

SERBIA AND ITALY IN THE GREAT WAR

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ITALY AND THE CREATION OF YUGOSLAVIA

DELEND AUSTRIA?*

Abstract: Nikola Pašić, president of the Serbian government during the Great War, never opted for a Great Serbia as opposed to Yugoslavia. That was why he considered Italian demands, as expressed in the Treaty of London, as more than perilous to Serbia's and Yugoslav interests. In his mind the war had to be fought with the demise of Austria-Hungary as its main objective, and with its heritage as the main objective of Serbia's war effort. To some extent his thinking corresponded to that of Italian Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, the architect of the territorial solutions set down in the Treaty of London. Both Pašić and Sonnino believed that the war effort would lose all meaning if the declining Austria-Hungary was replaced by a vigorous and threatening new neighbour, Italy and Yugoslavia respectively. The war turned out to be the unique opportunity for them to achieve not only their respective most ambitious national objectives but also, even more importantly, to impose strategic solutions necessary to ensure the defence of their enlarged respective states.

Keywords: Pašić, Great War, Serbia, Italy, Yugoslavia

The eastern Adriatic coast and the whole of the Balkans was the battle ground on which two empires of medieval origin, the Habsburg and the Ottoman, fought for supremacy in South-East Europe for centuries.

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The borders between them were established in accordance with the outcomes of the wars they waged for dominance of the South-East Europe. Once their conflicts ceased and the borders became stable at the end of the eighteenth century, Habsburg rule was firmly established on the eastern coast of the Adriatic and in the west of the Balkans. The nascent national movements began to question the non-national structure of both empires and, with time, became a threat to their very existence. This process, continuing throughout the nineteenth century, ended during the Balkan Wars and the Great War. The decline of the Ottoman Empire, a gradual and relentless process caused by its inability to introduce European-style reforms, left Austria-Hungary the sole great power present in South-East Europe at the end of the Balkan Wars. Considering the victory of the Balkan nations as a potential threat to the solidity of their empire, the Habsburg elites went so far as to start a war in order to fight what they saw as a destructive force of national movements, notably the South Slav one led by the neighbouring Serbian state. Therefore, what began as an existential concern of the Habsburg elites, the issue of the future of the Dual Monarchy in the Europe of nations became, after the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war, the survival imperative of Serbia embodied in the policy of *Delenda Austria*. The Great War and the efforts of the Entente to find new allies opened a new chapter in Italian relations with its Habsburg ally. The issue of the *terra irredenta* came to the foreground and found its ultimate expression in the relevant articles of the Treaty of London of April 1915, which did not explicitly call for *Delenda Austria*, but aimed to replace Habsburg dominance in the eastern Adriatic coast and the western part of the Balkans with Italian.

However, when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia in July 1914, the policy of *Delenda Austria* seemed inconceivable, since both the Central Powers and the Entente considered the Habsburg Empire as an indispensable structural element of the European balance of power. But Serbia declared the union of South Slavs to be its main war aim as early as December 1914, while the London Treaty in April 1915 announced the Italian bid for power in the Adriatic and in the Balkans.¹ The two national projects left no

¹ The bibliography on Serbian and Italian war aims is huge. The main works are Jasna Adler, *L'union forcée: La Croatie et la création de l'État yougoslave* (Geneva: Georg, 1997); Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984); Dušan T. Bataković, *Yougoslavie: nations, religions, ideologies* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1994); Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1989); James Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia. Negotiating Balkan Nationality and Identity* (London: Tauris, 2008); Dragoslav Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska*

room for the survival of Austria-Hungary as she was in July 1914. It seemed that in the case of the Entente winning the war victory the very survival of Austria-Hungary would be in danger, i.e. that *Delenda Austria* might become a realistic option. However, both in December 1914 and in April 1915 the victory of the Entente was less than certain, and *Delenda Austria* did not become the Allies' official strategy until the late spring of 1918. And even then, the Habsburg Empire, a reformed one perhaps, still had a large number of supporters among the Allied decision-makers.

Both to Rome and to Belgrade, *Delenda Austria* meant exactly the same thing: that Austria-Hungary had to lose control over its southern provinces. During the fall of 1914 and the spring of 1915, the main decision-makers of both Serbia and Italy arrive at the conclusion that their respective war efforts would be justified only if they took possession of the eastern Adriatic coast and its hinterland after the end of hostilities. In Belgrade, the government of Nikola Pašić concluded that a national state of the South Slavs should be created on the ruins of Austria-Hungary, whereas in Rome, Sidney Sonnino, Foreign Minister in the government of Antonio Salandra, concluded that the annexation of the remaining portions of the *terra irredenta* should be coupled with Italian strategic dominance in the Adriatic and the Balkans. Whereas Pašić opted for the policy of *Delenda Austria*, Sonnino was even inclined to accept a reformed Austria-Hungary

deklaracija 1917. godine (Belgrade: Savremena administracija, 1967); Dragoslav Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1973); Miro Kovač, *La France, la création du royaume «yougoslave» et la question croate, 1914–1929* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001); Bogdan Krizman, *Raspad Austro-Ugarske i stvaranje jugoslovenske države* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1977); Bogdan Krizman, *Hrvatska u Prvom svetskom ratu. Hrvatsko-srpski politički odnosi* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989); Vojislav G. Pavlović, *De la Serbie vers la Yougoslavie. La France et la naissance de la Yougoslavie 1878–1918* (Belgrade: Institut des Études balkaniques, 2015); Milada Paulová, *Jugoslovenski odbor. Povijest jugoslavenske emigracije za svjetskog rata od 1914.–1918* (Zagreb: Prosvjetna nakladna zadruga, 1925); Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije* (Zaječar: Zadužbina Nikole Pašića, 1995). The bibliography on Italian war aims being even larger, we shall cite only some of the works on Sonnino's strategy: Pier Luigi Ballini, ed., *Sonnino e il suo tempo (1914–1922)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2011); Geoffrey A. Haywood, *Failure of a dream: Sidney Sonnino and the rise and fall of liberal Italy (1847–1922)* (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1999); Sidney Sonnino, *Diario*, vol. 2: 1914–1916; vol. 3: 1916–1922 (Bari: Laterza, 1972); Sidney Sonnino, *Carteggio*, vol. 2: 1914–1916, vol. 3: 1916–1922 (Bari: Laterza 1975, 1981); Brunello Vigezzi, *I problemi della neutralità e della guerra nel carteggio Salandra-Sonnino: 1914–1917* (Milan: Dante Alighieri, 1962).

provided that she did not interfere with the Italian strategic control of the Adriatic.

The stage was thus set for a territorial conflict between at first Serbia and then Yugoslavia on one side and Italy on the other, which was not to be settled until after the Second World War. Different phases of the conflict have been described in detail and abundantly commented in recent historiography.²

Our intention is to retrace the evolution of the strategic thinking of Nikola Pašić that led to his belief that the only viable policy for Serbia during the Great War was the union of all South Slavs, which supposed the demise of Austria-Hungary. The most striking aspect of Pašić's strategy was that at no point during the Great War, not even in the most difficult moments such as the retreat from Serbia in late 1915 or the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution in the fall of 1917, did he think of seriously questioning the validity of the *Delenda Austria* policy. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to propose a study of the origins and implementation of Pašić's Yugoslav strategy, especially during the nascent, albeit latent conflict with Sonnino's project of territorial and political expansion into the eastern Adriatic coast.

Pašić's strategy was the result of his long experience as prime minister, foreign minister and diplomat from 1889 onwards.³ After the change of dynasty in 1903, he was the main architect of Serbia's foreign policy,

² Massimo Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia: (1922–1939)* (Bari: B. A. Graphis, 2006); Massimo Bucarelli, *La questione jugoslava nella politica estera dell'Italia repubblicana (1945–1999)* (Rome: Aracne, 2008); James H. Burgwyn, *Italian foreign policy in the interwar period, 1918–1940* (Westport, Conn. & London: Praeger, 1997); James H. Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic: Mussolini's conquest of Yugoslavia, 1941–1943* (New York: Enigma Books, 2005); Frédéric Le Moal, *La France et l'Italie dans les Balkans 1914–1919. Le contentieux adriatique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); Dragutin Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje 1914–1918* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1970); Dragoljub Živojinović, *Amerika, Italija i postanak Jugoslavije 1917–1919* (Belgrade: Naučna knjiga, 1970).

³ On Pašić and his ideas on the Yugoslav question see Nikola Pašić, *Moja politička ispovest: beleške za brošuru* (Belgrade: Zadužbina Miloša Crnjanskog, 1989); Vasilije Krestić, ed., *Nikola Pašić – život i delo. Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa u Srpskoj akademiji nauka i umetnosti* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 1997); Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1984); Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1958); Vasa Kazimirović, *Nikola Pašić i njegovo doba: 1845–1926*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Nova Evropa, 1990); Dragoslav Janković, "'Veliki' i 'mali' ratni program Nikole Pašića 1914–1918)", *Anali Pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu* 2 (1973), 151–167.

with the exception of the 1908–1912 period when his colleague Milovan Milovanović was in office. His policy of identifying Serbia's war aims with the Yugoslav programme as well as Sonnino's uncompromising defence of the terms of the London Treaty set the stage for a series of diplomatic and even military frictions during the Great War, to mention but a few: negotiations about the creation of a large pro-Allied Balkan alliance in the fall of 1914 and first half of 1915, the Corfu Declaration, the official recognition of the Yugoslav movement and, finally, the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and its territorial dispute with Italy in the Adriatic. Prior to discussing these moments of conflict in relations between Serbia and Italy in more detail, one must place the Yugoslav programme in the perspective of the evolution of Serbian foreign policy and, more precisely, in the perspective of the continuation of Pašić's personal experience as head of the Radical Party and hence one of the most prominent Serbian statesman in the period from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 to the outbreak of the Great War in 1914.

The origins of the Yugoslav programme and the *Delenda Austria* strategy

After the victorious outcome of the Balkan Wars, Pašić was opposed to any further diplomatic or military initiative on the part of Serbia. He believed that Serbia needed time and means to recover from the human, financial and material efforts the two Balkan Wars had imposed on her. Besides being unacceptable from the humane and political point of view, the Young Bosnians' violent act in Sarajevo came at the worst possible moment for Serbia. The campaign for the election provoked by a conflict between military and civil authorities in Serbia's newly-acquired areas was underway,⁴ and Serbian farmers were amidst preparations for the first peacetime harvest after two summers spent in uniform. When the war broke out, he did not share the enthusiasm of the Serbian Minister in Sankt Petersburg, Miroslav Spalajković, who exclaimed, after being assured of Russian backing in the war against Austria-Hungary, that the time came to do away with the menacing neighbour.⁵

⁴ Dušan T. Bataković, "Sukob civilnih i vojnih vlasti u Srbiji u proleće 1914", *Istorijski časopis* 29–30 (1982–1983), 477–492.

⁵ Spalajković to Pašić, Petrograd, 26 July 1914, Vladimir Dedijer Papers, Archives of Slovenia, group 179, box 138.

Nevertheless, when Sergei Sazonov, Russian Foreign Minister, informed him, at the beginning of August 1914, of his strategy of re-establishing the Balkan Alliance of the time of the First Balkan War at the price of Serbia's accepting to cede to Bulgaria the towns of Štip and Kočani and the whole of Eastern Macedonia up to the river Vardar, Pašić immediately started thinking of its possible repercussions for Serbia's war aims.⁶ The Russian diplomatic representative in Niš, Vasilii Strandman, noted that Pašić, although he had rejected the possibility of the alliance with Bulgaria being reconstructed at such a price, might prove to be more amenable if offered Bosnia and access to the Adriatic in compensation.⁷ To Pašić, the issue of Macedonia and of relations with Bulgaria had in fact been resolved at the time of the 1913 Bucharest Treaty, and he refused categorically to reconsider the territorial settlement reached then unless both Greece and Romania would also agree to make territorial concessions to Bulgaria. Moreover, Pašić concluded that the issue of relations with Bulgaria, as well as the balance of power in the Balkans would be settled lastingly after Serbia's unification with the Serb- and Croat-inhabited areas of Austria-Hungary, resulting in a large common state capable of maintaining peace in the region.⁸ Therefore, in his reply to Sazonov and the Allied governments of 1 September, he agreed to the proposed cession of territories but not until after the Allied coalition had won the war and Serbia received the Serbo-Croat areas with the associated portion of the Adriatic coast. To Pašić, this concession was possible only if Bulgaria came to Serbia's aid in case of an attack by Romania and Turkey.⁹ The conditions formulated by Pašić were so impractical that his reply was not even a disguised rejection of the crux of Sazonov's strategy.

⁶ Sazonov to Strandman, Petrograd, 5 August 1914, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epohu imperializma: dokumenty iz arhivov tsarskogo i Vremennogo pravitel'stv 1878–1917 gg.*: Ser. 3: 1914–1917, t. 6, vol. 1: (5 avgusta 1914 g. – 13 ianuarua 1915 g. (Moscow – Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 19135), no. 2, pp. 4–5.

⁷ Strandman to Sazonov, 6 August 1914, no. 19, *ibid.* 17–18.

⁸ Pašić's circular instructions sent to Serbia's diplomatic representatives in the Allied capitals, Niš, 31 August 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia; hereafter: AJ], 80/4/672–683. See also specific instructions sent to Spalajković on 4 September in *Prvi svetski rat u dokumentima Arhiva Srbije*, vol. I: 1914 (Belgrade: Arhiv Srbije, 2015), no. 285, pp. 263–270.

⁹ Strandman to Sazonov, 1 September 1914, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epohu imperializma*, t. 6, vol. 1, no. 205, pp. 196–198.

Even though Pašić rejected Sazonov's strategy, it made it possible for him to inform the Allies that Serbia's objective in the war was unification with the Serbs and Croats living in Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, the instructions sent to the Serbian representatives in the Allied capitals promoted the creation of a common state as the official policy of Serbia, and Serbian diplomats were supposed to present it in their contacts with representatives of the Allied governments. Serbian Minister to France, Miloško Vesnić, acquainted the French President, Raymond Poincaré, with the reasons for the creation of a common state of Serbs and Croats, stressing that, even if defeated, Germany and Austria would still be a force of 60 to 70 million people which would have to be contained in some way. A strong enough state was needed in South-East Europe in order to form, along with France and Russia, a sort of a circle around the German-speaking world. Such a state would have to be not only strong but also united to prevent the possibility of the Germans using diplomatic methods to divide the Balkan states and turn them one against another as they had done in the recent past.¹⁰ Sazonov's strategy of a great coalition against Austria-Hungary provided the Serbian diplomats with the opportunity to present Serbian national goals as a part of the common struggle against the aggressive Central Powers.

Sazonov's strategy had a comparable effect with regards to Italy since it gave new impetus to the Italian national programme aimed at unification with the *terra irredenta*. The idea of proposing territorial concessions to Italy in order to induce her to join the Entente was originally expressed by Poincaré in his talks with Russian Ambassador Alexander Izvolsky on 1 August 1914. Poincaré was of the opinion that Italy should be given Valona and a free hand in the Adriatic should she decide to side with the Allies.¹¹ Sazonov at first thought that the issue of Italy joining the Allies should be dealt with by France as a Mediterranean country.¹² The Italian Ambassador to Petrograd, Marquis Andrea di Riparbella Carlotti, explained to him that Italy's possible conditions for entering the war on the side of the Entente were: the liberation of Trentino, dominance in the Adriatic, and the possession of Valona. He added that Italy would even accept territorial concessions to Serbia and Greece in the Adriatic in case

¹⁰ Vesnić to Pašić, Bordeaux, 16 September 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/43-47.

¹¹ Izvolsky to Sazonov, 1 August 1914, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia v epohu imperializma*, t. 5, no. 411, p. 338.

¹² Sazonov to Izvolsky, 2 August 1914, *ibid*, no. 453, pp. 363-364.

these conditions were met.¹³ Interestingly enough, Carlotti presented the sequence of events to Marquis Antonino de Sanguiliano, Italian Foreign Minister, as if the initiative for an exchange of views and the proposal on territorial concessions to Italy had come from Sazonov whereas he had kept his reservations.¹⁴ Whoever may have been at the origin of the initiative to persuade Italy to join the Entente, there is no doubt that in August 1914 Sazonov worked both towards rebuilding the Balkan alliance from the time of the First Balkan War and towards associating Italy with it.¹⁵ The foundation on which this new large alliance was to be built was the enlargement of both Italy and Serbia at the expense of Austria-Hungary. The premises of the policy that would eventually lead to the demise of Austria-Hungary were thus established, since the idea of partition of Habsburg territory had been accepted in principle by the Allies. However, the chances for the realisation of this first stage of the *Delenda Austria* policy were more than slim since Sazonov's strategy was rejected by both Serbia and Italy.

Marquis de Sanguiliano was ready to accept only an informal exchange of views if they were to take place in strict secrecy and in London. In that case he was willing to consider the possibility of joining the Entente if the following conditions were met by the Allies: 1) Italy, France, England and Russia will solemnly declare that they will not conclude a separate peace; 2) The Italian fleet and the French and English Mediterranean fleets will be reunited on the location to be designated from the first day of Italy's entry into the war and from that day on they will enter the Adriatic in order to destroy the Austrian fleet; 3) In the event of final victory, Italy will have Trentino and Trieste; 4) Upon obtaining these, Italy will not oppose to Albania being divided, should France, Russia and England want that, between Greece and Serbia, as long as its coast from Cape Stylos to the mouth of the Bojana are neutralized and Valona with a proportionate region is not only neutralized but also declared autonomous and internationally governed, under conditions similar to those adopted for Tangier, by all the Adriatic Powers, including Italy. Finally, Sanguiliano declared that he was not willing to consider the possibility of annexing Dalmatia, proposed

¹³ Sazonov to Izvolsky, 4 August 1914, *ibid*, no. 529, p. 403.

¹⁴ Carlotti to Sanguiliano, Petrograd, 5 August 1914, *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (hereinafter DDI), Ser. 5, vol. I (2 agosto – 16 ottobre 1914) (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello stato, 1954), no. 65, p. 24.

¹⁵ Gaston Doumergue to Auguste Boppe, Paris, 25 August 1914, *Documents diplomatiques français* (hereinafter DDF), 1914 (3 août – 31 décembre), doc. 120.

by Sazonov to Carlotti,¹⁶ since he believed that Dalmatia was outside the geographical boundaries of Italy.¹⁷

Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, was unwilling to take part in the informal exchange of views since he believed it inappropriate for the Entente to consider the Italian conditions as long as Italy was unprepared to take an official position on the issue of her collaboration with the Entente. If and when Italy should decide to start negotiations with the Entente, he estimate that Italy's conditions for entry in the war, as stated by Sanguiliano would not pose a problem.¹⁸ But Sanguiliano was not prepared to start official talks, while the German offensive on the Western front and the refusal of the Allied fleets to enter the Adriatic convinced him that it was premature for Italy to take side in a war whose outcome was more than uncertain,¹⁹ as there was no proof that the United Kingdom and France were willing to effectively start hostilities with Austria-Hungary.²⁰ Sanguiliano believed that Italy should by all means avoid the prospect of confronting her neighbour on her own.²¹

Sanguiliano's decision to keep Italy out of the war until the outcome became clear was not risk-proof, as Wickham Steed, foreign editor of *The Times*, explained to Marquis Guglielmo Imperali, Italian Ambassador to London. Steed, a long-standing foreign correspondent from Vienna and a renowned expert on Central and South-East Europe, warned Imperali that if Italy entered the war, thus liberating the South Slavs living, as he underlined, in compact groups only five miles outside Trieste, it would bring her enormous prestige among them, which would then facilitate her annexation

¹⁶ Carlotti informed Sanguiliano that Sazonov was ready to concede Dalmatia from Zara to Ragusa to Italy provided she took on the obligation to respect the religious and cultural rights of the Slavs living in the region. Carlotti to Sanguiliano, 11 August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 194, pp. 109–110.

¹⁷ Sanguiliano to Marquis Guglielmo Imperali, Italian Ambassador in London, Rome, 11 August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 201, pp. 114–117.

¹⁸ Imperali to Sanguiliano, 12 August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 223, p. 130.

¹⁹ Sanguiliano expressed his conviction in a letter to Antonio Salandra, president of the Italian government, that Italy could not break its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary without the certainty of the Entente winning the war. He admitted that such a position was not heroic, but that it was wise and patriotic (*Ciò non è eroico, ma è saggio e patriottico*). Sanguiliano to Salandra, Fiuggi, August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 281, p. 160.

²⁰ Sanguiliano to Imperali, Rome, 23 August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 406, p. 221.

²¹ Sanguiliano to Imperali, Rome, 26 August 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 453, p. 245.

of Trieste. But if she stayed out of the war, thus permitting Serbia and Montenegro to present themselves as liberators at the end of the war, Italy might encounter great difficulties in achieving her war objectives.²² The same argument was put forth to Imperiali by Sir William George Tyrrel, private secretary to Sir Edward Grey, who believed that Serbia's influence in the Adriatic would inevitably grow considerably should Italy remain neutral throughout the war.²³ The importance of the threat that Serbia's or Slavs' aspirations in the Adriatic posed to Italy was clearly expressed by Sangiuliano in his telegram to Imperiali:

It is now known to Your Excellency that the fundamental reason why Italy might decide to change the orientation of its entire foreign policy is precisely the danger that Austro-Hungarian policy poses to her vital interests in the Adriatic. We cannot possibly accept to see the nightmare of the Austrian threat being replaced with the Slav one, therefore we need guaranties.²⁴

The importance of Serbia's aspirations in Dalmatia and the Adriatic in general were confirmed by the Italian Envoy to Niš, Baron Nicola Squitti, who in September 1914 informed Sangiuliano that Serbia's territorial aspirations extended to all regions in which Serbian was in use, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia, although this was not, at least not yet, the official position of the Serbian government. They concluded that Serbia's war aims were still in the making and dependent on the war situation and advice coming from Russia.²⁵

The existence and nature of Serbian aspirations in the Adriatic were considered by Sangiuliano to be a motive for Italy to enter the war, since Italy's vital interests would be imperilled if the defeat of Austria-Hungary

²² Imperiali to Sangiuliano, London, 1 September 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 537, p. 301.

²³ Imperiali to Sangiuliano, London, 4 September 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 571, pp. 320, 321.

²⁴ Sangiuliano to Imperiali, Rome, 16 September 1914, DDI, Rome 1964, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 703, pp. 412.

²⁵ Squitti to Sangiuliano, Niš, 24 September 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 788, 464. It is interesting to note that Pašić stated that he had not given any answer to Squitti on the issue of Serbia's territorial pretensions in the Adriatic. His version of their exchange of views was that Squitti had approached him with the claim that Serbia could count on obtaining territories from Dubrovnik to the south, but not in Albania since it was out of question for Serbia to obtain territories on the Albanian coast. Pašić's note on the telegram received from Vesnić, Vesnić to Pašić, Bordeaux, 26 September 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/40-42.

enabled Serbia to realize its territorial aspirations. In that case Sangiuliano was even prepared to consider the possibility of claiming Dalmatia and some of its islands for Italy, even though he was aware that this could lead to a conflict with Serbia and with the South Slavs in general.²⁶ Sangiuliano was ready to risk a future conflict with Serbia in order to ensure Italian dominance in the Adriatic, thus establishing one of the fundamental principles of Italian foreign policy in the Great War.

The real intentions of the Italian government were not yet known to Pašić, but by the end of August 1914 he had information about the ongoing negotiations between the Entente and Italy. The Serbian Minister to Rome, Ljubomir Mihajlović, sent Pašić accurate information but erroneously reported that Italy staked her claim to Dalmatia during the negotiations.²⁷ Mihajlović may have been under the influence of ongoing discussions on the future of Dalmatia in the Italian press. In September 1914 Piero Foscarelli, member of the Italian Parliament and an ardent interventionist, published an article in *Giornale d'Italia* with a rather explicit title: *Save Dalmatia*.²⁸ Italian interest in Dalmatia was confirmed in direct contacts with Italian diplomats. Italian Ambassador to France Tommaso Tittoni approached Vesnić, while Squitti, in Niš, approached Pašić looking for information on Serbian plans for Dalmatia.²⁹ In early October 1914, Mihajlović, in order to present the Serbian views on the future of Dalmatia to the Allied governments, organized a visit of Dalmatian politicians in exile to the Allied ambassadors in Rome, so that they could assure their hosts that Dalmatia was inhabited exclusively by Slavs who desired union with Serbia.³⁰

Sazonov's strategy of creating a large alliance against Austria-Hungary based on territorial concessions at the expense of Habsburg territory made it possible for Serbia to put forward her objective of creating

²⁶ Sangiuliano to Carlotti and Tomaso Tittoni, Italian Ambassador in Paris, Rome, 25 September 1914, DDI, Ser. 5, vol. I, no. 803, pp. 475–477.

²⁷ Mihajlović to Pašić, Rome, 31 August 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80-1-251.

²⁸ Dragoslav Janković, *Srbija i jugoslovensko pitanje 1914–1915* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1973), 105.

²⁹ Vesnić to Pašić, Bordeaux, 26 September 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/40-42.

³⁰ Mihajlović to Pašić, Rome, 30 September 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80-1-256. The Dalmatian politicians in exile in question were Frano Supilo, Ante Trumbić and Ivan Meštrović, who would create the Yugoslav Committee some months later, at the initiative and with the help of the Serbian government.

a common state for Serbs and Croats. The negotiations between Italy and the Allies convinced her that an important propaganda effort was needed to present the case of the common state to the Entente governments and publics. The first draft of what later became the Yugoslav programme was written in late August 1914 in the form of a project for an unofficial propaganda publication inspired by the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main arguments of the project were as follows: a large and strong state is necessary to assure peace in the Balkans and in Europe; such a state should be created by the union of Serbia with Bosnia, Herzegovina, Vojvodina, Dalmatia, Croatia, Istria and Slovenia; such a state will be capable of assuring a balance of power in the Adriatic and in the Mediterranean; Bulgaria can join such a state on a federative basis. The publication was meant to be accompanied by a series of articles in major Allied newspapers to help sway public opinion in favour of the Yugoslav programme. The publication was supposed to be written by the most prominent Serbian academics.³¹

Apart from this publication, Pašić decided to promote the programme by sending prominent Serbian academics to the Allied capitals to present the Serbian case in direct contact with the local public. Pašić believed that the credibility of the Serbian programme required that it be supported by those that were most interested in its realization, i.e. the Serbs and Croats living in Austria-Hungary. The first step towards the realization of the programme was to define its objectives clearly and to create a body capable of realizing it, which was done on 14 October in Niš, in a meeting presided by Pašić and attended also by two Serb politicians from Bosnia, Nikola Stojanović and Dušan Vasiljević.³²

The overall objective of the programme was defined as the creation of a common Yugoslav or Serbo-Croatian state. At that point no specific suggestions about its interior organisation were made apart from insisting on the preservation of the distinctive identity of each tribe, which was the term used. As for the Serbian part of the future common state, it was noted that the union with Montenegro was already in the making. As for Croatia, she could be given concessions which did not put the unity of the common state in peril and did not pose an obstacle to the crystallisation of a common nation: the name of the common state could contain the mention of Croatia, and if need be, the sovereign could be crowned with the Croatian

³¹ Note by Jovan Jovanović, Pašić's deputy in the Serbian Foreign Ministry, Niš, 29 August 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80-4-573.

³² Minutes of the meeting, Niš, 27 October 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/4/574-5.

crown; the emblems of the common state should contain proof of the historic identity of Croatia (emblem and flag of Croatia). In the common state different religions and alphabets would be in an equal position. All citizens of the common state would have equal rights. The first election to be held was to be the election for a constitutional assembly which would decide on the constitution. Until its promulgation, the existing laws would be in force unless contrary to the objective of the common state. The competent and capable civil servants would remain in office and the central administration would be accessible to all. If necessary, negotiations could be undertaken on establishing a separate regional Croatian assembly. Slovenes could be given similar concessions with specific guarantees for their language. All these concessions could be incorporated into a written constitution.³³

The thus defined programme was supposed to be put into practice by a body composed of Serb and Croat politicians in exile, namely Ante Trumbić, Franjo Supilo and Hinko Hinković, and the two Serb politicians from Bosnia who attended the meeting. The Croat members were supposed to have the liberty of inviting other colleagues to join the body. The body, or the committee as Pašić called it, was to unite all those who accepted to work towards the creation of the common state as it was defined in the programme. The president of the committee was not to be from Serbia, and the committee was to communicate with the Serbian government through Serbian diplomats. Its course of action was to be decided freely by its members. The committee was to act in public as a completely independent body propagating the established objective of creating a common state. All members of the committee would be financially aided by the Serbian government even if the realization of the programme turned out to be impossible.³⁴

The basis of the Yugoslav programme laid at the abovementioned meeting expressed Pašić's views which he maintained throughout the Great War. The realization of the programme began in November 1914 with Stojanović and Vasiljević's trip to Rome for a meeting, under the auspices of Mihajlović, with Trumbić, Supilo and Hinković. The Croat politicians accepted the programme and immediately started to work on its realization by trying to attract their colleagues to join the committee. It was decided that at first the work of the committee should be secret and eventually transferred to Paris. The Serbian government assigned 30,000

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

gold dinars for funding its work.³⁵ The territorial scope of the common state was presented to the somewhat astonished French Minister to Serbia, Auguste Boppe, by the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić in late November 1914, amidst an Austro-Hungarian offensive and a typhoid epidemic which was decimating the ranks of the Serbian army. According to Cvijić, the future Yugoslav state should be composed of Banat, Bačka, Srem, Slavonia, Croatia, Slovenia, Istria, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia.³⁶ The Serbian elite's uncompromising attitude and unconditional optimism as regards the outcome of the war was confirmed by the Pašić government's solemn declaration at the Serbian National Assembly in Niš on 7 December 1914, that the liberation of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and their union with Serbia was a war aim of Serbia.³⁷ The members of the committee unanimously expressed their gratitude to Pašić and the Serbian government for the Niš Declaration.³⁸

The Treaty of London and territorial concessions to Bulgaria

The constitution of the Yugoslav programme and of the committee of Croat politicians supposed to promote it among Allied publics was motivated by the need to challenge the Italian propaganda claims on Dalmatia in particular and the eastern Adriatic coast in general. But Sidney Sonnino, Sangiuliano's successor as Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, went much farther than his predecessor in defining Italian war aims. In a circular telegram sent to the Italian ambassadors in the Allied capitals in March 1915, he confirmed that a Yugoslav state on the other side of the Adriatic was absolutely unacceptable to Italy:

It will be of no use to us to enter the war in order to rid ourselves of Austria's ambitious dominance in the Adriatic, if we immediately fall into the same condition of inferiority and constant threat from an alliance of young and ambitious Yugoslav states.³⁹

³⁵ Mihajlović to Pašić, Rome, 9 November 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/1/270.

³⁶ Boppe to Delcassé, Niš, 14 Novembre 1914, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (hereinafter: AMAE), Guerre 1914–1918, *Sérbie*, vol. 370, pp. 19–20.

³⁷ Ferdo Šišić, *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1919* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1920), 10.

³⁸ Mihajlović to Pašić, Rome, 13 December 1914, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/1/276–277.

³⁹ Sonnino to Imperiali, Tittoni and Carlotti, 21 March 1915, DDI, ser. 5, vol. III, no. 164, p. 134.

Sonnino developed Sanguiliano's fundamental principle and transformed it in a strategic conception that was expressed in the Treaty of London, which went well beyond firm opposition to the creation of the Yugoslav state. He considered the Treaty as the foundation on which Italian dominance on the eastern Adriatic coast should be based. Italy's territorial gains, as listed in the Treaty, were part of a project that counted on either the survival of a weakened and territorially shrunken Austria-Hungary or the creation of a number of small states in its place, which would eventually fall under Italian economic and political domination.⁴⁰ Thus, the creation of a common and, therefore, large Yugoslav state was in clear contradiction to Sonnino's plans who, throughout the war, advocated the creation of the following states: Albania, Serbia (if need be, even united with) Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia (independent or as part of the Hungarian state) and Montenegro.⁴¹ Once the Treaty was signed by all interested parties in April 1915, Sonnino considered it to be the best possible guarantee of Italian national interests, and he never even considered the possibility of discussing its terms again.

Thus, the signing of the Treaty of London became the main obstacle to the realization of the Yugoslav programme. The agreement between Croat politicians and the Serbian government was based on the joint struggle against Italian territorial claims in the Adriatic. On the other hand, the Treaty of London explicitly satisfied all Serbian claims, namely, the incorporation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, union with Montenegro, and access to the Adriatic. In other words, in this way most of the demands of the Serbian national movement, expressed during the crises that had preceded the Great War, were guaranteed. On the other hand, Russia, Serbia's most loyal ally and her protector, declared herself against the creation of the Yugoslav state, since it involved the union of Orthodox Serbs and Roman Catholic Croats. As a result, Serbia was faced with a critical choice. Her attachment to the Yugoslav programme may have been put to a test when she learned about the extent of the concessions reserved for her by the Treaty of London. The choice she made might affect the fate of the Yugoslav movement, as Yugoslav exiles had not yet created their committee officially. All these questions arose when the Serbian government and the Yugoslav exiles received information on the content of the Treaty of London.

⁴⁰ James H. Burgwyn, "Sonnino at the Paris Peace Conference", *Storia delle relazioni internazionali* VII/2 (1991), 244–245.

⁴¹ Sonnino to Imperiali, Tittoni and Carlotti, 21 March 1915, DDI, ser. 5, vol. III, no. 164, p. 134.

The information about the negotiations and the territorial concessions proposed to Italy came in late March 1915.⁴² Pašić immediately decided to go to Petrograd to plead for the Yugoslav case before the Tsar. But his trip was put on hold by Sazonov.⁴³ He then, on 6 April, sent a circular note to Serbian diplomats in the Allied capitals, stating that the very idea of territorial concessions to Italy contradicted the Allies' main objective, the establishment of a lasting peace at the end of the war. By granting territories populated by Croats and Slovenes to Italy, the Allies, in his view, were practically setting the stage for a conflict between the Yugoslavs and Italy. On the other hand, he was in favour of an agreement between the two parties in order to prevent the advancement of Germanic interests in the Adriatic. The only way to arrive at such an agreement was to allow the union of all Yugoslavs. Any other solution would only lead to Slav irredentism in the provinces granted to Italy, and thus Italy would simply replace the Dual Monarchy as an adversary of the Yugoslavs. Such a solution would ultimately be in contradiction to the Allied declarations guaranteeing freedom and independence to all nations, large and small.⁴⁴

Upon obtaining confirmation of the extent of concessions made to Italy, Pašić abandoned the diplomatic language and, on 24 April, defined the Serbian position as follows:

It seems that someone wants to turn the Adriatic question and the Yugoslav question into the question of Serbian access to the Adriatic, which is absurd. The question is not one of Serbia's largest or narrowest outlet to the Adriatic, but of relations in the sea in question being put on a more stable and just basis. It is not the question of granting the Austrian heritage in the Adriatic to Serbia, or of Serbia taking over all strategic and military points on the eastern coast of the Adriatic – as some are trying to present it in order to discredit Serbia by ascribing her imperialist aims – but it is the question of resolving the issue in a just manner, and thus avoiding international conflicts. As long as the Italian demands are limited to the accomplishment of their national unity, neither the Serbs nor the Croats nor the Slovenes will have any objections. As long as Italian policy seeks to safeguard her economic interests and even some strategic interests on the eastern Adriatic coast, the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes might even be of assistance. But now

⁴² Dragovan Šepić, *Pisma i memorandumi Frana Supila: (1914–1917)* (Belgrade: Naučno delo, 1967), 56.

⁴³ Vojislav G. Pavlović, *De la Serbie vers la Yougoslavie. La France et la naissance de la Yougoslavie 1878–1918* (Belgrade: Institut des Etudes balkaniques, 2015), 229.

⁴⁴ Pašić's circular note to Serbian diplomats in Allied capitals, Niš, 6 April 1915, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/8/56.

they must oppose these Italian imperialist demands in the Adriatic ... Serbia is fighting the war in order to liberate her fellow nationals (Croats and Slovenes), and she must agree with them and support them in this matter. She is doing it in her best interest and in theirs. It is Serbia's interest to participate, after the war, together with all her fellow nationals liberated and united with her, in establishing a balance of power in Europe, in order to ensure peace ... It seems to us that it is the Allies' imperative need to have the support of all Yugoslavs united in one state, instead of having them dispersed into several states and dissatisfied.⁴⁵

Pašić explicitly rejected the territorial solution in the Adriatic as laid out in the Treaty of London. Serbia found her pre-war territorial claims not to be acceptable any more. The Great War, and the possibility of territorial gains at the expense of Austria-Hungary, convinced Pašić and the Serbian political and intellectual elite that the moment had come to do away with the oppressive Habsburg presence once and for all by creating a large common state of all South Slavs. This resolutely Yugoslav stance earned Pašić the support and approval of the Yugoslav exiles. However, Serbian protests had no effect. On 28 April Vesnić reported to Pašić that the treaty with Italy had already been signed.⁴⁶

Faced with the Italian threat, the Croat politicians in exile had to react. First of all they decided to constitute their committee formally. The Yugoslav Committee was set up in Paris on 30 April 1915. At its first meeting it elected Trumbić as its president. Its sole objective was to represent the Yugoslav provinces of the Dual Monarchy and to work for their liberation and union with Serbia.⁴⁷ Finally, on 2 May, Vesnić was able to introduce the Yugoslav Committee to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Théophile Delcassé, and on that occasion Trumbić presented Delcassé with a long memorandum on the Yugoslav question. But Delcassé considered Yugoslav unification to be an exaggerated demand on the part of Serbia. To him, it was just an ideal; all efforts had to be concentrated on winning the war. That is why he once again insisted on the issue of concessions to Bulgaria.⁴⁸

In that way Delcassé showed that the treaty with Italy was only the first step towards reconstructing the Balkan alliance. Indeed, the Romanian government of Ion Brătianu, prompted by the Treaty of London, renewed

⁴⁵ Pašić's circular note to Serbian diplomats in Allied capitals, Niš, 24 April 1915, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/8/108.

⁴⁶ Vesnić to Pašić, Paris, 27 April 1915, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/72.

⁴⁷ Dragovan Šepić, *Italija saveznici i stvaranje jugoslovenske države* (Zagreb: Naučna knjiga, 1979), 88.

⁴⁸ Vesnić to Pašić, Paris, 2 May 1915, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/86.

contacts with the Allies on 3 May, demanding considerable compensation for Romania's entry into the war, including the Banat. The Serbian government immediately learned of Romania's claiming the Banat. Faced with Italian and Romanian territorial claims, the Serbian government, in agreement with Prince Regent Alexander, decided to reaffirm with force its Yugoslav programme, including its refusal to haggle over the Yugoslav provinces. Pašić demanded guarantees from the Allied governments that the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians would be united into one state and not separated into several states, as they were under Austria-Hungary.⁴⁹

Pašić's stance made it clear to Allied diplomacies that any compromise with Serbia would have to be based on the respect for the idea of Yugoslav union. The Allies took note of this in their joint reply of 7 May to Pašić's demand for guarantees. They promised Serbia would obtain Bosnia and Herzegovina and access to the sea. As for union with Croatia, they stated that she would be free to make her own choice after the war.⁵⁰ This was the first time that the Allies made a clear statement on the extent of compensation that Serbia could expect. In vaguest terms, they also mentioned the possibility of Yugoslav union. Delcassé, on 6 May, assured Pašić that he would not object to Serbia's union with Croatia. French diplomacy was the first to suggest that the union of Yugoslavs should be supported in order to win Serbian cooperation for a reorganization of the Balkans. He went even further and, with British support, proposed on 7 July that the Allies should make the following statement to Serbia:

the Allies will not object to their union if it is demanded by both Serbia and Croatia. Already at this point they can recognize the right of Serbs to Semlin [Zemun] and to a territory between the Danube and the Sava yet to be defined.⁵¹

But Sonnino remained inflexible and, putting a veto concerning the future of Croatia, prevented a joint Allied note to Serbia.⁵²

After the Allied decision of 13 August to postpone the agreement with Romania *sine die*, and Bratianu's acceptance of 22 August of their

⁴⁹ Boppe to Delcassé, Niš, 6 May 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Balkans Serbie, vol. 371, pp. 105–107.

⁵⁰ Vesnić to Pašić, Paris, 18 May 1915, Jovan Jovanović Papers, AJ, 80/2/103.

⁵¹ Delcassé to Maurice Paléologue, French Ambassador in Petrograd, Paris, 7 July 1915, AMAE, Papier d'agents – Archives privées (hereinafter PA–AP), 211-Delcasse, p. 128.

⁵² Barrere to Delcassé, Rome, 8 July 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Balkans, Serbie, vol. 393, p. 43.

decision, the only unresolved issue remaining in the Balkans was the issue of Serbian territorial concessions to Bulgaria as the basis for the renewal of the Balkan alliance. In order to achieve it, the French and British governments put aside the Italian reservations and decided to define the exact territorial concessions Serbia could gain at the expense of Austria-Hungary at the end of the war in a joint note to Pašić of 16 August 1915 in which it was stipulated that if Serbia agrees with the views of the Powers as regards (Macedonia), the following territories will be reserved for Serbia in the case of a victorious war:

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Syrmie to the Drava Line and Danube, including Semlin and Batchka, and the Adriatic Sea coast from Cape Planka to the point 10 kilometers South of Ragusa- Old, with the islands of the Great Zirone, the Little Zirone, Bua, Brazza, Jaclan and Calamotta and the Sabioncello peninsula.

The Allies also promised Pašić that if the future of Slavonia is in their hands at the end of the war, it will be assigned to Serbia.⁵³

Once again, this time faced with a formal Allied proposal which would have satisfied all Serbian pre-war claims, Pašić refused even to take it into consideration. He said to the French Minister to Niš:

The Allies are dividing the Serbs as if we were in Africa. Italy wants that. She's a more useful ally than we are, so it's natural that she's listened to. We're the least well treated of all. We're not asking for anything; we will fight alone if we have to till the end. Perhaps Austria will offer us peace.⁵⁴

The tenor and tone of Pašić's reaction prompted the Allies to keep making unofficial proposals to Serbia. But all their attempts to come to an understanding with Serbia failed because of Sonnino's intransigent refusal to accept the union of Serbia with Croatia.⁵⁵ As a result, Pašić's official response of 1 September 1915 could be nothing but a disguised rejection. He accepted the line separating Serbia from Bulgaria in Macedonia prior to the Balkan War of 1912, but modified it so that the towns of Veles, Prilep, Ohrid and Monastir (Bitola), as well as the plain of Ovče Polje, remained in Serbia. He also demanded that the common border between Serbia and

⁵³ Pichon to Fontenay, Paris, 16 August 1915, AMAE, PA-AP, Fontenay, 347, vol. 103.

⁵⁴ Boppe to Delcassé, Paris, 16 August 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Balkans Serbie, vol. 394, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Barrere to Delcassé, Paris, 18 August 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Balkans Serbie, vol. 394, p. 23.

Greece be preserved. In addition, he asked that the Allied governments accept the union of Serbia with Croatia, including the region of Banat.⁵⁶

Sazonov's strategy of a large anti-Habsburg alliance failed because all countries concerned saw the Great War as an opportunity to achieve all their national objectives, thus making it impossible to reach a viable compromise. Eastern Macedonia was a too feeble incentive for Bulgaria to side with the Allies compared to the whole of Macedonia and eastern Serbia that the Central Powers promised her in a series of treaties signed in early September 1914.⁵⁷ As a result, a tripartite alliance against Serbia was forged and its joint offensive that began in October 1915 forced the Serbian Army and government to retreat in Albania, leaving behind the country under the enemy occupation. The defeat and exile of the Serbian government and army in November 1915, due mainly to the Bulgarian entry into the war on the side of the Central Powers, put the Yugoslav question on hold for some time.

The evacuation and reconstruction of the Serbian Army on the island of Corfu, and its subsequent deployment on the Salonika front from May 1916 onwards, gave a renewed credibility to Serbia as a member of the Allied coalition. However, its Yugoslav programme was revived only in July 1917 by a common declaration signed in Corfu on 20 July 1917 by Pašić as the president of the Serbian government and Ante Trumbić as the president of the Yugoslav Committee.

The Corfu Declaration

The Corfu Declaration established the principle of national unity since the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were explicitly described as parts of one nation with three names. Both signatory parties stated that their future common state, called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, would be a constitutional, democratic and parliamentary monarchy with common territory and citizenship.⁵⁸ The Corfu Declaration went far beyond the Declaration of the Serbian government of December 1914, because the bases of the fu-

⁵⁶ Boppe to Delcassé, 1 September 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, Balkans Serbie, vol. 394, pp. 1–5 bis.

⁵⁷ *Bŭlgaria v Pŭrvata svetovna voĭna. Germanski diplomatskeski dokumenti*, vol. I: 1913–1915 (Sofia 2002), doc. 345 and 347.

⁵⁸ Full text of the Corfu Declaration in Ferdo Šišić, *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914–1919* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1920), 96–99.

ture common state were laid out clearly and, even more importantly, because it was accepted and signed by the Yugoslav politicians from Austria-Hungary in exile.⁵⁹

The character of this document, which provided for the creation of a Yugoslav state, was quite peculiar. First of all, the two parties did not have the same status. The Serbian government was part of the Allied coalition from the beginning of hostilities, while the Yugoslav Committee was composed of a group of politicians from the southern provinces of Austria-Hungary who had chosen to go into exile at the beginning of the war. They had no legal right to represent anyone. The Committee was created in April 1915, as we have seen, at the initiative of the Serbian government to give additional credibility to its refusal to accept the Allied decision to enable Italy to dominate the Adriatic in the event of Allied victory. Why did Pašić, then, decide to sign a formal declaration with a group of politicians in exile whose activity, according to him, was merely a means of propaganda that was supposed to give credibility to his Yugoslav project?

Because, to Pašić, the Yugoslav project was not just the expression of Serbia's war aims but the *conditio sine qua non* for the survival of the Serbian state. The Yugoslav project involved the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary, and Pašić was convinced that Serbia's survival was not possible in the shadow of her powerful neighbour. But the Allies held secret peace negotiations with Austria-Hungary in the spring of 1917, when the outcome of the war in the Balkans was more than uncertain. Pašić chose to resuscitate the Yugoslav project in order for it to be present on the agenda of Allied diplomacies. But the manner in which he did it showed that, to him, it was a survey of the stances of Allied diplomacies more than a constitutive act of a future common state. He notified the Allied representatives present in Corfu about the content of the Declaration in the form of a verbal note, which did not require any response, and afterwards personally visited the Allied capitals to gather the reactions of their governments. He was forced to conclude that the Declaration was received with a deafening silence, with the noteworthy exception of Italy.

Sonnino's reaction to the Corfu Declaration was decidedly negative. He received Pašić in Rome on 10 September 1917 and pointed out that the Corfu Declaration was the main obstacle to any viable agreement between Italy and Serbia. In Sonnino's view, Italy would have no sensible reason to

⁵⁹ On the Corfu Declaration see Dragoslav Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917. godine* (Belgrade: Savremena administracija, 1967).

continue the war if she accepted the Corfu Declaration. The Declaration negated all possibility of Italy's achieving its main territorial objectives during the war. Therefore, for Sonnino, the precondition for any kind of agreement between Italy and Serbia had to be Pašić's acceptance of the Treaty of London, which could, by mutual agreement, undergo slight modifications. The positions of the two statesmen were too far apart. Pašić suggested that a halfway arrangement between Italy's territorial claims expressed in the Treaty of London and the creation of the Yugoslav state could be achieved through mutual effort, but Sonnino refused to consider the possibility of renouncing a single part of Italy's territorial gains promised by the Allies in April 1915. In conclusion, Sonnino firmly stated that no discussion between Italy and Serbia that would not take the Treaty of London as a starting point would serve any purpose.⁶⁰

However, Lloyd George's speech before the Trade Unions of 5 January and President Wilson's Fourteen Points of 8 January 1918 created a hostile environment in Allied public opinion for the kind of secret diplomacy that had led to the conclusion of the Treaty of London. President Wilson's well-known sympathies for the nationalities living under Habsburg rule and even for Yugoslav aspirations were expressed in the tenth of his fourteen points: "The people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be given the freest opportunity for autonomous development."

As early as December 1917, the Italian Ambassador to Washington, Count Vincenzo Macchi de Cellere, drew Sonnino's attention to Wilson's sympathies for the Yugoslavs living in Austria-Hungary. He suggested an agreement between Serbia and Italy capable of reassuring President Wilson about the real objective of Italian policy in the Adriatic and the Balkans. The Italian ambassadors to London and Paris supported their Washington colleague's suggestion. As a result, in December 1917 Sonnino proposed to Pašić a general agreement between the two countries in the following terms:⁶¹

The Italian government and the Serbian government acknowledge that they have a common interest in establishing their present and future relations on the basis of cordial and friendly collaboration and cohabitation between the two nations ... Neither nation motivates its actions by imperialist concepts. They both acknowledge the mixed

⁶⁰ Pietro Pastorelli, ed., *Sidney Sonnino, Diario* (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 190–193.

⁶¹ Macchi di Cellere to Sonnino, Washington, 11 December 1917, DDI, ser. 5, doc. 680, pp. 469–470.

character of the populations living on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, where Slav-inhabited territories and Italian centres of great economic and historical importance are located. The desired agreement between the two States can only be inspired by conciliatory concepts and the important need for mutual sacrifices and reciprocal concessions.⁶²

Sonnino concluded his telegram to Carlo Sforza, the Italian envoy to Corfu, which contained the above quoted declaration, with a remark revealing the true purpose of the proposed agreement: "If Pašić refuses the agreement, his refusal will only speak in our favour in the eyes of the American government."⁶³

With regard to a working agreement with Serbia, Sonnino was of the opinion that this was impossible, since any concessions that Italy was able to make would turn out to be insufficient for the Serbian government and the Yugoslavs.⁶⁴ He concluded that any concessions made to the Serbian government and the Yugoslavs would be regarded by the Allies as if Italy had unilaterally given up some of its territorial claims expressed in the Treaty of London. This was unacceptable to Sonnino, who thought that any territorial concession in the Adriatic would have to be compensated by a gain elsewhere to be negotiated with the Allies.⁶⁵ Sonnino's continued insistence in January 1918 on concluding a general agreement between Italy and Serbia was meant to appease the anti-Italian sentiment of American public opinion.⁶⁶ However, Pašić refused to be drawn into such an agreement, agreeing only to state publicly that a trusting and cordial alliance existed between Serbia and Italy.⁶⁷

The event that certainly destabilized Serbia's conduct of war and Yugoslav programme the most was the revolution in Russia. Ever since the crisis of July 1914 Serbia had relied on the support of Nicholas II and his ministers. The revolution of February 1917 worried the Serbian government, not because of its character, but because they feared that it might weaken Russia's role within the Allied coalition. In his letter of 23 March 1917 to Pavel Miliukov, Foreign Minister in the Provisional Government,

⁶² Sonnino to Carlo Sforza, in Sidney Sonnino, *Carteggio*, vol. II: 1916–1922, ed. Pietro Pastorelli (Bari: Laterza, 1975), doc. 247, pp. 355–356.

⁶³ *Idem*.

⁶⁴ Sonnino to Imperiali and Bonin Longare, Rome, 14 January 1918, DDI, ser. 5, vol. X, no. 83, pp. 58–59.

⁶⁵ Sonnino to Sforza, Rome, 31 January 1918, *Carteggio*, doc. 263, pp. 387–389

⁶⁶ Sonnino to Sforza, Rome, 27 January 1918, DDI, ser. 5, vol. X, doc. 156, p. 115.

⁶⁷ Sforza to Sonnino, Corfu, 8 February 1918, DDI, ser. 5, vol. X, doc. 198, p. 180.

Pašić hailed the new democratic Russia, hoping that she would bring more glory to the Russian people than the autocratic Russia had. The response of the Provisional Government confirmed its commitment to the Allied war aims, but it also declared, and this was the first such Allied declaration, its intention to support the creation of a Yugoslav state with Serbia as its Piedmont. However, the instability and changes of government in Russia convinced Pašić that it was essential to reorient his policy and look for support in other Allied capitals. One of the consequences of this decision was the Corfu Declaration. The fact that the Provisional Government accepted the Corfu Declaration did not, as had been the case before, result in a revision of Allied policy on the issue. These times were a far cry from the times when Sergei Sazonov had decided on the direction of Allied policy in the Balkans. The Allied reaction, a deafening silence, compared to that of Russia, was a clear indication of the changed balance of power within the Allied coalition.

The Bolshevik revolution had left Serbia without any support from Russia. The issuance of the Decree on Peace of 8 November announced the conclusion of a separate peace in the East. Italy's defeat at Caporetto in November 1917 was another setback for the Allies. Therefore, the Allied war aims as expressed in the speeches of Lloyd George on 5 January and President Wilson on 8 January 1918, known as the Fourteen Points, were more than moderate. In their speeches, the Anglo-Saxon statesmen did not anticipate the dismemberment, let alone the disappearance of the Double Monarchy; they merely demanded that Serbia's pre-war borders be restored. The renewal of talks on a separate peace with Austria-Hungary, announced by the British representatives at the Allied Supreme War Council in December 1917, showed that Serbia's efforts to get the Allies to accept the Yugoslav project had failed.⁶⁸

In this situation, Pašić seemed distraught for the first time. Nikola Stojanović described Pašić's state of mind in December 1917:

I remember very well the then President of the Serbian government , Pašić, in an unenviable situation; when anxious, he poked the fireplace in a Parisian hotel as if looking for a way out in the ashes. On this occasion he admitted to me, after long hesitation, that he had no formal promise from the Allies that, in the event of victory, at least Bosnia and Herzegovina would be united with Serbia. At that moment I became aware of the seriousness of our situation.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Victor H. Rothwell, *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy, 1914–1918* (Oxford 1971), 147.

⁶⁹ Nikola Stojanović, *Jugoslovenski odbor* (Zagreb: Nova Evropa, 1927), 57.

Pašić believed that with Russia's collapse the premises of Serbia's involvement in the war were in jeopardy. It was necessary to find a way not only to get the Yugoslav programme accepted but also to defend Serbia's territorial integrity in direct contacts with the Allies without, unlike in the past, the decisive support of Russia. The Bolshevik desire to denounce secret diplomacy inspired him to explore the possibility of contesting the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an act contrary to international law. The Serbian diplomatic representatives in Washington and Petrograd were tasked with probing the stances of the respective governments. This was the only time that Pašić gave indications of wishing to pursue a policy other than that of creating Yugoslavia.⁷⁰

Another initiative was to request confirmation of the territorial gains offered to Serbia in August 1915. At the end of January 1918 Serbia's chargé d'affaires in Paris, Stefanović, requested that he be provided with a copy of the Allied note proposing territorial compensation to Serbia in case she agreed to cede Macedonia to Bulgaria.⁷¹ At first he was informed that such a note did not exist. He finally received it in February 1918, but with the following remark by Stephan Pichon:

I would like to point out to you, however, that this document is incorrectly presented as relating to the concessions requested by the Allies from Serbia in favour of Bulgaria. In reality, it was about making Serbia aware of the benefits she would be granted subject to a victorious war, in the event that the Serbian Government came to an agreement with the Powers as to the territories to be ceded to Bulgaria in Macedonia. This observation is not without interest, because the territories envisaged for acquisition by Serbia were far more important than those she was asked to cede.⁷²

However, Pašić returned to the Yugoslav project already in his circular of 17 January. This note, written by Pašić himself, was Serbia's official response to Lloyd George's and Wilson's declarations. He clearly affirmed his commitment to the Yugoslav programme by pointing out the inseparable link between the Dual Monarchy and Germany and arguing that for Allied victory to be just and lasting the demise of the Dual Monarchy

⁷⁰ Pašić to Mihailović, Corfu, 22 January 1918, in Milan Djordjević, *Srbija i Jugosloveni za vreme rata 1914–1918* (Belgrade: Sveslovenska knjižara, 1922), 159–160.

⁷¹ Allied note delivered to Serbia in June 1915, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, 388, 80.

⁷² Pichon to Fontenay, Paris, 16 April, AMAE, AP-PA 347-Fontenay, 103.

and the creation of national states in its place was needed.⁷³ Pašić's hesitations about the direction of Serbian foreign policy had lasted only a few weeks, until he recovered from the shock caused by the Bolshevik revolution and the declarations made by Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson. He returned to the Yugoslav project as soon as he was assured that the French government, now his main support among the Allies, maintained full confidence in him.⁷⁴ He was completely reassured in April 1918 when Georges Clemenceau published Emperor Charles I's letters to Prince Sixtus of Bourbon-Parma, terminating permanently all possibility of a separate peace with Austria-Hungary and paving the way for plans to destabilize her by supporting the right to self-determination of the nations within the empire.⁷⁵

Official recognition of the Yugoslav movement

When the international situation became more favourable for the realization of Serbia's Yugoslav programme, another issue came to the foreground, that of relations between Pašić and the Yugoslav Committee with its president Ante Trumbić. The Corfu Declaration had been signed by both Pašić and Trumbić, but it was interpreted differently. Pašić saw it as a convenient propaganda move supposed to give additional credibility to the projected union, while Trumbić believed that it demonstrated that the two parties were equal partners in the process of South Slav unification. Two visions of the Yugoslav union were gradually articulated, one by the Serbian government, the other by the Yugoslav Committee.

Pašić wanted Serbia to liberate and unite, as stated in the Niš and Corfu Declarations, all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a new kingdom whose structure would resemble that of Serbia's. Trumbić and his colleagues from the Yugoslav Committee demanded to be recognized by the Allies as the official representative of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs still living under Habsburg rule and, as such, they laid claim to being at least an equal partner of Serbia in the future union. The conflict gained in importance during the spring and summer of 1918 because the Allies, after

⁷³ Bogdan Krizman and Dragoslav Janković, *Gradja o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, vol. I (Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, 1961), 37–41.

⁷⁴ Pichon to Fontenay, Paris, 28 January 1918, AMAE, Guerre 1914–1918, 388, 67.

⁷⁵ Wolfdieter Bihl, "La mission de médiation des princes Sixte and Xavier de Bourbon-Parma en faveur de la paix", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporaines* 170 (April 1993), 47.

trying for more than a year to conclude a separate peace with Emperor Charles, decided to bring about the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy by supporting the struggle of the nationalities. Therefore, the issue of the South Slavs gained considerably in importance, but because of the Italian veto still being in force, it was impossible to issue an official Allied declaration promising them the creation of their national states. The ongoing disagreement between Serbia and the Yugoslav Committee was another reason for caution to be exercised by the Allied governments. Lord Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, summed up the reasons for a circumspect approach to the issue of recognition of the Yugoslav Committee. He told the French Ambassador to London Paul Cambon, on 9 September 1918, that no decision could be made without the consent of the Italian government, which was not forthcoming. Furthermore, the Yugoslav Committee had no troops, unlike their Czecho-Slovak counterpart, and the Yugoslavs did not have unanimous support from all interested parties, notably from the Serbian government. Therefore, the Allies still saw the issue of Yugoslav union more as a propaganda one, since there were no conditions for its realisation. They would only be created with the breakthrough on the Salonika front. The Allied offensive that started on 15 September brought about the capitulation of Bulgaria. The unstoppable advance of Allied forces led by Serbian regiments that were returning home after almost three years in exile continued until all of Serbia, including its capital Belgrade, was liberated on 1 November 1918. Four years after the Serbian government had publicly declared the unification of all Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to be its main war aim, the necessary conditions for the creation of Yugoslavia were finally there.

The creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

The victories of Allied and Serbian armies on the Salonika front gave additional credibility to Pašić's concept of Yugoslav union. Thus he immediately solicited the Allied governments to officially declare their support to Serbia as the Piedmont of Yugoslav union. He was received by Pichon on 20 September 1918 and told that limits to Allied action as regards Yugoslav union were posed by the Italian government, which on 14 September stated that Yugoslav union was possible if not in conflict with the articles of the Treaty of London.⁷⁶ President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré,

⁷⁶ Sonnino to Imperiali and Bonin-Longare, Rome, 13 September 1918, Sonnino, *Carteggio*, p. 483.

informed Pašić that before any kind of Yugoslav union could be achieved the positions of the interested nations had to be heard via referendum. President of the French government, Georges Clemenceau, refused even to discuss the issue of Yugoslav union, commenting laconically that it would be achieved in its own good time.⁷⁷ The unanimous refusal of the French to accept Serbia as the Piedmont of Yugoslavia was strengthened by the reaction of the British government. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Balfour, informed Pašić that the British government could not accept Serbia as the Piedmont of Yugoslavia, since there was another project of Yugoslav union, the one advocated by the Yugoslav Committee.⁷⁸

The lack of support for his concept of Yugoslav union and the increasing differences with Trumbić forced Pašić to return to the text of the Corfu Declaration and to accept the Yugoslav Committee as an equal partner. In a note sent to the Allied governments on 12 October 1918 he asked them to accept Yugoslav union based on the Corfu Declaration.⁷⁹ After the Central Powers wrote to President Wilson asking for an armistice, Trumbić was no longer satisfied with the terms of the Corfu Declaration. He proposed a meeting of all actors of Yugoslav union – the Serbian government, National Assembly and opposition parties, the Yugoslav Committee, the Montenegrin National Committee – in order to decide on future actions.⁸⁰ The goal was to reduce Pašić from the sole representative to just one of the representatives of Yugoslav union, who for the most part were hostile towards him. The stalemate caused by the increasing differences between Trumbić and Pašić was broken by the emergence of a new and powerful actor of future Yugoslav union, the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, as the legal representative of the Yugoslav provinces of the defunct Austria-Hungary. But the Allies did not recognise the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, nor did they accept to consider it an Ally. After the Italian victory at the Battle of Vittorio Veneto (28 October 1918), the Austro-Hungarian army broke apart along ethnic lines, and the Dual Monarchy

⁷⁷ The notes of the Marquis de Fontenay, French envoy to the Serbian government, from Pašić's conversation with Pichon, Poincaré et Clemenceau, Paris, 20 and 21 September 1918, AMAE, PA-AP, 347-Fontenay, vol. 103.

⁷⁸ Hugh and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of the New Europe: R. W. Seton Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen & Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 312.

⁷⁹ Note of the Serbian government, 12 October 1918, Krizman and Janković, *Gradja*, vol. I, 357.

⁸⁰ Trumbić to Pašić, London, 11 October 1918, *ibid.* 353–355.

made a formal request for armistice, the terms of which were decided at the conference of the Supreme War Council held at Versailles from 29 October to 3 November.⁸¹ The armistice with Austria-Hungary was signed at Villa Giusti near Padua on 3 November 1918.

In a separate agreement Clemenceau promised his Italian counterpart, Orlando, that France would not recognize any Yugoslav state before the terms of the armistice agreement were fully implemented.⁸² Clemenceau's promise was of the utmost importance because the other military force present on the borders of Austria-Hungary was the Serbian Army, which was still a part of the Allied forces on the Salonika front under the command of the French General Franchet d'Esperey.

The Allies did not acknowledge the newly-proclaimed state, but neither did they accept Pašić's concept of Serbia as Yugoslav Piedmont or the demands of Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee. The Allied governments did not yet consider Yugoslav union as a realistic option. First of all because of Italian opposition, but also because of the lack of unity between the supposed actors of the union, Pašić, Trumbić and the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Lloyd George and Balfour advised all interested parties – through intermediaries such as Eleftherios Venizelos, President of the Greek government, and Edvard Beneš, a member of Czecho-Slovak National Council – that their accord was the indispensable precondition for considering Yugoslav union.

The whole structure of the Yugoslav project was under discussion during the conference held in Geneva on 6–9 November 1918. The participants had to reach an agreement if they wanted to convince the Allies of the feasibility of the Yugoslav union. In other words, after more than four years of war, the issue was not what the best modalities of the future Yugoslav union were, but whether there would be such a union at all. The positions of the participants had also changed. Pašić was no longer the only advocate of Yugoslav union with an indisputable mandate, since Anton Korošec was an elected representative of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs from Austria-Hungary. The participants in the discussion were organised in three distinct groups: Pašić, representing the Serbian government; the representatives of the Serbian opposition parties; and the representatives of the Yugoslav Committee and the National Council. Whereas Trumbić and Korošec quickly arrived at a common negotiating position, Pašić, after

⁸¹ Frédéric Le Moal, *La France et le l'Italie dans les Balkans 1914–1919* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 264–265.

⁸² R. Poincaré, *Au Service de la France*, vol. X (Paris: Plon, 1931), 407–408.

four years in office, had to face the hostility and frustrations of the Serbian opposition. The issue at hand was the composition and responsibilities of the common War Cabinet suggested by the British government and advised by the semi-official French newspaper *Le Temps* as well.⁸³

The creation of the common War Cabinet was accepted by all parties, but the kind of status it should have and whom it should represent was a matter of debate. Pašić proposed that it be set up as an ad hoc body but did not specify whom it would represent, the future common state or separately Serbia and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. Trumbić and Korošec proposed that the two states, Serbia and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, delegate a certain number of ministers to the common War Cabinet which would have a limited range of powers. The two states would continue to exist with their existing structure, administration and laws, until a Constitutional Assembly was able to express the will of the interested populations on the form and structure of the common state. The two proposals reflected two visions of the future union. The ambiguity of Pašić's concept was due to the fact that the only actor whose legitimacy was unquestionable was the Serbian government. The first priority of Trumbić and Korošec was to establish the legitimacy of the state they represented. Korošec had come to Geneva with the mandate to procure official recognition of the state he represented, and that was his main request throughout the conference. Thus, Pašić accepted to recognize the Council and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, and to ask the Allied governments to do the same.⁸⁴ Finally, both he and the Serbian opposition accepted the creation of a common representative body, a sort of a common War Cabinet of Serbia and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, which was supposed to conduct the affairs of common interest, whereas both states were supposed to preserve independence in their internal affairs.⁸⁵ Pašić's concept of the Yugoslav union with Serbia as its Piedmont was thus replaced by a confederal solution that resembled the inner structure of the defunct Dual Monarchy. Furthermore, due to the insistence of the Serbian opposition parties and Trumbić, supported by Korošec, who all refused to participate in the common War Cabinet, Pašić was also forced to renounce to take part in the new government.⁸⁶

⁸³ "L'écroulement de l'Autriche-Hongrie", *Le Temps* no. 20938, 3 November 1918.

⁸⁴ Pašić to Allied governments, Paris, 8 November 1918, Krizman and Janković, *Gradja*, vol. II, 513.

⁸⁵ The Procès-verbal of the Geneva Conference, Krizman and Janković, *Gradja*, vol. II, 497–505.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

After an initial hesitation, Pašić's colleagues in the Serbian government refused to accept the decisions of the Geneva Conference. They justified their refusal by the fact that its decisions did not provide for the position of the Serbian monarchy in the common state. Moreover, they were unwilling to accept the confederal structure of the common War Cabinet and future Yugoslavia. They called on Pašić to submit the resignation of his government to the Prince Regent, who would then be able to turn to the opposition to find a government ready to accept the decisions of the Geneva Conference. They were also convinced that negotiations on Yugoslav union should in the future be conducted directly between the Serbian government and the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, i.e. between Belgrade and Zagreb.⁸⁷

Pašić informed Trumbić and Korošec, on 14 November 1918, that the confederal solution established at the Geneva Conference had been rejected by the Serbian government and advised them that the remaining possibilities were either one cabinet for the entire future Yugoslavia or a common advisory committee that should be attached to the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He also informed them that his colleagues from the Serbian government refused the common War Cabinet decided at Geneva because it would not be answerable to the Serbian Parliament or the Serbian king, nor would it swear an oath to the Serbian king.⁸⁸

The National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was thus faced with the impossibility to obtain the status of an independent and internationally recognized state. Officially being only a local administration of a defeated country, which had signed an armistice agreement, it had no grounds to oppose Italy's advancement in the Adriatic and even beyond, as was the case in Ljubljana and Fiume, since Italy was designated by the Supreme War Council to enforce the terms of the armistice agreement. Moreover, the administration put in place by the National Council was incapable of managing the internal affairs of the nascent state. In these circumstances, union with Serbia, which was the National Council's ultimate objective since its creation, emerged as the only way to have official representation in international relations. In this way the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs would no longer be a local administration of a defeated country but would become part of a victorious Allied country. In case of union, the

⁸⁷ Stojan Protić to Pašić, Corfu, 11 Novembar 1918, Krizman and Janković, *Gradja*, vol. II, 553–555.

⁸⁸ Pašić to Protić, Paris, 14 Novembar 1918, Krizman and Janković, *Gradja*, vol. II, 574.

Serbian Army would have the necessary legitimacy to take a stand against Italy and to enforce order in the nascent country. However, the reaction of the Serbian government to the outcome of the Geneva Conference and the declarations of the local assemblies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Vojvodina, in November 1918, all in favour of union with Serbia, demonstrated that the National Council was not in a position to impose its concept of the Yugoslav union. The decision to opt for an unconditional union, such as the one of 1 December 1918 which created the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was, in our opinion, influenced mainly by the fear that the temporariness of Italian presence in the Adriatic might be transformed into permanence. The only possible way to prevent that was to participate in the Peace Conference, and the only way to participate was as part of the Serbian delegation. However, during the Peace Conference, the delegation from both parts of the new Kingdom had to use all their capacities to defend the territorial interests of the Slovenes, Croats and Serbs who used to live in Austria-Hungary, since the Allies did not recognize the new Kingdom officially, nor did they recognize its borders. The Allies officially recognized the state of South Slavs only in June 1919, when its delegation signed the Peace Treaty with Germany in the name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

The Third Balkan War, as historians have named the conflict in the Balkans, during the Great War, for Pašić should have settled the issue of the Serbs living in the Austria-Hungary and the one of union with Croats and with Slovenes. Whether the Yugoslav programme, gradually built from August 1914 and expressed in its final form in the declaration of December the same year, was an expedient of the war or a preconceived plan, is a question that misses the point. In its first programme of 1881, Pašić's Radical Party declared the unification of all Serbs as its main foreign policy objective. The war with Austria-Hungary created the conditions necessary for its realization. To Pašić, after almost thirty-five years of service in the Serbian Parliament, where he actively fought for the development of democracy, and the economic and military potentials of the Serbian state, only Serbia was capable of achieving Yugoslav union. The cooperation with Croat and Slovenian politicians from Austria-Hungary was supposed to give additional credibility to Serbia's Yugoslav programme, but it was not meant to be an equal partnership. In Pašić's view, the result of Yugoslav union should be one state which should naturally benefit from Serbia's state and military tradition. To him, any solution involving the division of the Yugoslav lands into two or more polities had to be prevented at all costs, since it was a recipe for disaster in the form of their rivalry if not an outright conflict.

Therefore, he never had a reserve or small solution as opposed to the big, Yugoslav one. That was why he considered Italian demands, as expressed in the Treaty of London, as more than perilous to Serbia's and Yugoslav interests. In his mind the war had to be fought with the demise of Austria-Hungary as its main objective, and with its heritage as the main objective of Serbia's war effort. To some extent his thinking corresponded to that of Italian Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, the architect of the territorial solutions set down in the Treaty of London. Therefore, their negotiations of 1915 and 1917 were doomed to fail from the beginning. If Pašić was willing to make territorial concessions in Istria and Quarnaro, it was tantamount to high treason to his Yugoslav partners, and largely insufficient to his Italian counterpart. Even at the time when Austrian army was still a dominant force in the Balkans, both on the Carso front and in Serbia, the conflicting territorial claims prevented any kind of meaningful cooperation between Serbia and Italy.

Both Pašić and Sonnino believed that the war effort would lose all meaning if the declining Austria-Hungary was replaced by a vigorous and threatening new neighbour, Italy and Yugoslavia respectively. The war turned out to be the unique opportunity to achieve not only their respective most ambitious national objectives but also, even more importantly, to impose strategic solutions necessary to ensure the defence of their enlarged respective states. By following such uncompromising agendas Pašić and Sonnino set the stage for a conflict which continued into the 1930s and was only settled during the Second World War, when both strategies were decisively defeated.

