1923.

Among the many issues that arose from the breakup of the Habsburg empire, the fate of an empire-wide rail network was one of the most complicated, on both political and economic levels. Italy was especially interested as Rome had previously recovered several railway sections after the war. Beyond that, to take hold of at least part of the rail system of the former empire was a valuable chess piece which could be played later in larger negotiations on the future of Central Europe and could also aid in Italy's desire to take over as the region's great power after Austria. Italy's attempts at controlling the rail lines in Central Europe necessitated a joint effort from all players involved: diplomats, the military and economic operators – especially those coming from Trieste and the “redeemed lands”. With limited finances Italian ambitions partially hindered by France and the successor States, it first set its sights on the Südbahn Gesellschaft, (Southern Austria Railway Company), one of the key Austrian railway companies. The Südbahn Gesellschaft found itself at the centre of a major rivalry where strategic, diplomatic and financial issues were at stake though it can be argued that the Italian railway policy in Central Europe was elaborate, consistent and in line with the general purposes of the country's overall foreign policy. From peace treaties to the Rome agreements on the Südbahn Gesellschaft in March 1923, the railway issue helped to make Italy a major player in the area by enforcing diplomatic leadership, but also exposed its weaknesses and shortcomings in the aftermath of the Great War.

**Keywords:** Franco-Italian rivalry, Italian economic and financial foreign policy, economic recovery of Central Europe, economic cooperation, Central Europe railway network

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When the Habsburg empire collapsed, it left behind one of the largest rail systems in Europe which was divided between great companies whose networks ran from Northern Italy and Tyrol to Budapest, and from Vienna to the Adriatic harbours of Fiume and Trieste. Before the Great War, the railway was a prized tool for growing State power abroad as capital and debt bonds could be taken in the form of foreign railway companies and directly serve the purposes of foreign policy. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Habsburg empire attempted to extend the network towards the Balkans, while Italy tried to surpass Austria-Hungary by constructing a new rail line connecting the Danubian network with the Balkan lines.<sup>1</sup> As far as railway issues were concerned, Italy was not a new-comer in Eastern and Central Europe.

Political changes starting in 1918 created opportunities for asset seizure since the breakup of Austria-Hungary put the fate of the entire empire-scale railway network at stake.<sup>2</sup> Italy recovered long-claimed territories: South Tyrol, Trentino, Trieste and its

1 GRANGE, Daniel. *L'Italie et la Méditerranée (1896–1911). Les fondements d'une politique étrangère*. Rome ; Paris : Ecole française de Rome, De Boccard, 1994, pp. 1305-1346.

2 HAIDBAUER, Gabriele. *Desintegrationsprobleme und Reorganisationsmaßnahmen im österreichischen Bahnwesen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg (1918–1923)*. Wien, Wirtschaftsuniv., Dipl.-Arb., 1981.

hinterland, and consequently also recovered the land on which railway sections belonging to the Südbahn Gesellschaft ran, as did the new-born kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and also the emerging Austrian and Hungarian Republics. The Peace Conference in Paris had to set up a Railway Committee to deal with specific issues developing as a result of this shattering of the railway network throughout Central Europe. The successor states were the most interested but they partly depended on the Great Powers, (France, Great Britain and Italy), who had already invested a lot in rail construction, not to mention the banks that had provided funding. In a competition that had been deeply altered by the Great War, the stakes for Italy were two-fold: first, it wanted to safeguard the economic interests of Trieste and Fiume, which necessitated maintaining links from both cities with railway networks beyond the new boundaries; second, it hoped to acquire at least part of the railway network in order to ensure a strong diplomatic position in a strategic area where Austria formed the keystone to Italian security in Europe.

Italian leadership circles tried work towards these objectives more consistently than is typically assumed. Italy entered the Peace Conference as one of the winners of the war, though, rapidly turned into a bit of an outsider struggling to overcome the perception of a so-called “mutilated victory”. For a long time, Italy was not granted a very constructive position in the peace negotiations. As early as the 1920s, some nationalistic journalists spread the idea that the Italian delegation arrived at the Conference without any Central and Eastern Europe agenda at all.<sup>3</sup> At a later stage, Italy was thought to have conceived peace in a very narrow and self-centred way and therefore failed to have any greater influence.<sup>4</sup> According to a more qualified approach, Italian claims on the Adriatic shore were given priority and ended up overshadowing other pending issues.<sup>5</sup> Subsequent works<sup>6</sup> underline that some Italian leaders and diplomats did attempt to manage the reorganization of Central Europe and held a vision of what the Italian role in it should be, even if it may have become blurred within the course of the negotiations. Still, the conflict between these differing points of view raises more questions than answers. It is not easy to determine which role Italy expected to play in Central Europe, whether there was a consensus about it or not, or whether the actual Italian policy was consistent with these ambitions or not.

Focusing on the railway issue may highlight some parts of the problem. The topic was relatively fringe compared to discussions on borders, economic reparations or colonial empires, but was still a highly strategic matter since the transportation of soldiers, food and weapons had proved critical during warfare. The railway issue drew keen attention and at the same time was not a top priority, which makes it a good example for understanding the Italian global purpose in Central Europe, without being blindsided by more controversial issues. Due to the archival sources used, this paper mostly analyzes the Italian point of view.

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3 TAMARO, Attilio. *La lotta delle razze nell'Europa danubiana*. Bologna : Zanichelli, 1923, p. 285.

4 POMBENI, Paolo. La lezione di Versailles e l'Italia. Alcune riconsiderazioni. In *Ricerche di storia politica*, 1999, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 355-370.

5 DONOSTI, Mario (pseudonym for the diplomat Mario Luciulli). *Mussolini e l'Europa. La politica estera fascista*. Rome : Leonardo, 1945, pp. 4-5; MARSICO, Giorgio. *Il problema dell'Anschluss austro-tedesco, 1918-1922*. Milan : Giuffrè, 1983, pp. 4-5.

6 PASTORELLI, Pietro. *Dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale, momenti e problemi della politica estera italiana, 1914-1943*. Milan : Edizioni universitarie di Lettere Economica Diritto, 1997; CACCAMO, Francesco. *L'Italia e la nuova Europa. Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla conferenza di pace di Parigi (1919-1920)*. Milan : Luni, 2000.

It should be considered, however, that in this type of multilateral issue, the Czechoslovak or Austrian perspective<sup>7</sup> could prove relevant for understanding the global picture.

### The Aftermath of WW1: Italy's Great Expectations

Soon after the armistice with Austria-Hungary, Italy attempted to secure key positions in Central Europe, especially in the railway network. At first, it was mainly argued that the acquisition of some territories was necessary for the continuity of communication lines. For instance, General Grazioli portrayed the Trieste-Vienna line and the Fiume-Budapest line as complementary in order to strengthen Italy's alleged rights over Fiume.<sup>8</sup> But beyond territorial and strategic issues, some major exponents in the political, economic and military spheres suggested the importance of maintaining links between different parts of the former Habsburg empire and the opportunity for Italy to play a leading role. Despite the empire being discredited as a jail for the people, the economic advantages of a great common market had been developed for half a century.<sup>9</sup> Even some of its fiercest opponents admitted it. Attilio Tamaro, a nationalistic journalist born in Trieste, wrote how nostalgic he was for the great Central European economic zone.<sup>10</sup>

The railway network was the backbone of this economic space and the Italian leaders were well aware of that. The Allied and associated powers felt concerned with the situation in Central Europe, especially in Austria which was on the brink of starvation because of a bad harvest and disorganized transportation. The Council of Ten had in fact adopted a proposal by Herbert Hoover to have the States of the former Habsburg empire, including Italian-held areas on the Adriatic, supply rolling stock to the American Relief Administration. It was to pass its instructions through an inter-allied Communications Section that was responsible for the entire network from the Adriatic Sea to Prague. Food and coal supplies were considered a priority regardless of political boundaries.<sup>11</sup> It was this experiment led to the idea of an international railway organization. Despite being far beyond reach in 1919 and discussed mainly in some French diplomatic circles, like those around Jacques Seydoux<sup>12</sup>, it still gave the railway issue a new diplomatic scope.

This evoked an Italian reaction stemming mainly from military circles but was not limited to them. In April 1919, General Scipioni based at the Supreme Headquarters, sent his government a memo written by Enrico Scodnik, member of the Dante Alighieri and vice-director of the National Insurance Institute, who strived to promote a better trade relationship between Italy and Czechoslovakia and had set up an Italian Committee for

7 In his PhD Jan Oliva has renewed the perspective, without however addressing precisely the geopolitical issue: OLIVA, Jan. *Les Réseaux de transport tchécoslovaques dans l'entre-deux-guerres (1918-1938) : une approche historique multimodale*, PhD under the supervision of Christophe Bouneau and Ivan Jakubec, University Bordeaux 3, 2012.

8 Memorandum by general Grazioli, (chief of the inter-allied army in Fiume), 13 March 1919. In *Documenti diplomatici italiani (DDI)*, 1918-1922, Vol. 2, Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1984, pp. 612-616.

9 KOMLOS, John. *The Habsburg Monarchy as a Customs Union: Economic Development in Austria-Hungary in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 215-219.

10 TAMARO 1923, pp. 283-285.

11 Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (USSME), fond Consiglio supremo economico, Sezione Comunicazioni, 43, Minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 1919.

12 USSME, fond Consiglio supremo economico, Sezione Comunicazioni, 43, *Minutes of the meeting held on 13 August 1919*; SEYDOUX, Jacques. *De Versailles au plan Young. Réparations. Dettes interalliées. Reconstruction européenne* (writings published by Jacques Arnavon and Etienne de Felcourt). Paris : Plon, 1932, pp. 275-276.

independence of the Czech people during the war.<sup>13</sup> He advocated for a tighter relationship between Italy and Czechoslovakia, which was portrayed as a bulwark against Bolshevism and the most stable new State in Central Europe. In the short term, this tighter relationship meant strict control over the railways. His memo also emphasized the importance of the Innsbruck-Salzburg-Linz-Budweiss line in providing food to starving people in Austria and for transporting troops in the case of a Bolshevik crisis. The memo went even further and concluded this way: "After the military occupation of the railway, it could be easy to schedule a train twice a week from Milano to Prague through the city of Trento. It would set up direct ongoing communications between Italy and Czechoslovakia, and it would offset the direct communication France has already set up between Paris and Prague."<sup>14</sup>

The content of the message was clearly heeded. Two months later De Nava, the minister for Sea and Rail Transport, informed President of the Council Orlando that such direct trains were now functioning.<sup>15</sup> This episode reveals that just after the war, military issues were strongly coupled with a broader vision of Italian influence in Central Europe. It also emphasizes that military, economic and civil spheres were inter-connected when it came to railway issues, which made them crucial for the way the Italian leaders considered their policy in Central Europe. At the beginning of 1919, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino was told that Czechoslovak General Milan Štefánik wanted his country to set up a tight trade relationship with Italy provided that tariff trade guarantees were given by Austria. He thought that the best way to ensure this was to establish direct railway communication between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> What matters is not how sincere Štefánik was, or how successful the project could have been – the fact that Yugoslavia was sidelined and that the project implied that Fiume would become Italian were quite obvious flaws. What matters is that Štefánik was well aware that Italy would play an important role in the aftermath of the war and its interests should be spared.<sup>17</sup> The fact that he chose to put such importance on the railway shows how much it was valued by keen observers of the great powers' policy.

This understanding was widely shared. Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, a well-known journalist for the *Corriere della Sera*, wrote to Luigi Albertini that Italy should use the railway communications to draw Austria into the Italian sphere of influence. He imagined a global political strategy in which Austria could be used as a tool to thwart French policy in Central Europe and prevent any resurrection of a Danubian federation under the auspices of Czechoslovakia.<sup>18</sup> The latter was thus considered both a potential enemy and a valuable partner, since in the meantime the elite from Trieste had insisted on the importance of a good relationship between Italy and Czechoslovakia as well to sustain city trade. Alberto Moscheni, a trustee for the Cosulich firm (a ship owner), one of the representatives of

13 SANTORO, Stefano. *L'Italia e l'Europa orientale. Diplomazia culturale e propaganda, 1918-1943*. Milano : Franco Angeli, 2005, p. 82.

14 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, (ACS), Rome, fond Prima Guerra Mondiale, 196/1, Memorandum by Enrico Scodnik sent to ministers of War and Industry, 7 April 1919.

15 ACS, Rome, fond Prima Guerra Mondiale, 196/3, letter Giuseppe De Nava to Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Rome, 18 June 1919.

16 Paternò to Sonnino, Paris, 26 March 1919. In *DDI, 1918-1922*, Vol. 3, Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1985, pp. 43-44.

17 KŠIŇAN, Michal. *L'Homme qui parlait avec les étoiles. Milan Ratislav Štefánik, héros franco-slovaque de la Grande Guerre*. Paris : Eur'Orbem Editions, 2019, pp. 226-227.

18 Borgese to Albertini, 4 September 1919. In ALBERTINI, Luigi. *Epistolario 1911-1926*, Vol. III, Milano : Mondadori, 1968, pp. 1276-1277.

the liberal-national trend that wanted Trieste to be Italian and an author of several memoranda that promoted Trieste as a rail hub<sup>19</sup>, urged Sonnino to lower railway tariffs which had increased significantly in order to safeguard Trieste's trade with its hinterland.<sup>20</sup> By sketching out the possible guidelines of a political and trade deal between Italy and Czechoslovakia, he made a strong link between trade, the railway and the general Italian strategic goals in Central Europe. In the first half of 1919, beyond the political disputes that continued in full swing at the Paris Peace Conference, stress was put on cooperation between Rome and Prague – which had also the advantage of differentiating Czechoslovakia from Yugoslavia. French diplomats documented “the extraordinary and very methodical Italian activity” in Vienna, Budapest and Prague. In economics, it took the form of buying large stock packages in shipping companies or banks and restarting the goods trade bound to Trieste.<sup>21</sup> The same agent who notified of these moves thought they were harmless and assumed that despite its efforts, Italy would not gain a stronger position in Central Europe. Without considering the results, we may note that Italian policy was nevertheless quite consistent and involved personalities from many different spheres. In 1919, economic operators as well as the government were convinced that they could exploit the victory by combining commercial and political interests through broad economic penetration in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Italy also got key positions in the inter-allied military control commissions who were in charge of organizing railway traffic and the distribution of the rolling stock. In November 1919, an Economic Council established at the Paris Peace Conference decided to set up a unique railway commission operating in the former Austro-Hungarian territories with Italy presiding. A few months later, this Commission was replaced by an International Wagon Exchange Committee led by a French civil servant, Gaston Lerverve. This was typical of a trend that saw the military being gradually taken over by civil servants in the name of economic relief in Central Europe. That was also characteristic of French policy from the beginning of 1920 which emphasized the need for Austrian recovery through cooperation between successor States.<sup>23</sup> However, the Italian general staff felt deprived of its means of action and attempted to maintain the railway commission even if it was clear that it would be subordinated to the “Lerverve Committee”.<sup>24</sup>

Since military control was, in a sense, watered down among multiple committees, Italian civil servants and diplomats chose to involve Italy in financial control of the former Austro-Hungarian railway companies. In April 1920, the Bank of Italy released a list of such companies and ranked them according to their importance for Italian interests.<sup>25</sup> The win-

19 Archivio di Stato di Trieste (AST), fond Igino Brocchi, 7/62, note by Alberto Moscheni about the regulation of the relationship with the Südbahn Gesellschaft, 12 August 1919.

20 Moscheni to Sonnino, Paris, 23 May 1919, DDI, 1918–1922, Vol. 3, Roma : Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1985, pp. 604-605.

21 Archives du Ministère français des Affaires Etrangères (AMFAE), fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918-1940, Italie, 78/93-98, note by Pernot to the Minister of War, Vienna, 22 May 1919.

22 DI QUIRICO, Roberto. *Le banche italiane all'estero, 1900–1950. Espansione bancaria all'estero e integrazione finanziaria internazionale nell'Italia degli anni tra le due guerre*. Fucecchio : European Press Academic Publishing, 2000, pp. 55-57.

23 NARDELLI-MALGRAND, Anne-Sophie. La France et le nouvel espace danubien : échec de la définition et de l'organisation d'un espace périphérique, 1919–1933. In DESSBERG, Frédéric - SCHNAKENBOURG, Éric. *Les Horizons de la politique extérieure française. Régions périphériques et espaces seconds dans la stratégie diplomatique et militaire de la France du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Bruxelles : Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 197-208.

24 USSME, fond Commissioni militari interalleate di controllo, Ungheria, 84/4, memorandum Mattioli on the Hungarian railway, September 1920.

25 Archivio storico della Banca d'Italia (ASBI), fond Rapporti con l'estero, 315/5/2, note “Sezione ferrovie”, 17 April 1920.



ners were the Aussig-Toeplitz Eisenbahn Gesellschaft, whose head office was in Teplice, (Czechoslovakia), and above all the Südbahn Gesellschaft, the flagship of the Austro-Hungarian railways, which was originally meant to link Trieste to Vienna. The latter was considered a priority and the goal to get Italian leadership onto the Südbahn board was disclosed in a telegram. A communication from Pietro Tomasi della Torretta, then ambassador in Vienna, reveals that in summer 1920, the Italian government claimed Südbahn's shares owned by German banks on the grounds of German reparations<sup>26</sup>, though at first this great design partly failed to lead to concrete success. The first reason was that business circles were unwilling to invest, even though they were encouraged to commit themselves to such far-reaching projects. In Spring 1920, Colonel Barbieri, who was in charge of the military mission in Innsbruck, urged his superiors to set up "an economic offensive using banks and financial institutions".<sup>27</sup> Colonel Barbieri also mentioned the Commander of the Trento area and the General Commissioner for Tridentine Venetia stating that Italian control of the Tyrol railway and economy was intended both to protect the liberated regions and to provide a springboard for Italian interests in Central Europe. The initiative was not completely far-fetched since a bank representative was sent by the Foreign Affairs Ministry to study what could be done in the field. High-ranking diplomats like Della Torretta were perfectly aware of the importance of capitalism and investments when it came to the railway issue, but Italian banks were reluctant to spend large amounts of money on quite an uncertain challenge and the project failed.

This shift from military to financial control was not entirely conclusive, which led Italy to further invest in the diplomatic field. Moreover, the stress placed on Czechoslovakia as a special partner in the railway issue was to meet the general duties of Italian foreign policy.

### **The Railway: A Key Issue for Italian Global Design in Central Europe**

As long as Sidney Sonnino was the minister of Foreign Affairs, the economic issues were still overlooked and the relationship between Italy and Czechoslovakia was characterized by mistrust.<sup>28</sup> Things changed with Carlo Sforza, who was first Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs from June 1919, and then minister from June 1920 to June 1921. He was convinced that Italian security depended on the capacity of making special partnerships with the successor States, especially Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and attempted to resist French influence in Central Europe up to a point. He did not exclude Hungary and Austria, which President of the Council Francesco Saverio Nitti had signed an agreement with in April 1920. It stipulated that Italy would help Austria in both diplomatic and economic concerns provided that neither would implement the Anschluss and join Germany, nor enter a Danubian confederation that would have been led by the other successor States.<sup>29</sup> Carlo Sforza continued to implement this policy which ensured that an independent Austria would not fall under the influence of another power: "The thought of the leaders of Italian democracy with regard to the question of Austria was that it was better that the Austrian Republic

26 Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE), fond Affari Politici 1919–1930, Austria, 812, fasc. Austria, trattazione generale, Tomasi della Torretta, telegram 548, 7 August 1920.

27 USSME, fond Commissioni militari interalleate di controllo, Austria, 26/2, dispatch no. 872 from colonel Barbieri, 2 April 1920.

28 BOLECH CECCHI, Donatella. *Alle origini di un'inimicizia. Italia-Cecoslovacchia 1918–1922*. Soveria Mannelli : Rubbettino, 2008, pp. 30–31.

29 ASMAE, fond Rappresentanze diplomatiche, Vienna, 255/4/3, Austro-Italian agreement signed on 12 April 1920.

should continue to live, honourably and without lustre, as long as Italy's patient work was being accomplished."<sup>30</sup>

In Sforza's mind, "Italy's patient work" consisted of building loose ententes which Italy had available to use as a pivot. On these terms, it could take over from Austria-Hungary as the great power in Central Europe. Therefore, the Austro-Italian agreement was completed in February 1921 through an exchange of letters between the Italian and Czechoslovak governments by which both claimed they agreed on the independence of Austria.<sup>31</sup> This strategy implied promoting cooperation between the successor States and bringing Italy into the game by giving it some mutual interests with the Central European countries.

In this global design the railway played a significant part, all the more important in the beginning of 1921 as Central European economic recovery reached out to a new prospect. On the American and French initiative, the Austrian section of the Reparations Commission wanted to implement article 222 of the peace treaty which left the possibility to Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to conclude special agreements about trade and communications.<sup>32</sup> Such diplomatic prospects were very much in line with the imperatives of French diplomacy: to reintegrate Hungary into the Danube regional system, to move Austria away from Germany, to build solid relations between successor states and to keep Italy estranged.<sup>33</sup> It thus got the support of French diplomacy while Italy remained wary about the initiative. On this occasion, it could partly rely on Czechoslovakia's help as the government in Prague suggested that the conference be held in Porto Rose, a small Istrian town. It implied that Italy would be the inviting power<sup>34</sup>, which was an opportunity for Italy to be recognised both as a successor State and as a great power, or in other words, as the leading power amongst the successor States.<sup>35</sup> An acute Franco-Italian rivalry stemmed from the situation. One French representative, Louis Fatou, was sent on a diplomatic tour of the Central European capitals and instructed to convince the successor States that the French approach was best.<sup>36</sup> He was accompanied by Gaston Lerverve, an engineer specialized in railways and head of the International Wagon Exchange Committee. The railway issue was indeed particularly at stake since the French government wanted the transport concern to be tackled. As for Italian diplomacy, it hammered on the necessity to take the lead in railway companies. Giacomo De Martino, the powerful Italian ambassador in London, drew the attention of the minister in a report written by the commercial attaché, who underlined that: "An exclusion of Italy from international railway policy in the Balkan peninsula would cause serious damage to our country. During the political and economic competition that lasted many years before the war between Italy and Austria-Hungary on the Balkan peninsula, railway issues were the subject of our most vigilant attention. Although the dual monarchy has now disappeared, I believe that there

30 SFORZA, Carlo. *Les Frères ennemis : l'Europe d'après-guerre*. Paris : Gallimard, 1933, pp. 212-213.

31 AMFAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918-1940, Tchecoslovaquie, 65/201-202.

32 Telegram from the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 9 November 1920. In *Documents diplomatiques français (DDF)*, 1920-1932, 1920, Vol. III, doc. No. 172. Bruxelles : Peter Lang, 2002.

33 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919-1940, B54/61/136, telegram No. 32 from Aristide Briand (minister for Foreign Affairs) to Pierre Lefèvre-Pontalis, 18 January 1921.

34 ASMAE, fond Conferenza della Pace, Delegazione italiana, 2/16, telegram No. 1452 from Carlo Sforza to the Italian Delegation in Paris, 11 December 1920.

35 ASMAE, fond Rappresentenze diplomatiche, Vienna, 273/1, dispatch No. 30 from Giuseppe Salvago-Raggi (head of the Italian delegation in Paris), Paris, 10 January 1921.

36 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919-1940, B54/61/233-238, draft of a dispatch from Briand to Fatou, 10 February 1921.

is still a conflict of economic interests between the successor states of Austria and Hungary, as it is in our interest that the Adriatic should be a communication route rather than an obstacle for Italian traffic to the interior of the Balkan peninsula.”

However, it supposed that the Italian harbours would concentrate trade traffic from Central Europe, that is why De Martino attached a map to the report showing the entire European railway network on which Northern Italy appears as a node between the East and West, and the North and South of the continent.<sup>37</sup> What was still at stake was a long sought connection between the Danubian and Balkanic networks.

The Quai d'Orsay then no longer hesitated to implicitly put a kind of market in the hands of the Italians, as emerged from a conversation between Seydoux and Della Torretta at the beginning of July: “The Porto Rosa Conference was undoubtedly still very useful, but the goal had almost been achieved [through the agreements already concluded by various States] and it would now have to do little more than endorse the arrangements it had been intended to bring about. Mr. Seydoux was convinced that here again, Italy should take the lead and that the real way to achieve a solution was the one he had long advocated, namely the establishment of a small committee composed of an Italian, Sir Francis Dent and Mr. Lerverve, which would have the necessary powers to deal with transport matters in the territory of the successor States. [...] there would be a good chance that these decisions would be accepted, if they had the simultaneous support of Italy, the United Kingdom and France.”<sup>38</sup>

Seydoux was probably referring to some technical agreements reached in previous conferences, as well as to the first contacts between Vienna and Prague which led to the Lana agreements. There was, of course, a bluff in his remarks intended to raise the spectre of a Porto Rosa conference devoid of any substance in order to revise the programme. However, in the end the alternative was quite clear: either Italy would agree to work loyally with France in a cooperation of the great powers which was to be imposed “naturally” on the successor states, or France would withdraw from the conference in order to leave Italy on its own in the face of such difficulties.

The conference opened in Porto Rose on 24 October 1921, gathering all the successor States plus France and Italy. The Italian delegation, headed by Camillo Romano Avezzana, was inspired by Sforza's views: economic recovery should be considered on a larger scale and include all the successor States; links had to be tightened with Czechoslovakia and, to a lesser extent, with Yugoslavia; and the conference was intended to give Italy a leading position and to make it a full successor State, not only a great power interested in the Danubian area. However, the conference itself was thought to be a stopgap measure, since the Italian strategy was about weaving discreet links rather than releasing its intentions through a public session.<sup>39</sup> In the opening, Avezzana declared that: “The present Conference was planned [...] with rather more general intentions than those specified later in the final programme accepted by the Governments concerned. In fact, it did not seem useful to touch upon arguments which, although of great economic importance, could

37 ASMAE, fond Affari commerciali 1919–1923, 8/11, dispatch No. 523 from De Martino to Sforza, 4 March 1921.

38 Centre of Diplomatic Archives in Nantes (CDAN), fond French embassy in Berlin, B/533, copy of a dispatch from Aristide Briand (then minister for Foreign Affairs) to Camille Barrère, French ambassador to the Italian kingdom, 6 July 1921.

39 MARSICO, Giorgio. *L'Italia e la conferenza economica di Porto Rose, 24 ottobre-23 novembre 1921*. Milano : Giuffrè, 1979.

run up against insurmountable difficulties and which, by their very importance, seemed insoluble for the time being.”<sup>40</sup>

The threat that Italy could try to divert the conference for its own profit was clearly perceived by Louis Fatou: “The Italian proposals tend to conclude general conventions on transit, tariffs and circulation of rolling stock, as well as commercial agreements with the successor States and these various agreements could give Italy political influence and serious economic advantages to the detriment of France. There is no doubt that there is a desire to prepare a kind of broad economic and railway association encompassing the seven States, with its centre in Rome.”<sup>41</sup>

In the same report, Louis Fatou stated that the Italian project relied on direct international trains between Milan and Central Europe and on unified tariffs, which matches quite well with what was called for as early as 1919.<sup>42</sup> The Italian strategy may have been less articulate than the French diplomat thought, but it undoubtedly existed and had its own makeup, even if diplomatic staff lacked the time and means to implement it.

In Porto Rose, Romano Avezana, head of the Italian delegation, tried to make trade and rail agreements with the successor States in order to sketch a special entente at the expense of France. However, the other countries did not want Italy to be judge and jury; both a great power exercising its influence and a successor State claiming rights. The French diplomats counter-attacked with the help of the Romanian delegation.<sup>43</sup> The latter suggested that the railway agreement should be tackled in another conference, and the Czechoslovak delegation ended up supporting these views. In the end, regulation of international transport was only the subject of “wishes” with calls for conferences to be held in the near future.<sup>44</sup> As far as the railway network was concerned, the conference ended in a stalemate. The Italian-Czechoslovak relationship had already been endangered by Charles I’s attempts to get back his throne and the Burgenland issue<sup>45</sup>, and the conference worsened it.

From that point, Italian diplomacy focused on important yet less ambitious goals which had been targeted since the very end of the war. One was to take control of railway companies like the Südbahn Gesellschaft in order to provide Italian foreign policy with useful tools at the crossroads of diplomacy, economics and geopolitics.

## Taking Control of the Südbahn

The Südbahn Gesellschaft was an Austrian company whose shares were controlled by a variety of banks and firms from various European countries. Its debt was assumed to be almost 1 million and represented up to 88 % of the firm’s bondholders total, held mainly by French bondholders.<sup>46</sup> In the redeemed lands, Italy wanted to take over the railway without

40 ASMAE, fond Rappresentanze diplomatiche, Vienna, 273/1, letter from Romano Avezana to Tomasi della Torretta, 8 November 1921.

41 Telegrams 5-7 from Louis Fatou to Jacques Seydoux, (head of the Direction of Commercial Affairs in the French ministry for Foreign Affairs), Porto Rose, 2 November 1921. In *DDF, 1920–1932, 1921*, Vol. 2, document No. 318. Bruxelles : Peter Lang, 2005.

42 See above, part 1.

43 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919–1940, B54/65/105-118, telegrams from Louis Fatou to Aristide Briand, 15 November 1921.

44 ASMAE, fond Rappresentanze diplomatiche, Vienna, 273/1, Report on the conference held in Porto Rose, from Romano Avezana.

45 BOLECH CECCHI 2008, pp. 128-131.

46 AMFAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918–1940, Z-Europe, Autriche, 153/65-71, Note sur les chemins de fer du sud de l’Autriche (dits Lombards) , Paris, 24 mai 1919.

paying an annual fee to the French bondholders, but it also needed the Südbahn to thrive so that Central Europe could remain the outlet of Trieste's harbour.<sup>47</sup> The Südbahn issue fell within domestic policy insofar as it concerned sovereignty over the recovered territories, and also aligned with the designs of Italian foreign policy.

Article 320 in the *peace treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye* provided for the future of the Südbahn: "With the object of ensuring regular utilization of the railroads of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy owned by private companies which, as a result of the stipulations of the present Treaty, will be situated in the territory of several States, the administrative and technical reorganization of the said lines shall be regulated in each instance by an agreement between the owning company and the States territorially concerned. Any differences on which an agreement is not reached, including questions relating to the interpretation of contracts concerning the expropriation of the lines, shall be submitted to arbitrators designated by the Council of the League of Nations. This arbitration may, as regards the South Austrian Railway Company, be required either by the Board of Management or by the Committee representing the bondholders."<sup>48</sup>

This article interwove the territorial aspect, which was highly political since the League of Nations was involved, and also financial issues as the Committee representing the bondholders, mainly French, was acknowledged as a key player, which had in turn deep diplomatic implications on the Franco-Italian relationship. However, this article did not particularly solve anything and simply opened the door for further negotiations. Since the company was private, its reorganisation following the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire could follow one of two paths: the network could be divided and bought back by the successor States, or the company could survive as a whole under the condition it would conclude operational agreements with each successor State. The standoff over these two possibilities would form the core of negotiations for the years following the Great War.

In France as in Italy, each of the proposals had its supporters. In Italy, those in favour of maintaining the unity of the network were grouped around trade chambers, economic circles and the Ufficio centrale per le nuove provincie, (the Central Department for the New Provinces), instituted under the Presidency of the Council to organize connection of the redeemed lands to the kingdom of Italy. Those who feared the harmful consequences for Trieste of a split network had to face supporters of the purchase of the company, who lined up behind the Ferrovie dello Stato, (Italian State railways), and all those who saw the increasing intervention of the State as progress. This trend corresponded with a powerful, European-wide movement to nationalize railways. A note from General Segré expressed these contradicting concerns. On one hand, he considered that the interest of the Südbahn, which rested in maintaining its unity, coincided with Italy's desire in extending its sphere of influence from the Adriatic ports. On the other hand, he stressed that internationalisation of the company would not solve the fundamental question of fares charged on the railway lines

47 CUOMO Pasquale. *Il miraggio danubiano. Austria ed Italia. Politica ed economia 1918-1936*. Milano : Franco Angeli, 2012, p. 62-63.

48 The treaty of Saint-Germain has recently been the object of renewed interest : Otto Ranzenhofer, « Die Eisenbahn und die Südbahn-Gesellschaft im Friedensvertrag von St. Germain », in Gerhart Artl (dir.), *Mit Volldampf in den Süden : 150 Jahre Südbahn Wien-Triest*, Vienne, Fassbaender, 2007, p. 13-32.

and that it was perhaps necessary to consider takeover.<sup>49</sup> A booklet that passed through the Supreme Command, dated 1919, was much more clear in its support for internationalisation of the Südbahn and put forward economic arguments, including Italian influence in Central European trade.<sup>50</sup> As for the Italian Treasury, it bought shares in the Südbahn in the spring of 1919 in order to gain leverage within the company.<sup>51</sup> A compromise was finally adopted at an inter-departmental meeting held from 17 to 26 January 1920.<sup>52</sup> Lines in Trentino had to be bought back for both military and political reasons as Rome could not accept Austrian management in German-speaking regions that were barely Italianised, but Italian diplomacy would have to work towards maintaining the company unit for lines linking Vienna and Budapest to Trieste and Fiume. This would also greatly reduce any potential Yugoslav challenge to Central European trade. The Italian objectives were therefore manifold, both to ensure the security of the redeemed lands and to acquire assets for penetration into the Danube basin. The incorporation of railways into geopolitical projects, which had first been realized in the Danube-Adriatic railway projects before the war, found another domain to thrive in here.

France dealt with the same kinds of divisions. The bondholders' representatives wanted the lines to be bought back by the successor States in order to pay off the debt<sup>53</sup>, whereas diplomatic circles supported an international company as a means to promote cooperation in Central Europe. This idea was supported by quite a lot of French public figures. According to Sigismondo Solvis, a member of the Südbahn board, deputy Alfred Margaine, who was then a member of the Railways and External Affairs Committee, advocated for this idea and used the well-known French newspaper *Le Temps* to amplify his position.<sup>54</sup> The French representative sent to Vienna in the spring of 1919, Henri Allizé, suggested "the internationalisation of the Südbahn with ownership for the independent national states whose territory is used by the line".<sup>55</sup> However, the French government was primarily preoccupied by the bondholders interests that were considered a priority for some time over any diplomatic design. The Italian annual fee issue was solved by a Franco-Italian agreement signed on 10 October 1919.<sup>56</sup> On a financial level, a distinction was made between the annuity due to the former foes and that due to the allied, associated or neutral countries, whose payments the Italian Government undertook to resume. On political and economic levels, the French government promised its support to Italy, as evidenced by this quotation from the convention: "The Italian Government may have an interest in the purchase of lines

49 Archivio di Stato di Trieste (AST), fond Iginio Brocchi, 7/62, note from general Roberto Segré, head of the Italian Armistice Mission, 25 April 1919.

50 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 9/82, booklet "*Internalizzazione della ferrovia meridionale, 1919*", holding the stamp "Regio Esercito Italiano, Comando Supremo".

51 AMFAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale, Z-Europe, Autriche 153/54, telegram No. 50 from Henri Allizé, 30 April 1919.

52 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 7/62, Memorandum sent by Iginio Brocchi to Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti, 3 February 1920.

53 AMFAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918–1940, Recueil des actes de la Conférence de la Paix, 43, minutes No. 33, 17 June 1919.

54 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 23/218, document No. 20, note from Iginio Brocchi to Biancheri, head of the Austrian section in the General Direction for Political Affairs, 20 January 1925.

55 AMFAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918–1940, A-Paix, 102/27-47, Document attached to Allizé's dispatch, 5 May 1919.

56 ACS, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Prima Guerra Mondiale, 198, fasc. "*Trattative fra governo francese e austriaco per cessione delle ferrovie austriache a un gruppo francese e la questione delle ferrovie della Südbahn*" (Convention on the Südbahn railways signed by French and Italian governments), 10 October 1919.

which are operated in the territories acquired by Italy, and even in the purchase of part of the lines operated by the Südbahn outside those territories, and has an interest in the restoration of proper operation of that Company, as well as the establishment on all former Austro-Hungarian railway lines of tariffs allowing competition between the Adriatic ports, in particular the port of Trieste, and the northern German ports, and ensuring the defense of Trieste's traffic against the application of preferential tariffs." As such, the French government chose to meet the expectations of the bondholders rather than pushing French diplomatic and geopolitical interests.

In the meantime, the Italian government bought Südbahn shares in order to strengthen its position in the board and by February 1923, the Italian Treasury held half the shares of the company.<sup>57</sup> From 1921, the issue became highly sensitive as the Foreign Affairs Department under the rule of Carlo Sforza, took the lead over the Trade Department in handling the issue.<sup>58</sup> In this endeavour, he may have relied on Iginio Brocchi who was born in Trieste in 1872. He was a specialist in trade law in Austro-Hungary and after the war he became an Italian civil servant in charge of the Central Department for the New Provinces. Brocchi was actually the Italian expert for economic and trade negotiations with the successor States.<sup>59</sup> In the wake of the negotiations that took place in Vienna in February 1921, Brocchi managed to set up a plan that fit Italian ideals: the Südbahn network remained united and every State was required to provide financial assistance to cover the company's shortfall and to pay the French bondholders. This was in line with Briand's opinion. The French President of the Council had explicitly put the market in Italian hands, defending the rights of French bondholders against the intervention of the French government "in favour of solutions desired by the Italian government" for the reorganisation of the company.<sup>60</sup> The deal kept open the possibility for the Bank of Italy to grant loans to Austria and Hungary, which meant that Italy gained a valuable tool to expand its influence in the Südbahn.<sup>61</sup>

This plan was welcomed by a significant number of people inside key Italian administrations. Attilio Wiesmayer and Alberto Pennacchio, advisers to the Bank of Italy, supported Brocchi's rationale. The former wrote while returning from a mission in Vienna: "The value [of the company's shares] is more political than real: they are a bad investment since the Südbahn has not paid the dividend for some years. However, from a political point of view, the states concerned by the operation of the railway network managed by the Südbahn, either because their railway lines are linked to those of the company, (Italy, Hungary, Poland), or because the Südbahn network passes through their territory, (Austria, Yugoslavia), have a natural interest in securing as many shares as possible in order to influence the operation and to reap the benefits that are due to them as the main shareholders."<sup>62</sup>

57 ASBI, fond Rapporti con l'estero, 260/1/3, Letter from Attilio Wiesmayer to Pennacchio, Rome, 29 July 1921.

58 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 7/62, Telegram No. 100 from Carlo Sforza to Filippo Meda, minister for Treasury, Rome, 16 February 1921.

59 DORSI, Pierpaolo. *Inventario dell'Archivio di Iginio Brocchi: 1914-1931*. Roma : Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1997, pp. 2-7.

60 CDAN, fond French embassy in Rome-Quirinal, 174, Highly confidential telegram No. 229 from Aristide Briand to Camille Barrère, Paris, 27 January 1921.

61 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 7/62, *Promemoria* for the President of the Council, Iginio Brocchi, 25 February 1921.

62 ASBI, Attilio Wiesmayer to Pennacchio, 29 July 1921, 260/1/3.

One year later, while negotiations between France, Italy and the other States concerned took place in Venice, Arminio Brunner, a manufacturer and banker from Trieste, sent a note to Iginio Brocchi. The businessman defended the idea that Italy would risk losing the fruits of its victory if it did not extend influence from its Adriatic ports to the Danube plain. He paid tribute to the foresight of previous governments which had secured “dominant influence” in the Südbahn and appealed to those in power to keep on working in that direction, i.e. in exchange for Italian financial assistance, the company should buy specific financial assets targeted by the Italian Treasury.<sup>63</sup> It would be a financial burden but also perfectly in line with the negotiations led by Iginio Brocchi in Vienna in February 1921. The Venice conference also stated that the contribution paid by Italy for goods transiting through Trieste was intended to amortize the Südbahn’s bonds, which meant that the bondholders and the French government were now interested in Trieste thriving as well. From that moment, the bondholders put pressure on the French government to secure “the indispensable assistance of Italy” against the successor States. Gabriel de Vellefrey, a representative of the bondholders, underlined “the opportunity of a policy of Franco-Italian understanding” to impose freedom of traffic on the Südbahn network.<sup>64</sup>

These negotiations unfolded against the backdrop of the economic recovery of Austria, and more broadly, of Central Europe. The conviction that international solutions were required to deal with Central Europe’s economic disarray had gradually been emerging since 1919. In the wake of the Porto Rose conference, an international banking consortium was set up specially supported by the British government. Carlo Schanzer, then minister for Foreign Affairs, Guido Jung, one of his advisors and the ambassador Tomasi della Torretta insisted that Italian participation should be the same as that of France or Great Britain – 20%.<sup>65</sup> However, the Italian government had the greatest difficulties to encourage banks to invest in such a project. As the Treasury minister wrote: “[I mention] the opportunity for Italian banks to make an effort to exert greater influence on the Austrian market [...]. I doubt whether our banking institutions can take action that would be desirable in the present circumstances so as not to let other countries exert their influence over Austria, but I believe that this could be done by Banca Commerciale Triestina, given its relations with the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian empire and the vast resources at its disposal.”<sup>66</sup> Moreover, 20 % was not a great deal. Since Italy could not acquire more influence or control out of a lack of money to invest, to get a special position in the Südbahn became all the more important.

This convergence of French and Italian interests led to the conclusion of the Rome Agreements signed on 29 March 1923 between the four States that owned the territories covered by the network, the Südbahn company and the bondholders’ committee. At the end of negotiations, a financial settlement and a deal about the restructuring of the company were

63 AST, fond Iginio Brocchi, 7/64, “*Memoria sulla necessità di assicurare all’Italia una posizione importante nella vita bancaria di Vienna*”, Rome, 31 July 1922; It should be noted that the same document had been retrieved from Alberto Beneduce’s papers. See ASBI, fond Alberto Beneduce, 121/1.

64 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919–1940, B59-61/20, Letter from Vellefrey to President of the Council Raymond Poincaré, 22 January 1923.

65 ASBI, fond Rapporti con l’estero, 3/3, Note “*Per il risolleamento dell’Europa centrale e orientale*”, undated.

66 ASBI, fond Rapporti con l’estero, 13/9, Highly confidential letter from Marcello Soleri, minister of Treasury, to Carlo Stringher, Governor of the Bank of Italy, 14 November 1921.



signed. Its name was changed to “Danube-Sava<sup>67</sup>-Adriatic Company”, which echoed projects undertaken before the war. The board was made up of 4 members elected by the bondholders, 8 elected by the owner states, (2 each), and 17 elected by the shareholders. Since Italy then owned about half of the shares in the Südbahn, it could expect to have a comfortable number of advisers who would be loyal to its interests, but did not get an absolute majority. Contemporaries and historians alike have insisted that the Rome agreements represented a genuine entente between France and Italy.<sup>68</sup> The pact had to be imposed on the Hungarians who were very reluctant to accept that the Italian government would guarantee their share of the rent, and also on the Yugoslavs who were not satisfied with the transit agreement and the common tariffs.<sup>69</sup> The fact that the Italian guarantee could lead to an increase in Hungary’s debt to Italy and force Budapest to fall under the control of Rome did not seem to bother the French diplomats, who encouraged Hungary either to pay its share or to accept the Italian guarantee.<sup>70</sup> Italy also concluded a truly unequal treaty with Austria as well which detailed the compensatory measures required in exchange for Italy’s guarantee of the annual instalment and an immediate advance to make up the operating deficit of the Austrian network. It allowed the Italian government to prevent any sale to private companies and to maintain advantageous tariffs for Trieste.<sup>71</sup> However, Italian policy was thwarted by Zimmermann, the League of Nations’ Commissioner appointed after the Geneva Protocols in October 1922. He postponed ratification of the Rome Agreements by the Austrian Parliament on the grounds that they imposed too heavy a burden on the country and would prevent it from fulfilling the obligations derived from the peace treaty and the Protocols.<sup>72</sup> In summer 1923, a new agreement had to be negotiated between Brocchi, Leverve and Zimmermann, which provided for the deposit of money coming from the Austrian network in the Austrian National Bank instead.<sup>73</sup>

A consensus developed amongst Italian leadership circles to consider the Rome agreements as an achievement to be built upon, especially since Mussolini had shown a particular interest in the Südbahn. According to François Charles-Roux, he had asked for a report on the matter very soon after he was appointed President of the Council.<sup>74</sup> Mussolini specially agreed with Brocchi’s opinion in assigning two main tasks to the Italian representatives on the board: “To eliminate the mistrust of other states, which stems from the fact that we have a majority in the Board. To ensure discreet protection of Italian interests, considering the best possible time and way to increase our interference into Austrian issues.”<sup>75</sup>

67 The Sava river is a tributary to the Danube that flows through Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia.

68 ANTONUCCI, Alceste. *La Liquidation financière de la guerre et la reconstruction en Europe centrale*. Paris : Marcel Giard, 1933, pp.345-360; PIETRI 1981, *La Reconstruction*, p. 712; SRETENOVIĆ, Stanislav. *La France et le nouveau royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes (1918–1929): des relations interétatiques inégales*. PhD Thesis : European University Institute, 2006, p. 267.

69 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919–1940, B59-61/20, telegrams n.266 and 267 from Camille Barrère, Rome, 23 February 1923.

70 AFMAE, fond Correspondance politique et commerciale 1918–1940, Z-Europe, Autriche, 157/61-63, telegrams No. 42-44 from Raymond Poincaré to Jean Doulet (French representative in Budapest), Paris, 2 March 1923.

71 AST, fond Brocchi, 1/7, Note “La missione della delegazione italiana nella nuova compagnia ferroviaria Danubio-Sava-Adriatico”, undated.

72 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919–1940, B59-61/21, telegrams No. 54-55 from Lefèvre-Pontalis, Vienna, 4 July 1923.

73 PIETRI 1981, *La Reconstruction*, p. 715.

74 AMFAE, fond Relations commerciales 1919–1940, B59-61/20, dispatch No. 562 from François Charles-Roux to Raymond Poincaré, Rome, 21 November 1922.

75 AST, Brocchi, 1/7, Note “La missione...”, undated.

Brocchi's perspective was not, however, limited to a purely nationalist vision, as shown in a report addressed to Mussolini in which he recalled the framework he had set for himself: "The States should strive to maintain the Company and to make the Board of Directors a body of contact and cohesion between the States, in order to ensure regular management of the lines that cross their territories and to counteract contrary tendencies that are detrimental to the rational operation of the network. It was therefore logical to seek to guarantee the serenity and continuity of the management of the Südbahn lines [...], and it was logical to ensure that the collective will of the States and the representatives of capital could never prove to be contrary to the interests of a State. It was necessary to avoid, for example, lowering fares to the point of creating dangerous competition for national industry and production."<sup>76</sup> Brocchi's policy was two-fold: it was based on the conviction that inter-governmental cooperation through a railway company was a worthwhile tool for economic reorganisation of Central Europe and it was intended to give Italy leverage. It took note of Italy's limited resources and the need for regional cartels in interwar Europe, in which Italy was called upon to play a decisive role.

This notion combined with Mussolini's beliefs, more oriented towards the immediate political advantages that Italy could derive from its weight in the Danube-Sava-Adriatic Company, explains the very offensive Italian policy in 1923. Several inter-departmental meetings were held, bringing together representatives of Foreign Affairs, Finance, National Economy and Public Works, to determine how to make the Rome agreements bear fruit<sup>77</sup>, which launched a new cycle of negotiations that took place between 1924 and 1926.

## Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Habsburg empire's dissolution, Italian diplomacy was often misperceived as messy. On the contrary, it may be argued that negotiators responded to a precise goal, (to take over from Austria-Hungary as the great power in Central Europe), and foreign policy was implemented strategically in the field. Italian railway policy in Central Europe was consistent with their general diplomatic design, attempting to maintain a political balance and considering Czechoslovakia a special partner to serve as a counterweight to Yugoslavia and help supervise Austria and Hungary. Italy also tried to cope with the scarce financial means available in the country after the war and made the Südbahn the first milestone in a calculated but very ambitious strategy. It relied, above all, on a tight entente between the economic elites in Trieste, Italian military authorities and some major exponents of the leading political circles.

From 1919 to 1922, despite the so-called "mutilated victory", it can be assumed that Italian diplomacy saw the interest of promoting cooperation in Central Europe, even if it was a bit asymmetrical in areas where Italy had to take the lead. Though it was hardly possible that Italy alone could take up the challenge and the railway issue was tightly connected to more global political patterns. This explains why, after the Porto Rose conference and against a background where Italy and Czechoslovakia were moving apart, Italian-Czechoslovak

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<sup>76</sup> AST, fond Brocchi, 9/81, Report on the Rome conference, addressed to Mussolini by Brocchi, undated.

<sup>77</sup> ASMAE, fond Affari politici 1919–1930, Austria, 838, fasc. "Südbahn, 2. semestre 1923", Letter from Mussolini to De Stefani, minister of Finances, Rome, 29 October 1923.

cooperation was dropped. Moreover, in the following years this strategy unfolded in quite a different context, both because of the political trends of Fascism and from October 1922, Austrian recovery was partly taken over by the League of Nations, which made the asymmetrical cooperation much more difficult to enforce.

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# Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period

Michal Kšiňan – Juraj Babják

## Abstract

KŠIŇAN, Michal – BABJÁK, Juraj. Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period.

The collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918 led to a rupture in Central-European geopolitics and in the aftermath, having a hand in the establishment of Czechoslovakia became an important source of political capital, which individual actors utilized to increase their influence and reputation. In this paper, we discuss two dimensions of the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation in 1918–1919 that contributed to the creation and stabilisation of Czechoslovakia: one pertaining to ceremonies and the formal aspects of remembrance, and the other centred on the effects of international politics—specifically the often-turbulent Italian-Czechoslovak relations—on commemorative practices. Italy sought to limit these ceremonies to only a military dimension, though both countries emphasized the “glorious” aspects and persons of their military cooperation, leaving out “unsuccessful” symbols of the time. Special attention was paid to executed Czechoslovak soldiers, who were remembered as both heroes and martyrs at the same time.

**Keywords:** Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation (1918–1919), official historical memory, military monuments and cemeteries, public commemorations, General Graziani, Czechoslovak military traditions, Italian-Czechoslovak relations

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The collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918 led to a rupture in Central-European geopolitics, the likes of which were effectively unimaginable a mere four years earlier. Having a hand in the establishment of Czechoslovakia became an important source of political capital, which individual actors used to increase their influence and prestige on both the international stage and at home. In this paper, we discuss two dimensions of the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation in 1918–1919: one pertaining to ceremonies and the formal aspects of remembrance, and the other centred on the effects of international politics—specifically, the often-turbulent Italian-Czechoslovak relations—on commemorative practices. The main aim of the public commemorations of historical events was to strengthen and unite Czechoslovak society by providing some definite markers on which to build a national identity.<sup>1</sup> In view of space constraints, this paper should be understood as a typological overview of the most significant methods and manifestations of official historical remembrance concerning the given era rather than a complete and exhaustive summary.

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- 1 For the theoretical and methodological background, see MANNOVÁ, Elena. *Minulosť ako supermarket? Spôsoby reprezentácie a aktualizácie dejín*. Bratislava : Veda; Historický ústav SAV, 2019; HÁJKOVÁ, Dagmar – HORÁK, Pavel – KESSLER, Vojtěch – MICHELA, Miroslav (eds.) *Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*. Praha : Academia; Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2018.

## The emergence and early days of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation, 1918–1919

The Czechoslovak movement abroad led by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, attempted to enlist support of the United States and the Entente powers for creation of the state of Czechoslovakia. Their most successful tools in these efforts were propaganda and the Czechoslovak Army Abroad (the Legion), which was mostly comprised of former Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia, France and Italy. Establishment of the Legion was probably most difficult in Italy, whose territorial ambitions in the Adriatic conflicted with those of Yugoslavia, causing Rome to be suspicious of the exile political movements of Austro-Hungarian nations as a whole. Such worries were partly dispelled by Štefánik, whose successful diplomatic mission to the Apennine Peninsula in the spring of 1918 culminated in the signing of a treaty on the creation of a Czechoslovak Legion in Italy on 21 April, and subsequently the handover of a battle flag to the Legion on 24 May during a ceremony held on the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war at the Vittoriano (the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II) in Rome.<sup>2</sup> The Legion in Italy entered the fray in the summer of 1918 under the command of General Andrea Graziani with their most important deployment being at the Battle of Doss Alto. Because the legionnaires had been originally sworn to the Austro-Hungarian monarch, as soon as they fell into enemy captivity, they were executed. Forty-six of them in total met this fate.

Czechoslovakia officially came into existence on 28 October 1918, but securing its borders—or in the case of Slovakia, demarcating them—was still a significant challenge. Legionnaires in Russia had no way of returning to their homeland so Beneš, as minister of foreign affairs, petitioned the French and Italian governments to send soldiers stationed in their countries back to Czechoslovakia. Rome was far prompter and more accommodating in its response, dispatching around 20 thousand men to the newly founded state led by an Italian military mission headed by General Luigi Piccione, who had replaced General Graziani. The Italians not only equipped and arranged the redeployment of Czechoslovak legionnaires from France (around 10 thousand men) to their homeland, they also organized groups of Czechoslovak POWs in their own country into so-called civil defence units (eventually these would be around 80 000 strong).<sup>3</sup> The first phase of securing Slovak territory under Piccione's command proceeded without serious impediments and was completed in January 1919. Moreover, the legionnaires from Italy also joined the fight against Poland for Tešín (Cieszyn) Silesia.

However, because Beneš and the French were dismayed to see Italy's increasing influence in Czechoslovakia, they agreed to dispatch a French military mission led by General Maurice Pellé to the country. Pellé became Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army and a deputy to Marshall Ferdinand Foch. Tensions between the two foreign generals escalated into an open conflict, which was only resolved by a compromise specifying exact terms for

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2 As early as in 1917, several Czech and Slovak prisoners were interspersed among various Italian units, serving as translators, propagandists, or scouts.

3 A distinction should be made between the legionnaires, who voluntarily joined the Legion before the official creation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1918, and the civil defence units, who entered the Czechoslovak military after this date.

the end of the Italian military mission in Czechoslovakia. It was negotiated by Minister of War Štefánik, who was far more sympathetic towards Italy than Beneš.

At the same time, Italy's image in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating. While the Italians considered themselves neutral peace-makers—and acted as such in ethnically diverse territories—the Czechs viewed their approach as effectively “pro-Hungarian”. Also, Czechoslovakia's support for Yugoslavia's demands at the Peace Conference did not help relations between the two countries. This, along with failures in Slovakia, had a decisive impact on the formation of the historical memory concerning the Italian military mission. In April 1919, when General Piccione was ordered to advance to the new demarcation line (the existence of which remains a source of controversy to this day), he could not proceed on account of the Czechoslovak army's limited combat capacity.<sup>4</sup> A subsequent attack by the Hungarian Soviet Republic compelled the troops to fall back. The fact that the French military mission<sup>5</sup> had by this time assumed full command of the Czechoslovak forces had little bearing on such developments. The Hungarians only retreated behind the demarcation line following an intervention by the Peace Conference. Despite that, in Czechoslovakia an image persisted of the Italians as those who had “failed” and the French as those who had successfully “saved” Slovakia.<sup>6</sup>

### Italian-Czechoslovak relations in the interwar period

Throughout the early 1920s, both countries were attempting to resolve the initial friction of their mutual relations with varying degrees of success. The ascent to power of Benito Mussolini in 1922 initially had a positive impact on Italian-Czechoslovak relations, which may seem paradoxical in light of later events. Mussolini was in charge of Italian foreign policy and until September 1929, he was also “interim” head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His goal was to “mould Italy into a mighty and formidable nation that its foreign partners would finally take seriously and would play a leading role on the global stage”.<sup>7</sup> With the exception of Romania, Czechoslovakia was surrounded by countries staking territorial claims against it, and so it had an eminent interest in maintaining the international status quo and supporting the principle of collective security, guaranteed by the League of Nations. In 1924, after the resolution of the Rijeka (Fiume) Question and the resumption of Italy's relations with Yugoslavia, Italy and Czechoslovakia even signed a treaty of friendship, but it remained mostly on paper.<sup>8</sup>

4 For more on this and related events, see KŠIŇAN, Michal. *Milan Rastislav Štefánik. The Slovak National Hero and Co-Founder of Czechoslovakia*. Abingdon; New York : Routledge, 2021, pp. 151–201. For more bibliography on this matter, see the paper in this issue of Forum Historiae: CACCAMO, Francesco. Italy, the Paris Peace Conference and the Shaping of Czechoslovakia. In Forum Historiae, 2021, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 7–22. ISSN 1337-6861. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.1.2>

5 The Italian military mission relinquished command of the Czechoslovak troops on 1 June 1919.

6 There is not sufficient space in this paper for a detailed analysis of the military aspects of the Italian and French commands. For more, see HELANĚ, Pavel. Československo-italské vztahy od první světové války do začátku dvacátých let. In RAUCHOVÁ, Jitka – JIROUŠEK, Bohumil et al. *Věda, kultura a politika v československo-italských vztazích 1918-1951*. České Budějovice : Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích, 2012, p. 33; PROKŠ, Petr. Soupeření italské a francouzské vojenské mise v Československu v r. 1919. In *Slovanský přehled*, 1988, Vol. 74, No. 5, pp. 374–384.

7 MILZA, Pierre. *Mussolini*. Praha : Volvox Globator, 2013 (1st edition 1999), p. 390.

8 CACCAMO, Francesco. Promarněná příležitost ve střední Evropě. Itálie a Československo mezi dvěma světovými válkami. In RAUCHOVÁ – JIROUŠEK 2012, p. 80. See also: CACCAMO, Francesco. Un'occasione mancata l'Italia. La Cecoslovacchia e la crisi dell'Europa centrale, 1918-1938. In *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 2015, Vol. 99, No. 1, pp. 111–158; Ideological conflicts between democratic Czechoslovakia and fascist Italy did exacerbate the two countries' foreign-policy frictions, though did not trigger them.

Although in practice, Italy and Czechoslovakia were rival powers in Central Europe and the Danubian lands, they did share some common interests. Both were attempting to prevent the Anschluss of Austria, which would leave too much power in the hands of Germany, and at the same time, competing for economic influence in this country.<sup>9</sup> Czechoslovakia had extremely strong ties with France, which Rome viewed with great reservation. Italy's claims to the Adriatic coast were another source of tension, significantly complicating Rome's relations with Belgrade. Czechoslovakia's sympathies towards Yugoslavia<sup>10</sup> were based not only on "Slavic unity", but also on the alliance of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia), which was meant to be a bulwark against the revisionist ambitions of Hungary.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of the 1920s, after Mussolini failed to establish better diplomatic cooperation with this bloc, he reoriented his country towards Hungary.<sup>12</sup>

In April 1927, Rome and Budapest signed the Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation, and Arbitration. On the occasion, Mussolini gave a speech expressing contempt for the countries of the Little Entente, which naturally worsened Italy's relations with Czechoslovakia.<sup>13</sup> Though from a global point of view, Mussolini was a supporter of the Versailles System, bar a few exceptions in the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>14</sup> In 1929, the Treaty of Friendship between Czechoslovakia and Italy expired and in view of the abovementioned events, logically it was not renewed. In early-1930s Czechoslovakia, pro-Yugoslav attitudes and the attendant anti-Italian sentiments were gaining momentum.

The Great Depression provided a new impetus for ideas on deepening economic cooperation within Central Europe, possibly of a confederation, but such plans were stymied by the conflicting visions of Czechoslovakia and Italy, among other reasons.<sup>15</sup> Hitler's ascent to the Chancellery in 1933 was not viewed positively in Rome or in Prague, but again, the two countries' views regarding a possible solution were at odds. While Mussolini favoured a so-called Four-Power Pact (Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany), which would govern Europe and guarantee its stability, Beneš sought to increase cooperation among the Little Entente. Neither of these initiatives were particularly successful. The so-called Rome Protocols of 1934 reinforced Italy's ties with Austria and Hungary. Relations between Rome and Prague were also gradually improving with encouragement from Paris, something that had been lacking in the past.<sup>16</sup>

The year 1935, when Italy invaded Ethiopia, brought major change. In response, the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Rome but they were not fully respected<sup>17</sup> as Great Britain and France wanted to avoid completely alienating an important ally in a potential anti-

9 For more on the various economic cooperation projects in Central Europe as well as on the broader context of Czechoslovak-Italian relations, see HOUSKA, Ondřej. *Praha proti Římu. Československo-italské vztahy v letech 1922–1929*. Praha : Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 2011.

10 Until 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

11 FERENCÚHOVÁ, Bohumila. La France et la Petite Entente - vision slovaque. In HOREL, Catherine. *Nations, cultures et sociétés d'Europe centrale aux XIXe et XXe siècles*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006, pp. 83–105.

12 CACCAMO 2012, p. 81.

13 MILZA 2013, p. 416.

14 VARSORI, Antonio. How to Become a Great Power: Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922. In VARSORI, Antonio – ZACCARIA, Benedetto (eds.) *Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922*. Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 2.

15 MARÈS, Antoine. *Edvard Beneš. Un drame entre Hitler et Staline*. Paris : Perrin, 2015, pp. 167–227. See also the following article, which argues in favour of Beneš's position ŠEPTÁK, Miroslav. Československo-italské soupeření ve střední Evropě v letech 1929–1938. In RAUCHOVÁ – JIROUŠEK 2012, pp. 109–126.

16 CACCAMO 2012, pp. 84–86.

17 Beneš, as President of the General Assembly of the League of Nations, supported adoption of the sanctions. They were only officially lifted in July 1936.

German coalition. Italy's engagements in East Africa and its support of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War brought it closer to Hitler (the Berlin-Rome axis) while also drawing its attention away from Central Europe, creating room for German expansion.<sup>18</sup> In 1937, Rome further deepened relations with Budapest and Vienna, also signing a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia and made a gentleman's agreement with Great Britain. Unlike in 1934, Mussolini was no longer wholly opposed to the idea of the Anschluss even though he was keeping the door open for an alliance with Great Britain and France in case Hitler should attempt a takeover of the German-speaking South Tirol (Alto Adige). The international situation was becoming increasingly tense. In March 1938 after the Anschluss, Germany stepped up pressure on Czechoslovakia to annex territories inhabited by ethnic Germans. As far as the Sudetenland was concerned, Mussolini wanted Germany to have the final word, which would put further strain on the Versailles System. At the same time, the *Duce* was opposed to a military solution, for which Italy was unprepared. The Munich Agreement was thus a success for Mussolini, earning him the moniker "Angel of Peace" back home<sup>19</sup>, though the triumph would be short lived.

### The official historical memory of the Legion in Italy in the interwar period

The official historical memory of Czechoslovak legionnaires and the Legion from Italy began to form immediately following their deployment on the front. Monuments to the fallen and the executed were erected at battle sites, military orders were issued on important anniversaries related to the Legion in Italy, and Czechoslovak army and political representatives exchanged salutations with their Italian counterparts through telegraphs. Because the legionnaires had played an important role in the creation of Czechoslovakia, the newly founded state was hugely invested in cultivating their memory. Czechoslovak Legion regiments from Italy, which in 1920 were merged with local Czechoslovak regiments as part of a unification of the armed forces, retained their Italian heritage. They were given nicknames referencing locations, names, and battles in Italy that were important to their history. On 24 October 1923, Infantry Regiment 31 was honourably nicknamed "Arco", 32 became "Garda", 33 "Doss Alto", 34 "Rifleman Jan Čapek", and 35 "Foligno". "Reconnaissance" Regiment 39 was also later given an honourable nickname associated with Italy.<sup>20</sup>

Italian legionnaire literature was being published, though for understandable reasons it remained in the shadow of memoirs and fictional works devoted to the Legion in Russia. During battles on the Italian front, in Slovakia, and in Tešín Silesia, several Czechoslovak soldiers kept diaries<sup>21</sup>, however, many of them were only edited and published in recent decades.<sup>22</sup> In *Doss Alto*, one part of his trilogy from 1938, the famous legionnaire writer Adolf Zeman described the titular conflict. The key personality in the historiography of

18 MILZA 2013, pp. 641, 650–654.

19 MILZA 2013, pp. 667, 670.

20 The assignment of honourable nicknames was carried out by a presidential decree issued in 1923 by the Ministry for National Defence.

21 LIBIŠ, František – HRUŠKA, Ladislav. *Pod prapor odboje: (v řadách Československého dobrovolnického sboru v Itálii)*. Brno : Moravský legionář, 1927; LIBIŠ, František. *Ve stínu Apenin a Alp. Vzpomínky vojáka československé revoluce v Itálii*. Brno : Moravský legionář, 1928.

22 FLEICHMANN, Václav. *Paměti lékaře Čs. légie v Itálii 1910–1920*. Praha : Votobia, 2002; DUDEK, Josef. *Učitel na frontě: denník legionáře Josefa Dudka*. Praha : Epoque; Československá obec legionářská, 2019; VALNÍČEK, Svatopluk. *Vzpomínky na Velkou válku*. Prague : ANLET, 2014; TRÍSKA, Jan. *Zapomenutá fronta: vojákův denník a úvahy jeho syna*. Praha : Ivo Železný, 2001; APFEL, Viliam. *Čas bez. Martin* : Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 2005.



the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy was trained historian and former legionnaire František Bednařík, who published several books on this matter.<sup>23</sup> Naturally, there were other authors in both Czechoslovakia and Italy who wrote about the subject.<sup>24</sup>

## Celebrations in the anniversary year of 1928

Czechoslovakia placed the highest importance on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Legion in Italy. During a private breakfast with the Italian ambassador, Beneš mentioned that he would like to come to Rome on the occasion not only to commemorate the creation of the Legion in Italy, but also to discuss the economic and security challenges faced by Central Europe with Mussolini.<sup>25</sup> The Italian leader thought it imprudent to ascribe too great an importance to the anniversary and had no interest in meeting with Beneš, which he justified by claiming that the Italian government desired the celebrations to have a strictly military character and would limit the attendance of civilians.<sup>26</sup>

During the interwar period, it was common for veterans, mostly of the victorious powers, to go on remembrance visits of cemeteries and former battle sites. In this spirit, Czechoslovak legionnaires who had fought in Italy set out on a trip to Rome following a trail of important battlefields and memorial sites, which included many detours along the way. For political reasons, they were granted free visas to enter Italy and a 50-per cent discount on train fares. On 8 April, around 150<sup>27</sup> legionnaires arrived in Brennero where they were welcomed by an Italian military delegation who then accompanied them the remainder of the way to the capital. The same day, the group reached Rovereto<sup>28</sup> where they were joined by General Graziani and took a tour of the cemetery, the museum, and the city. They visited in succession: Riva del Garda, Loppio, Doss Alto (where a handful of soil was taken to be laid at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Prague), Arco, Peschiera, Verona, Venice, San Donà di Piave, and the former Piave front. On 13 April, the group took a trip to Conegliano at which point General Graziani left to return to Rome. The following day, part of the legionnaires returned to Prague, which suggests that they may have found it more important to visit the remembrance sites than to attend the official ceremony in the capital. The remaining 80 legionnaires continued via Bologna to Florence, which they toured on 15 April. They then continued via Foligno to Rome, arriving on 17 April and enjoying an official welcome by representatives of the Italian government. On 16 April, another delegation also arrived in Rome directly from Prague comprising of “five colonels or lieutenant-colo-

23 For the author's bibliography, see entry “František Bednařík” in the Biographical Dictionary of the Czech Lands. [http://biography.hiu.cas.cz/Personal/index.php/BEDNA%C5%98%C3%8DK\\_Franti%C5%A1ek\\_24.9.1892-5.3.1944](http://biography.hiu.cas.cz/Personal/index.php/BEDNA%C5%98%C3%8DK_Franti%C5%A1ek_24.9.1892-5.3.1944) [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

24 For instance, LOGAJ, Josef. *Československé legie v Itálii*. Praha : F. Žďárský, 1920; MORAVEC, Otakar. *O naší zahraniční armádě v Itálii*. Kolín : self-published, 1922; PORCINARI, Giulio Cesare Gotti. *Coi legionari cecoslovacchi al fronte italiano ed in Slovacchia (1918-1919)*. Roma : Ministero della guerra, Comando del Corpo di stato maggiore, Ufficio storico, 1933.

25 Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (ASMAE), Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 7 February 1928, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth abbreviated as MFA), telegraph copy no. 924; See also *I documenti diplomatici italiani, settima serie: 1922-1935, volume VI (1 gennaio - 23 settembre 1928)*. Roma : Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1967, pp. 82–83.

26 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 15 February 1928, copy of Mussolini's telegraph to the Italian Embassy in Prague. See also *I documenti diplomatici italiani* 1967, pp. 95–96.

27 According to other sources, there were as many as 200. See Triezvy taliansky hlas o československom odboji. In *Slovenský denník*, 3 May 1928, p. 3.

28 We discuss the importance of the monuments and locations visited by the legionnaires in a later part of this paper.

nels, one for each regiment formed in Italy<sup>29</sup>; one colonel from the Ministry of National Defence and three or four MPs who travelled as private individuals. In Rome, where the legionnaires were received by General Graziani among others, part of the group who were dressed in legionnaire uniforms lodged in the Barracks of King Umberto I. On 17 April, they laid wreaths at the Pantheon, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and the Martyrs. The next day they were scheduled to go on an official tour of the Barracks of King Umberto I, which housed the Museum of the Grenadiers of Sardinia, and then attend a lunch at the Ministry of Defence. Later, the legionnaires were received by Mussolini in the Victory Room at the Chigi Palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters, and in the evening, they visited the Rome Opera House. The following day they took a tour of the city and its surroundings. From the Italian capital, part of the group of legionnaires returned home and around 30 remaining proceeded via Naples, Palermo, and Messina to Reggio Calabria.<sup>30</sup> The tourism aspect of this journey deserves some attention insofar as, apart from reflecting the undeniable popularity of Italy as a destination, it attests to the fact that such “luxury” was accessible to an ever-widening segment of the population, in contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Legion understandably had a wide scope and took place in various locations. In Czechoslovakia, the events culminated in a visit by General Graziani, whose trip was sanctioned by the Italian Ministry of War. The general arrived in the Czechoslovak capital on 28 April accompanied by a mission of several officers. Although Italy insisted that the ceremony in Prague have a strictly military character, according to Italian Ambassador Count Luigi Vannutelli Rey, local authorities attempted to usurp it for their own purposes. Immediately after Graziani’s arrival and official welcome, Vannutelli Rey warned the general to keep clear of non-uniformed representatives of the Czechoslovak government or state. On the morning of 29 April, Graziani laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then moved to a function at the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House.<sup>31</sup> Aside from the many official guests, seats of honour in the hall were reserved for relatives of fallen and executed legionnaires. The function began with a speech by the chairman of the “Association of Italian Legionnaires”, František Šišma, who was followed by Minister of Defence František Udržal and by the Italian ambassador. Vannutelli Rey limited his comments to reminiscing about the war, having served under Graziani’s command as well as alongside Czechoslovak legionnaires, whom he showered with praise. He did this at the behest of Mussolini, who had also asked the ambassador to emphasise that the victory on the Italian Front had been achieved by the Italian army.<sup>32</sup> Afterwards, the vice-chairman of the Czechoslovak Legionnaire Association, Lev Sychrava, took to the lectern followed by General Graziani himself.<sup>33</sup>

29 Six regiments (31th–35th, 39th) were founded in Italy. On 1 October 1920, they were merged with the Czechoslovak army by a decree issued by the Ministry of National Defence, no. 5700-org.1919.

30 We reconstructed the itinerary of the trip from a planned agenda provided by the Italian authorities. It is possible that the legionnaires diverged from this scheduled route. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, attachment to a telegraph sent by the Italian Ministry of Transport to the Italian MFA, and other documents from this box.

31 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 1 May 1928, telegraph no. 100 from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

32 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Ambassador Vannutelli Rey’s speech in Prague, 29 April 1928.

33 Oslava 10. výročí zřízení československé armády v Itálii. In *Československá republika*, 1 May 1928, p. 3.

The ambassador was troubled by the words of the minister of national defence, who concluded his speech by saying that the countries of the Little Entente along with their allies from the First World War would treat anyone who might attempt to “destroy by force a part of what had been achieved through such immense sacrifice” as an enemy. Vannutelli Rey read this as a veiled, though highly contrived, reference to the most sensitive foreign affairs issues of the day and he sought a way of conveying his disapproval for this attempt by the Czechoslovaks to exploit the presence of the Italian mission for the intents of their own foreign policy. He did not, however, wish to resort to a formal protest insofar as it might interrupt the ongoing ceremony, which was above all, a demonstration of the Czechoslovak army and the people’s affection for the Italian general. After an official lunch at Hradčany with President Masaryk, the ambassador decided to abstain from the rest of the day’s events as a form of protest. He also declined Defence Minister Udržal’s invitation for lunch the next day, doing so at the very last moment and subsequently made sure that the Czechoslovak authorities interpreted his actions as he had intended them. Czechoslovak diplomats assured the ambassador that Udržal had merely hoped to impress upon Hungary that Czechoslovakia was capable of diminishing the effects of the Italian-Hungarian friendship. By the ambassador’s reckoning, the minister’s speech was also inspired by Beneš’s foreign-policy outlook seeking to ensure Czechoslovakia’s security by moving the country towards Italy, which would have been on friendly terms with France. Furthermore, Vannutelli Rey was convinced that if Beneš himself had been present in Prague during the event, the minister for national defence would not have committed such a “grave misstep”.<sup>34</sup>

After lunch with the president, General Graziani visited the Resistance Memorial Institute and in the evening hours, he attended a traditional stage play.<sup>35</sup> On the morning of 30 April, he visited the Italian military cemetery in Milovice. Later, the members of the Italian mission were awarded the Order of the White Lion and treated to lunch with the minister of defence. In the afternoon, Graziani laid a wreath at the Olšany Cemetery, which housed the remains of 44 legionnaires executed on the Italian front and the following day he went, on his own request, to meet with the mother of celebrated war hero Alois Štorch<sup>36</sup>, who had only recently returned from a visit to the locations around Italy where her son had fought.<sup>37</sup>

In his report from the trip, Graziani stated that the Czechoslovak government had gone to great lengths to highlight the importance of his visit. He also shared some positive reflections regarding the progress that the country had made since his previous visit in 1925 and stressed that the general populace, the socialists, as well as the army were now more favourably inclined towards the fascist regime.<sup>38</sup>

34 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 1 May 1928, telegraph no. 100 from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

35 Generál Graziani v Prahe. In *Slovenský denník*, 1 May 1928, p. 3.

36 Štorch was captured by Austro-Hungarian troops during a dangerous sabotage mission on Lake Garda. Although he could not swim, he allegedly attempted to escape by jumping into the lake. He fainted and was subsequently dragged out of the water by the enemy. During his execution on 5 July 1918, he refused to wear a blindfold, put on his own noose, and lifted his legs to expedite his demise. Alois Štorch: Zámečník a oběšený legionář, který miloval české básníky. Na šibenici odmítl pásku přes oči. In *Lidovky*, 5 July 2019, [https://www.lidovky.cz/lide/alois-storch-zamecnik-a-obeseny-legionar-ktery-miloval-ceske-basniky.A190704\\_134716\\_lide\\_mber](https://www.lidovky.cz/lide/alois-storch-zamecnik-a-obeseny-legionar-ktery-miloval-ceske-basniky.A190704_134716_lide_mber) [last viewed on 24 March 2021].

37 The visit most likely took place in the village of Nová Ves u Bakova. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Stefani press agency releases regarding these events.

38 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 7 May 1928, General Graziani’s report from his mission in Czechoslovakia.

Graziani's visit continued to resonate even after his departure. The Italian ambassador noticed an article in the *Československá republika* journal which reported that during a visit to Hungary, Count Baratelli, editor of the Roman daily *La Tribuna*, had stated that just as the Alps were the natural border of Italy, so it was legitimate for Hungary to want to reclaim its natural border, the Carpathians. However according to the journal, it was clear that Mussolini did not share this view as indicated by a statement by General Graziani who had allegedly told his Czech friends that his visit had a political dimension and had been organised at the behest of the *Duce* who thus wanted to “document Italy's sympathies towards Czechoslovakia”.<sup>39</sup> Vannutelli Rey thought it unlikely that General Graziani would have said something to that effect. He interpreted the article as being part of a Czechoslovak government campaign and proposed that Italian dailies “set things straight”.<sup>40</sup>

Ceremonies were held not only in Prague, but also in cities and towns garrisoning regiments whose foundations had been laid in Italy. The fact that they were formed in towns across the region of Umbria was also reflected in the plans for the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia and of “Foligno” Infantry Regiment 35. This regiment was named for the town of Foligno in the Perugia province of Umbria where it was formed. Its commander, Colonel Hynek Koptík, invited the mayor of Perugia to the celebrations reasoning that the legionnaires would always consider Umbria “as their homeland, their cradle, and the first step in their quest for freedom”.<sup>41</sup> Although the Italian Ministry of Defence approved this journey, sources do not mention that the mayor ultimately attended the ceremonies. They took place on 5–8 July offering a varied programme and culminating in the handover of and swearing of an oath to the new regimental banner (the old one was laid at the Resistance Memorial Institute).<sup>42</sup>

On 21 April, on the initiative of “Reconnaissance” Regiment 39, the Reduta palace in Bratislava hosted a military tattoo<sup>43</sup> which saw the attendance of the Italian consul, several official guests, and Minister of Education Milan Hodža. The minister took patronage over the event, which “celebrated the Czechoslovak-Italian friendship”<sup>44</sup> and in his speech he highlighted the contributions of the regiments created in Italy to the “liberation” of Slovakia in December 1918 and January 1919.

Celebrations were also held on the anniversary of the founding of the “Garda” Infantry Regiment 32 from Košice. The official part of the ceremony was moved back from April to July 1928, starting with a shooting contest on 5 July and culminating with a march to the Mound to the Fallen in the Battles of 1919 in Medzev. There a memorial plaque dedicated by the Eastern-Slovak branch of the Sokol movement<sup>45</sup> to the soldiers killed in the war with the Hungarian Soviet Republic was unveiled.<sup>46</sup>

39 Vzkaz generála Grazianiho. In *Československá republika*, 5 May 1928, p. 1.

40 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 5 May 1928, Vannutelli Rey to the Italian MFA.

41 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Plzeň, 6 March 1918, copy of the letter sent by Colonel Koptík to the mayor of Perugia.

42 Včerejší vojenská slavnost v Plzni. In *Nová Doba*, 9 July 1928, p. 2.

43 Slobodu dáva si národ sám. In *Slovenský denník*, 24 April 1928, pp. 1–2.

44 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 23 April 1928, telesspresso no. 504, Vannutelli Rey to the Italian MFA.

45 The Sokol movement was an athletic union founded in the mid-1800s, which played a part in the development of Czech patriotism.

46 Oslavy 32. pluku Gardského v Košiciach. In *Slovenský denník*, 12 July 1928, p. 4.

General Graziani was not the only person commemorated at the festivities honouring the Czechoslovak Legion. Others included the chief of the Italian General Staff, General Armando Diaz<sup>47</sup>, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Association in Italy, Jan Čapek, who fell during the Battle of the Piave, and most importantly, General Štefánik. Štefánik's Italian ties are highlighted by the fact that two of the three<sup>48</sup> Italian crewmembers who were on board his aircraft when it went down on 4 May 1919 were interred with him at the Bradlo Mound.

The members of the Committee to Build a Mound to General Štefánik<sup>49</sup>, namely Fedor Houdek and František Hromada, a former legionnaire from Italy, approached the Italian consul in Moravian Ostrava, Dadone, saying that they would like to invite General Graziani and Prince Pietro Lanza di Scalea, the former chairman of the *Comitato Italiano per l'indipendenza cecoslovacca* (Italian Committee for Czechoslovak Independence), to the inauguration of the memorial. In their view, a significant Italian presence would be in line with Štefánik's sympathies towards their country. The committee also pointed out that, particularly in Slovakia, people were sensitive about the fact that although General Graziani repeatedly visited Czechoslovakia, he never came to Slovakia, which was home to many of the legionnaires who had served under his command and who would have been honoured to meet with him again. Dadone, however, feared that an official Italian presence could be exploited in the interests of anti-Hungarian propaganda and so Italian representatives told organisers that Graziani and the prince would not attend the ceremony. As Italy could not afford to ignore the proceedings altogether, the ambassador decided that the country would be represented by the Bratislava consul, Francesco Palmieri. At the same time, Dadone was supposed to inform the organising committee that the Italian side did not wish for the ceremony to take on an anti-Hungarian character, as under such circumstances the Italian consul's attendance would be considered inappropriate.<sup>50</sup> In his report from the ceremony, Palmieri summarised the guests' speeches, noting that only that of Minister Hodža could have been interpreted as "anti-Hungarian". He expressed surprise at the fact that none of the speakers had mentioned the Italian soldiers buried alongside Štefánik or even brought up the general's death, limiting themselves to merely highlighting his contribution to the "liberation of the homeland".<sup>51</sup>

## Graziani's death

An important moment in the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation came with the tragic death of General Graziani in February 1931. Ambassador Orazio Pedrazzi reported that Graziani's passing had caused an outpouring of sorrow in Czecho-

47 *Lidové noviny* (poobedňajšie vydanie), 8 March 1928, p. 1.

48 Originally, all three Italian crewmembers were buried at the site but the remains of one of them were later moved to Italy.

49 It was likely this committee, though the source does not make it entirely clear.

50 ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1928, box 5, Rome, 26 July 1928, telespresso 238983 addressed to the Italian Embassy in Prague, and attachments.

51 ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1928, box 5, Bratislava, 24 September 1918, report elaborated by the Italian Consul in Bratislava for the Italian Ambassador in Prague. Hodža's speech was published in the *Slovenský denník* daily on 25 September 1928.

slovakia. All the papers, even the socialist outlet, published reverential articles about the man, and masses of people along with official authorities came out to voice their grief.<sup>52</sup>

The *Lidové noviny* daily wrote about the circumstances of the general's death and informed that his funeral had been postponed to allow for Czechoslovak representatives to attend.<sup>53</sup> On 15 March, on the initiative of the "Association of Italian Legionnaires" and with the support of the Czechoslovak government, a remembrance event was held in honour of the deceased general. In his speech, the Italian ambassador who had served under his command for a year during the war, emphasised Graziani's contributions and expressed regret over the way in which this great man who had weathered so many perils of the battlefield ultimately met his end. He declared that Graziani had been a righteous heir to Garibaldi's legacy and that Italians had always stood on the side of those fighting for national freedom. He also spoke about the death of another accomplished general, Štefánik.<sup>54</sup>

Pedrazzi's reflections on the event itself are also important. In a cable to Rome, he noted that from a political vantage point, it was of some significance to have drawn, among others, all the representatives of the French embassy and military mission. In his speech, the ambassador avoided any political statements, restricting himself to celebrating the "brotherhood in arms during the war". He considered Beneš's speech to have been most noteworthy to the extent that it conveyed the politician's first-ever formal expression of gratitude towards Italy for its "boundless cordiality". Beneš even said a few kind words about Mussolini (who had supported the Czechoslovak cause during the war) and "insisted on speaking Italian" in front of the French and Yugoslav delegations. The ambassador further attributed the event's "agreeable" atmosphere to the signing of the London Naval Treaty<sup>55</sup>, which Czechoslovak politicians reportedly viewed as a safeguard against revisionism and a step towards the isolation of Hungary, the weakening of Germany, and the opening of the road for Beneš to the chairmanship of the World Disarmament Conference.<sup>56</sup> Pedrazzi had not, however, forgotten to mention that not long ago, Czechoslovak public opinion of Italy had not been entirely positive. According to the ambassador, Beneš would try to move his country closer to Italy only insofar as it would not upset the French.<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after his death, Graziani received another honour. On 16 April 1931, at the request of the minister of defence, President Masaryk issued Decree 2618, by which "Reconnaissance" Infantry Regiment 39 was renamed to "Reconnaissance Regiment of General Graziani".<sup>58</sup>

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52 Generál Andrea Graziani zomrel. In *Slovenský denník*, 1 March 1931, p. 2, published an obituary and a panegyric biography of General Graziani.

The Italian ambassadors paid particular attention in their cables to the reactions of the Leftist parties, which generally were not as favourably disposed towards the fascist regime. For more on Czechoslovak society's attitude to the ascendance of fascism see GRITTI, Fabiano. *La Cecoslovacchia e l'ascesa del fascismo in Italia*. In *Studi italo-slovacchi*, 2020, Vol. IX, No 1, pp. 3–19.

53 Jak zahynul generál Graziani. In *Lidové noviny* (poobedňajšie vydanie), 3 March 1931, p. 1.

54 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Praha, 6. 3. 1931, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA, interview attached.

55 The London Naval Treaty, signed on 22 April 1930, limited the naval capacities of the great powers.

56 The Italians were trying their best to thwart Beneš's bid for the chairmanship (1932–1934). In the end, the office went to the British politician Arthur Henderson.

57 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Prague, 20 March 1931, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

58 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Rome, 11 May 1931, verbal note for the Italian Embassy in Czechoslovakia.

## Celebrations in the anniversary year of 1938

The celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Legion were held under very different international circumstances, which understandably had a noticeable effect. In March 1938, Beneš approached the Italian ambassador saying that Czechoslovakia would like to hold a celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Legion in Italy as a “gesture of thanks, friendship, and affection towards Italy on the part of the Czechoslovak legionnaires”. In Czechoslovakia, the event would be held under Beneš’s patronage and as part of the anniversary, some Czechoslovak legionnaires would travel to Italy.<sup>59</sup> The Italian foreign service replied that the prevailing conditions were inconducive to such a proposal.<sup>60</sup>

According to Italian Ambassador Domenico de Facendis, Rome could not forget that high-ranking former Czechoslovak legionnaires from Italy had failed to express their support for Italy in times when the country was struggling with international sanctions.<sup>61</sup> De Facendis asked Rome for instructions as to how he should act during the celebrations suggesting that he probably should attend at least one of them, though without giving a speech.<sup>62</sup>

On 17 April, Czechoslovakia took a conciliatory step towards Italy when it recognised its occupation of Ethiopia.<sup>63</sup> *Slovenský denník* linked the decision to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Legion in Italy. “Czechoslovakia’s actions may be seen as a gesture of thanks for the help which Italy provided us 20 years ago when we were fighting for our national and political independence.”<sup>64</sup> The ceremony, held under the patronage of President Beneš, took place on 21 April 1938 at the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House in Prague. According to a cable from the Italian ambassador, who at the last moment had been granted permission to attend the event but without delivering a speech, it had been a “cordial demonstration of gratitude to our homeland”. Speeches were continuously interrupted by spontaneous applause whenever the Italian king and emperor, Prime Minister Mussolini, or General Graziani were mentioned.<sup>65</sup>

The Italian Consul in Bratislava also initially did not plan on attending the celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of “General Graziani’s Reconnaissance” Infantry Regiment 39, but in the end, he was granted permission by the ambassador.<sup>66</sup> Celebrations in Bratislava were held between 17 and 24 April and included an exhibition on the regiment, public concerts, a ceremonial march through the city, a military parade, and a speech by Minister of National Defence František Machník, etc. *Slovenský denník* described how the Legion in Italy was formed and also mentioned that Italy had provided “the compara-

59 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 7 March 1938, telegraph no. 025, Italian Embassy in Prague to the Italian MFA.

60 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Rome, 25 March 1938, telespresso no. 496, Italian MFA to the Italian Embassy in Prague.

61 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 7 March 1938, telegraph no. 025, Italian Embassy in Prague to the Italian MFA.

62 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 9 March 1938, Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

63 *I documenti diplomatici italiani, ottava serie: 1935-1939, vol. VIII (1° gennaio - 23 aprile 1938)*. Roma : Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999, p. 589.

64 Po československom uznání habešského císařstva. In *Slovenský denník*, 21 April 1938, p. 2.

65 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 22 April 1938, telespresso no. 586/400, Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

66 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Bratislava, 11 April 1938, telegraph no. 823, Consul Francesco Lo Faro to the Italian ambassador.

tively best-armed and best-organised divisions, which played a large part in the liberation of Slovakia”.<sup>67</sup> Additional celebrations were held at Štefánik’s Mound in Ivanka pri Dunaji. The fallen soldiers of the “Battle for Slovakia” were commemorated at a monument at the cemetery in Nové Zámky and also in the town of Komárno.

As part of the celebrations in Košice, “Garda” Infantry Regiment 32 were gifted a silver fanfare trumpet. This was followed by a military parade and the laying of wreaths at the statue of M. R. Štefánik. The regiment were also sent telegraphs by three of their former Italian officers.<sup>68</sup>

In the difficult situation of 1938, Czechoslovakia tried its best to improve relations with Italy. At the beginning of May that year, due to a proposal by the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party, two streets in the capital were renamed for General Graziani and the Czechoslovak civil defence units from Italy. According to an Italian Embassy cable, the recent recognition of the Italian Empire by Czechoslovakia and the gesture of honour on the part of the capital were efforts to remedy the mistakes of Czechoslovak foreign policy, “which often tends to forget that we are a great power”.<sup>69</sup>

As mentioned previously, Štefánik was an important personality in Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation and so the Italian Consul in Bratislava took part in a remembrance event held on the anniversary of the general’s death on 4 May 1938 in Ivanka pri Dunaji. In his speech, General Miloš Žák mentioned Štefánik’s actions, the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy, and the “pan-Germanic plots against the republic”. The Italian consul filed a written complaint against this particular remark, though Žák assured him that he had been referring to historical pan-Germanism not to the contemporary political situation. At the consul’s request, any mention of pan-Germanism, historical or otherwise, was omitted from the press reports.<sup>70</sup>

### **Czechoslovak legionnaire monuments and cemeteries in Italy**

Aside from the abovementioned ceremonies, the historical memory of the Legion in Italy was preserved by other means. Monuments, memorial plaques, and graves naturally arose in places where Czechoslovak legionnaires and so-called “recons” were active in 1917 and 1918. These were mostly located in two regions: the area surrounding Lake Garda and Veneto. Typologically, monuments to fallen Czechoslovak legionnaires in Italy can be divided into two groups. The first, and more widely seen, is comprised of monuments to the fallen and the executed located at or near the execution sites. From an iconographic standpoint, they are rather more subdued. The second group encompasses monuments erected at military cemeteries.

Monuments to executed legionnaires are particularly widespread and typologically significant. In the area of Lake Garda, the largest such monument can be found in the village of Arco. It was built in honour of four executed legionnaires—Antonín Ježek, Karel Nováček, Jiří Schlegl, and Václav Svoboda—who were hanged as deserters by Austro-Hungarian

67 Jubileum našich légii a naša vďačnosť Itálii. In *Slovenský denník*, 22 April 1938, p. 1.

68 Slovenská krajina odmieňa jubilujúci peší pluk 32 Gardský. In *Slovenský hlas: nezávislý denník*, 26 April 1938, p. 4.

69 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 2 May 1938, telegraph addressed to the Italian MFA.

70 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Bratislava, 4 May 1938, telesspresso no. 1178 from the consul to the ambassador.



troops on 21 September 1918. An original, simpler monument was renovated in 1938 at the request of the “Association of Italian Legionnaires” and the Resistance Memorial Institute. A monument in honour of the aforementioned legionnaire and war hero, Alois Štorch, can be found in the town of Riva del Garda.<sup>71</sup> In the past, a monument commemorating legionnaire Alois Sobotka could be found in Pieve di Bono, but today it no longer exists.<sup>72</sup>

In the town of Conegliano, in Veneto, on the Street of Czechoslovak Martyrs (Via Martiri Cecoslovacchi), there is a memorial plaque dedicated to 15 executed Czechoslovak legionnaires—the largest group to be executed on the Italian front—who were members of the 39th Rifle Regiment.<sup>73</sup> Another memorial plaque, dedicated to three men executed on 16 June 1918, was erected in the town of Oderzo on the tenth anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy, and one dedicated to three legionnaires also executed on 16 June 1918 was installed in the nearby village of Piavon. The town of San Donà di Piave<sup>74</sup> near Venice is the site of two more memorial plaques. One installed in 1928 in the area of Davanzo is dedicated to five hanged soldiers and another in the district of Calvecchia, is dedicated to Bedřich Hlavena, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Corps in Italy. Ten more executed legionnaires have a memorial plaque dedicated to them in the town of Montone near Collalto. Also, a plaque in San Stino di Livenza commemorates soldiers Alois Herzig and František Turpiš.<sup>75</sup>

That the memory of executed legionnaires was treated with exceptional reverence is also demonstrated by the fact that in 1921 and 1922, the remains of 44 out of 46<sup>76</sup> executed legionnaires were transported to Czechoslovakia and interred in a tomb of honour at the Olšany Cemetery in Prague.<sup>77</sup> Fallen legionnaires in Italy were mostly buried at the Sacratio militare (military cemetery) di Castel Dante in Rovereto, which serves as the final resting place for 151 men, with one grave belonging to an unknown soldier. In 1924, the so-called Bell of the Fallen “Maria Dolens” was installed in Rovereto. The metal it was forged with was acquired from molten cannons symbolically donated by nineteen countries, including Czechoslovakia.<sup>78</sup> It was originally mounted at the Castel Veneto stronghold in Rovereto, the seat of a military museum (Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra), which since 1921, housed an exhibition dedicated to the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy.<sup>79</sup> On preassigned days, the bell would toll in memory of the fallen from specific belligerents of the First World War. Czechoslovak combatants were assigned the date of 15 June. A smaller replica of the bell was donated by the towns of Rovereto and Trento to the Czech municipality of Benešov in 1926 on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial plaque dedicated to the Italians who

71 Today, the monument serves as the site of regular remembrance events. A memorial plaque dedicated to legionnaire Leopold Jeřábek was mounted here in 2015. Štorch e Jeřábek: la solenne commemorazione, 26 September 2016, <https://www.comune.rivadelgarda.tn.it/Notizie-ed-eventi/Archivio-delle-notizie/Storch-e-Jerabek-la-solenne-commemorazione2> [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

72 KRETŠÍ, Jindřich. *Vznik a vývoj československé legie v Itálii*. Praha : self-published, 1928, p. 244.

73 The memorial plaque was restored in 1991.

74 The plaques in the latter three towns, as well as those in Gallarate and Solbiate Olona, were donated on the 10th anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion by the Association of Czechoslovak Legionnaires and the Resistance Memorial Institute. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 27 July 1928, telesspresso no. 239237, Italian MFA to the Italian Ministry for Finance.

75 KRETŠÍ 1928, p. 244.

76 The remains of two victims were not recovered after the war.

77 České vojenské hroby a památníky na italském území, 29 September 2014, [https://www.mzv.cz/rome/cz/ceskoslovenske\\_legie\\_v\\_italii/ceske\\_vojenske\\_hroby\\_a\\_pamatniky\\_na\\_1.html](https://www.mzv.cz/rome/cz/ceskoslovenske_legie_v_italii/ceske_vojenske_hroby_a_pamatniky_na_1.html) [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

78 Čs. legionáři zárukou bratrstva s Itáliou. In *Slovenský denník*, 14 April 1928, p. 3.

79 KRETŠÍ 1928, p. 245.

had died in a local internment centre.<sup>80</sup> Between 1918 and 1919, the cemetery in the town of Solbiate Olona near Milan, which no longer exists, housed the remains of 315 members of the Czechoslovak civil defence units, most of whom died as a consequence of injuries and infirmities.<sup>81</sup>

## Monuments to legionnaires and civil defencemen from Italy in Czechoslovakia

Monuments to legionnaires from Italy can be divided into two categories. The first comprises artefacts commemorating soldiers who fell abroad, the second, legionnaires and civil defencemen who laid down their lives in battles on Czechoslovak territory. Aside from the main remembrance sites, the Legion in Italy were also commemorated with traditional monuments to fallen legionnaires. Memorial plaques dedicated to executed combatants and other persons of note comprise a special category.

Legionnaires from Italy are, of course, also commemorated on the central monument Prague to Its Victorious Sons, even though out of the seven figures, only one depicts a legionnaire from Italy. The monument also includes references to the battles of Doss Alto and the Piave. These references and the depiction of a legionnaire wearing an Italian hat (worn by Alpini troops), were the most frequent and thus most widely recognisable symbols of the Legion from Italy.

Naturally, there was also an emphasis on preserving the memory of legionnaires executed on Czechoslovak territory. Josef Sobotka has a memorial plaque in his home village of Čachotín. Alois Štorch is immortalised by several artefacts across the Czech lands, such as a plaque in Nová Ves u Bakova. One memorial plaque to Jan Čapek can be found in the town of Hranice, and another from 1926 is mounted at the legionnaire's birthplace in Prague's borough of Michle. In 1928, the Sokol movement also unveiled a plaque on the house in Orlová where Jan Čapek was drafted.<sup>82</sup> Apart from monuments and memorial plaques dedicated to specific executed legionnaires, the Czech lands are graced by many other remembrance sites associated with the overall history of the Legion in Italy. One of the biggest is a monument to the fallen legionnaires from the Písek region in Peace Square in the town of Písek. One of the statues in the sculptural group depicts a legionnaire from Italy and the pedestal is inscribed with the names of famous battles including Doss Alto and the Piave. The central monument to the fallen of the Seven-Day War for Tešín Silesia, which can be found at the Orlová Cemetery, was unveiled on 30 September 1928.<sup>83</sup> The remains of legionnaire Jan Čapek were transferred here as early as 1922.

In Slovakia, the memorialisation of legionnaires and militiamen mostly relates to battles with Hungary in 1918 and 1919. Memorial sites were typically constructed in cemeteries where Czechoslovak soldiers found their final resting place. For instance, in 1919 a monument to the fallen was erected at the large military cemetery in the borough of Majer in the city of Banská Bystrica. It was basically a headstone, or more specifically a general

80 Italian residents of Austria-Hungary from Trentino who, starting in 1915, were interned in Benešov as untrustworthy. For more, see TYWONIAK, Jiří. Šedesát let česko-italské desky v Benešově. In *Jiskra*, 5 September 1986, p. 3.

81 After the destruction of the grave sites in 1968, the remains were transferred to the Cittadella military cemetery in Veneto.

82 Uctenie pamiatky zakladateľa československých légii. In *Slovenský denník*, 17 June 1928, s. 5.

83 *Těšínským hrdinům: památník vydaný ku slavnosti odhalení pomníku postaveného na hřbitově v Orlové*. Orlová: Spolek pro počtu padlých za Těšínsko, 1928.

monument to Czechoslovak soldiers killed in battles with Hungary. This included members of the 35th Rifle Regiment. Far more important is the monument at the Cemetery of St. Joseph in the town of Nové Zámky, whose cornerstone was laid on 24 June 1934, on the 15th anniversary of the battles with the Hungarian Soviet Republic, though it was only finished two years later. It was built on the site of new graves which hold the exhumed remains of fallen soldiers from several other cemeteries. Also noteworthy is a monument in the Komárno cemetery dedicated to sixteen defenders of the city from the 39th Rifle Regiment who died on 1 May 1919 during an attack by the Hungarian Bolsheviks. A smaller monument can be found at the mass grave in the village of Velký Ďur.

Apart from cemeteries, legionnaire monuments can be found at former battle sites such as Badín, Lučenec, or Turňa nad Bodvou. As far as the depiction of legionnaires from Italy is concerned, the Monument to the Fallen in Sered' is particularly important. It was constructed by two Slovak sculptors, Jozef Pospíšil and Vojtech Ihriský, and shows a legionnaire dressed in an Italian uniform with a rifle in his left hand and a raised banner in the right. The pedestal is inscribed with the words “[Dedicated to] the Fallen Heroes Defending Slovakia”, accompanied by Štúr’s maxim, “The way back is impossible; onward must we stride”.<sup>84</sup> There is also another, newer monument in Nové Zámky, which since 1922 stood outside the local Sokol headquarters and was meant to symbolise the subjugation of Slovakia within the Kingdom of Hungary and its “liberation” after the war. Two separate standing figures represent Czechoslovak legionnaires from Italy, while a group of three soldiers lie at their feet. The soldier in the middle is anchored with arms outstretched and the three fallen soldiers are depicted in Russian, Italian, and French legionnaire uniforms. A unique memorial plaque was unveiled in 1934 in Nové Zámky dedicated to the Commander of the 39th Rifle Regiment, Lt. Col. Jiří Jelínek, who was the highest-ranking officer to lay down his life in the war with the Hungarian Soviet Republic.<sup>85</sup> His remains were transported to Prague on 23 June 1919 and ceremonially inhumed at Olšany. President Masaryk as well as Minister of National Defence Václav Klofáč were present at the event.

These monuments are undeniably pro-republic and their aim was to symbolically mark the territory. References to the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy made up one layer of their iconography. In the case of monuments to soldiers who fell in battles with Poland and the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the dominant motif was that of (the original) defenders of the homeland who laid down their lives fighting for the common cause. Monuments and memorial plaques in Italy were seen as commemorating foreign citizens and simultaneously, victims. Their inauguration and continued preservation are evidence of the deep-seated tradition of honouring the fallen in Italy. On the other hand in Czechoslovakia, the Italian aspect of legionnaire monuments was secondary, principally alluding to the tradition behind the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy. This was most visible in the iconography and symbolism of the statues.

## Conclusion

This initial analysis of the official historical remembrance of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation (1918–1919) during the interwar period yields several conclusions, which

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84 Slávnosť odhalenie pomníka padlých v Seredi. In *Slovenská liga*, 1929, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, pp. 213–215.

85 Nezabúdajme, že naša sloboda bola vykúpená krvou a slzami. In *Slovenský denník*, 26 June 1934, p. 2.

could be adapted through more extensive research. It is clear that official memorialisation events took place against the backdrop of a complicated international political situation, which necessarily influenced their form and content. In 1928, Italian representatives feared that the celebrations would take on an anti-Hungarian character. Ten years later, they were initially reluctant to attend and ultimately resented the Czechoslovak representatives' anti-Germanic statements. For Italy, the Legion and the civil defence units were an instrument for improving its nation's image in Czechoslovakia. As far as individuals are concerned, Generals Štefánik and Graziani were accorded particular reverence. The Italians referenced Štefánik's affection for their country in their struggle regarding the command in Slovakia as early as 1919, though we should not forget that Štefánik was a French citizen and Czechoslovakia's minister of war, which naturally prevented the Italians from claiming him wholesale. Where General Graziani is concerned, the question naturally presents itself as to why he was preferred over General Piccione. His support for the fascist regime at home undoubtedly played a role but beyond that, he also personified the effectual deployment of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy – something that cannot be said of General Piccione, whose skirmishes with the Hungarian Soviet Republic in Slovakia were arguably less glorious. Graziani could thus at least partially compete with the popularity of General Pellé, who was then—and to this day continues to be—pedestalised as the “Saviour of Slovakia”. A similar competition of historical memory of the break of the Salonika front between France and Italy was much more pronounced in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.<sup>86</sup>

Commemorations are normally “constructed on the premise that they embody change and continuity, past and present at the same time”.<sup>87</sup> The Italian insistence on a strictly military character of the commemorations, the protest of the Italian ambassador against the Udržal's speech, and the article in *Československá republika* show the will of Rome, in line with its foreign policy, to break the symbolic past – present – future link that is often proper for public commemorations.

As far as their content is concerned, remembrance events in Czechoslovakia honoured the memory of the fallen and especially the executed, who were characterized as heroes and martyrs. On one hand, this was motivated by the need to foster a military tradition in the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic. Legionnaires such as Jan Čapek and Alois Štorch became important members in the pantheon of military personalities. On the other hand, the overall losses of Czechoslovak legionnaires on the Italian front were relatively low (especially in contrast to Russia), with only about 190 men perishing in battle.<sup>88</sup> To a certain extent, this could have been offset by the cult of the executed, which was mostly built around the legionnaires from Italy.

86 SRETENOVIĆ, Stanislav. Memory of the Break of the Salonika Front: an Aspect of Franco-Italian Rivalry in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 1918–1929. In RUDIĆ, Srđan – BIAGINI, Antonello – VUČETIĆ, Biljana (eds.) *Serbian-Italian Relations: History and Modern Times*. Belgrade : The Institute of History, Belgrade; Sapienza University of Rome, 2015, pp. 199–212.

87 BUCUR, Maria. Birth of a Nation. Commemorations of December 1, 1918, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Romania. BUCUR, Maria – WINGFIELD, Nancy M. (eds.) *Staging the Past. The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*. West Lafayette, Indiana : Purdue University Press, 2001, p. 289.

88 The overall losses, including men who succumbed to various injuries and illnesses, were tallied at 723. In Russia, 4 114 legionnaires died, 1 609 of them in battle. MICHL, Jan. *Legionáři a Československo*. Praha : Naše Vojsko, 2009, p. 20.

Comparing the celebrations of the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the formation of the Legion in Italy, certain differences can be seen. In 1928, the celebrations were part of wider festivities surrounding the decennial of the republic, mostly commemorating the formation of the Legion and the combat events of 1918. The visit of General Graziani, who symbolised the Czechoslovak deployment on the front, was basically the culmination. On the twentieth anniversary, the celebrations were held under very different circumstances as far as Czechoslovakia's international position was concerned. The sense of peril in the second half of the 1930s brought out the importance of the army with the military being present at every important social event. In contrast to 1928, the Czechoslovak Legion's contribution to the struggle against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 took on a broader resonance, despite the fact that the memory of these particular legionnaires and members of the civil defence units was still more strongly cultivated in Slovakia than on the national level. The festivities were more massive than in 1928 and there was no real interest in combining them with the commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the republic.

Monuments to fallen legionnaires and civil defencemen were an important anchoring point for Italy and Czechoslovakia's shared historical memory. References to Doss Alto or the Piave are thus commonplace in Czechoslovak legionnaire iconography. On the other hand, in Italy, monuments to executed Czechoslovak soldiers have been, above all, a symbol of honour to men who died fighting in Italian uniforms.<sup>89</sup>

Officially, the Czechoslovak republic refused Austrian "militarism" but it was impossible to deny that the new state was one of the results of the war that had ended recently. The historical legacy of the Czechoslovak Legion and subsequent military cooperation with France and to a lesser extent, with Italy, formed the basis of the Czechoslovak military tradition. In order to piece together a more complex picture of that tradition, it would undoubtedly be helpful to subject the two partnerships to a side-by-side analysis as well as to compare them to the legacy of the Legion in Russia.

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89 Great War military cemeteries are also notable, seeing as there were many more Czech and Slovak fighters (not legionnaires or civil defencemen) who fell in Italy and conversely, many more Italian soldiers who died in Czechoslovakia. However, they are not the subject of this paper.

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