

**The Institute of History Belgrade  
Sapienza University of Rome**

**WAR, PEACE AND NATION-BUILDING  
(1853–1918)**



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# **WAR, PEACE AND NATION-BUILDING (1853–1918)**

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## FOREWORD

Nationalism is the concept of the modern times. By the late 18th century it became a generally accepted movement which influenced public and private life, and grew into one of the decisive factors of modern history. The 19th century is rightly called the era of nationalism as in the early century nationalism spread to Central Europe and in the mid-century to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, where it eventually triumphed in the First World War. New, national states, faced with internal national conflicts and territorial tendencies, were formed on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy. All national movements in Europe in the 19th century had common denominators – the struggle for national unification and for gaining national sovereignty and independency from the empires, as well as the strive for democracy. Up until the First World War, the nation served as a means of achieving the equality and freedom of all citizens. The development of modern European societies – the establishment and development of state institutions, cultural, educational and scientific progress, and democratic political and parliamentary life implied the liberation from the Habsburg, Ottoman and Russian imperial influence. On the path of nation-building, European societies faced numerous challenges, obstacles and differences between political institutions and constitutional principles on the one hand, and the levels of economic and cultural development on the other.

The thematic collection of papers WAR, PEACE AND NATION-BUILDING (1853–1918) aims to explore the processes unfolding during peacetime, wartime and conclusion of agreements, when individuals, nations and empires were forming their identities. It also examines many other topics – from the role of ordinary people in shaping the landscapes of nationalisms and empires, history of women, families, communities and elites, through modernisation and the impact of Ottoman and Habsburg heritage in the Balkans, wars as the factors of national emancipation, to the final fall of the empires and creation of modern national states. In practice, national movements were expected to aim at national unification or expansion. Despite numerous short-lived attempts to change the borders of the successor states of the Austrian and the Ottoman Empire, they are still more or less the same as after the First World War, at least south and west to the former Soviet borders. The timeframe – from 1853 to 1918 – are the borderline years which witnessed the pinnacle of the process of national mobilisation on the one hand, and a complete collapse of empires on the other. The intention is to present, through a scientific perspective, the social, political, diplomatic and cultural changes in European societies from the start of the Crimean War until the Versailles Peace Conference, which marked the end of the First World War.

The Institute of History from Belgrade and Sapienza University of Rome have cherished successful cooperation for years already. The result of this cooperation is also the collection of papers WAR, PEACE AND NATION-BUILDING (1853–1918), which contains twenty two scientific papers, explaining, to an extent, the intricate and intertwined past of the European empires and modern European national states. We believe that the published articles contribute to a successful analysis of the rise of nationalism and the nation-building process in a broader European context, in peace and wartime, in “the long nineteenth century”.

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## **FROM THE LAUSANNE CONGRESS TO THE ROME PACT UNTIL THE FIUME LEAGUE, NATIONALITIES AND NATIONALISMS (1916–1920)**

**Abstract:** Between 1917 and 1918, a deciding context for the outcome of World War I arose: the relevance of social and national mobilisation emerged as a new ideological factor that triggered the last phase of the war. Nationalities and nationalisms were the factors of weakness in the lands of multinational empires, in warfare and after the armistices: in Russia, particularly in 1916 and 1917, supported by Germany; in Austria-Hungary, fuelled by Italy in 1918; then, after the war, against the “League of Nations” established by the Great Powers, within the oppressed nations’ “Fiume League” in 1920. In all these contexts, political movements and governments fostered nationalisms and pursued policies to support nationalities. The nation-state’s system is the output of that transition and is still today at the base of our historical context.

**Keywords:** Lausanne Congress, Nationalities, Adriatic Question, Fiume League, Nationalism, 1916-1920.

### *Introduction*

During the Great War, a historical period ended and a new one started – the long 19<sup>th</sup> century received its *adieu* at the same time when the short 20<sup>th</sup> century got its first “welcome”.<sup>1</sup> Nationalities emerged as strong political factors, in the context of nationalism, to undermine multinational empires and powers<sup>2</sup> – the Spanish Kingdom, the British Empire, the Mediterranean coasts, Eastern Europe and the Balkans are the main multicultural regions producing ethno-religious nations.<sup>3</sup> The political action

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<sup>1</sup> See Erich J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1987, and *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, Michael Joseph, London 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrea Carteny, *Oppressed Nationalities in Warfare, 1918*, in: Al fronte. La Grande Guerra fra interventismo, cronaca e soccorso, Andrea Carteny, Giuseppe Motta, Alessandro Vagnini (eds), Nuova Cultura, Roma 2018.

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, 2 vols, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983; Antonello F. Biagini, *Momenti di storia balcanica (1878–1914)*, Ufficio Storico SME, Roma 1981.

for claiming the rights of the nationalities without a state was developed in the years preceding the outbreak of the Great War.

### *Nationalités opprimées*

Interesting activities were carried out upon the initiative of French journalist and activist Jean Pélissier and Lithuanian *émigré* Juozas Paršaitis, known as Jean Gabrys.<sup>4</sup> In 1912, promoting the *Congrès Universel des Nationalités*, they set up an institution – the *Office Central des Nationalités*, later also known as *Union des Nationalités*, tasked with the diffusion of information and the coordination of activities by different movements of oppressed nationalities and peoples. Pélissier took part in the Conference of Oppressed Nationalities in London in February 1914, and promoted, though without attending, the *Deuxième Conférence des Nationalités* in Paris, in June 1915, when speeches were held by Serbs, Bulgarians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Romanians, Armenians and many others. Through the *Office Central des Nationalités*, they were able to bring together representatives and leaders from very different movements, from Western Europe to Asia (Catalans and Basques from Spain, the Irish, Egyptians and Indians from the British Empire, Latvians and Lithuanians from Russia, Czechs and Serbs from Austria-Hungary, etc.) and until 1919, they promoted meetings, conferences and congresses for nationalities, and spread information on the situation and activity of nationalities with the magazine *Annales des Nationalités*. Published as a report (*Bulletin de l'Union des Nationalités*) by the secretary of the organisation (in 1916 the headquarters were in Villa Messidor of Chemin de l'Elysée, in Lausanne-Ouchy), the *Annales* were an essential instrument for the coordination of different movements as well as for dissemination of information and propaganda. Each issue was often devoted to a different national question, taking into account the news concerning the situation of each nationality and the recently published literature on the topic.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, by applying a comparative approach, some issues concerned specific national questions through monographs: this series of studies, which started before the outbreak of the conflict, represented, during the war, the first documentation supporting the claims of different nationalities at the peace negotiations. Between 1916 and 1917, the literary production broadened its interests and deepened its focus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See D. R. Watson, *Jean Pélissier and the Office Central des Nationalités, 1912–1919*, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 110, nr 439 (Oxford University Press, November 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. *Le Problème Baltique* (“La Question Lithuanienne”, “La Question Esthonienne”, “La Question Finlandaise”) and *Chronique des Nationalités* (news from Bohemia, Lithuania, Sweden, Ukraine), *Les Annales des Nationalités*. *Bulletin de l'union des Nationalités*, nr 12, 5<sup>me</sup> année (Lausanne-Ouchy 1916).

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. *Étude sur la Nation Catalane*, *Les Annales des Nationalités*. *Bulletin de l'union des Nationalités*, nr 6–8, 5<sup>o</sup> année (Lausanne–Ouchy 1916).

### The Lausanne Congress (1916)

The best known initiative was the *Troisième Conférence des Nationalités* in 1916. In the absence of Pélissier, the Conference was organized by Gabrys who moved the *Office Central* with his Lithuanian information bureau to Lausanne. It is also known as the *3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of Oppressed Peoples*.<sup>7</sup> Under the influence of its president, the Belgian Paul Otlet, and his pacifistic position, the so-called “Lausanne Congress” had a pro-German and anti-Russian approach. The setting up of the *Union des Nationalités* with German support allowed the participation of almost three thousand people, many coming from Russian territories (Tatars, Kyrgyz, Persians, several Lithuanians arrived from the country under German occupation). The main promoter of the Congress, Jean Gabrys, was linked with the German propaganda, which contributed to the success of the Congress and to the self-determination claims from the oppressed nationalities in Russia until the collapse of the Tsarist Empire. In this context, the first relevant documents were produced, e.g. the Lithuanian Memorandum addressed to Woodrow Wilson, or the first declarations on full independence by Finland, Poland and Lithuania. Certainly, the German support proved to be transient and not strategic, in line with the German interests of the moment, as in the case of Lithuania. In this country, after the Lithuanians proclaimed their wish for independence at the “captive” nations’ Congress of Lausanne in 1916, when the German forces occupied the land there was neither space nor speculation about this objective.<sup>8</sup> In 1917, when the February revolution in Russia changed the international context, Germany focused its action in support of the Bolsheviks to produce further overthrows at the core of the Russian Empire, losing at the same time interest in non-Russian nationalities.<sup>9</sup>

Numerous organizations were established in this context: worth mentioning is the *Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands* (league of the “alien nationalities” or “foreign peoples” of Russia), founded by Gabrys and an *émigré* from the Russian Empire. The League was active from the spring of 1916 with discreet support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs and addressed a distress call to President Wilson for the protection of non-Russian nationalities from Tsarist policies of oppression.<sup>10</sup> During 1917 and 1918, following the success of the June 1916 Congress, the *Union des*

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<sup>7</sup> See *III<sup>me</sup> Conférence des Nationalités, Juin 1916 and Invitation*, Les Annales des Nationalités. Bulletin de l’union des Nationalités, nr. 4–5, 5<sup>e</sup> année (Lausanne–Ouchy 1916).

<sup>8</sup> See Alfonsas Eidintas, Alfredas Bumblauskas, Antanas Kulakauskas, Mindaugas Tamošaitis, *The History of Lithuania*, Eugrimas, Vilnius 2013.

<sup>9</sup> D. R. Watson, *Jean Pélissier and the Office Central des Nationalités*.

<sup>10</sup> See Seppo Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands, 1916–1918*, Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Helsinki 1978; *Chapter 14*, in: A. E. Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland. 1914–1917*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1971; *Chapter 9*, in: Hakan Sirri Kirmli, *National movements and national identity among the Crimean Tatars (1905–1916)*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1990.

*Nationalités* published a series with papers of participants in the Congress, with abstracts from the *Annales* and with monographs devoted to specific issues, with different titles.<sup>11</sup>

### *Italian Eastern front with Austria-Hungary*

If, from the one side, Germany tried to use the issue of oppressed nationalities against the Tsarist regime in its favour, even more so Italy could count on using the entire Risorgimento and irredentist heritage against Austria-Hungary and in favour of freedom for the Italians and other oppressed peoples under the Habsburg regime. The Italian government, in fact, used propaganda as a new extraordinary means of exerting pressure and of mobilisation in the hands of the state towards the society.<sup>12</sup> Spread in trench journals,<sup>13</sup> reorganized from 1916 with the "P" office,<sup>14</sup> then used domestically and abroad,<sup>15</sup> propaganda was a formidable way to implement a complex strategy against the enemy, mainly after the defeat at Caporetto at the end of 1917, by focusing on the different nationalities within Austria-Hungary. The traditional taboos of using propaganda against the enemy or of encouraging desertion (initially prohibited as it was considered a means with no military value) started to be broken under the urgency of answering the *Strafexpedition* launched by Vienna in May 1916. Despite the sceptic attitude, if not the refusal, of the Italian Chief of Staff, General Luigi Cadorna, the High

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<sup>11</sup> See e.g. *La Question Esthonienne et la Question Septentrionale*, "Mémoire présenté au nom des Esthoniens à la III<sup>me</sup> Conférence des Nationalités par M. Keskula", Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 24, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1918; *La Nation Ukrainienne et ses revendications*, "Mémoire présenté par la Délégation Ukrainienne à la III<sup>me</sup> Conférence des Nationalités", Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 25, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1917; *Projet de Charte Mondiale*, "par Paul Otlet", Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 26, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1917; *Le Capitalisme Anglo-Américain et la Question des Nationalités*, "par le Dr. Sakya Muni", Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 27, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1917; *Recueil des Documents concernant les Droits des Nationalités – n. 1*, Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 28, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1917; *La Question des Nationalités et le message du Président Wilson*, "Extrait des 'Annales des Nationalités', nr 11–12, 1917", Union des Nationalités – Office Central, nr 29, Lausanne, Librairie Centrale des Nationalités, 1917.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Row, *Mobilizing the Nation: Italian Propaganda in the Great War*, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, Vol. 24 ("Design, Culture, Identity: The Wolfsonian Collection"), (Wolfsonian-Florida International University, Miami 2002).

<sup>13</sup> See Mario Isnenghi, *Giornali di trincea*, Einaudi, Torino 1977.

<sup>14</sup> See Gian Luigi Gatti, *Dopo Caporetto. Gli ufficiali P nella Grande Guerra: propaganda, assistenza, vigilanza*, LEG, Gorizia 2000.

<sup>15</sup> See Luciano Tosi, *La propaganda italiana all'estero nella prima guerra mondiale. Rivendicazioni territoriali e politica delle nazionalità*, Del Bianco, Udine 1977; Nicola Della Volpe, *Esercito e propaganda nella Grande Guerra*, Ufficio Storico SME, Roma 1980.

Command issued a document signed by General Carlo Porro, deputy to Cadorna, recognizing the benefit of propaganda in the enemy's trenches and the need for several launchers to deliver it.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the turnover, in 1916, at the head of the Empire and in the armed forces' High Command also reflected on the management of Austro-Hungarian nationalities. Emperor Charles started with, in a way, a modern approach: he took control of the war with less concern for military policies and more sensibility towards prospects of peace, freeing the Czech nationalist leaders with the decree of amnesty in spring 1917. According to the German command, these moves towards detente with internal nationalities caused the moral breakdown in the imperial-royal army (and thus also caused the betrayal of the 19<sup>th</sup> division's soldiers on the Italian front in July and of the Carzano betrayal in September).<sup>17</sup>

### *The "dream" of Carzano*

In September 1917, the venture of Carzano showed the amazing chances of success that propaganda and the activity of national anti-Habsburg mobilization could have along the trenches.<sup>18</sup> From the summer of 1915, in fact, upon the initiative of General Roberto Brusati, Italian troops penetrated the Austrian territory from that area, and, until autumn, many Czech soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian army who were held captive showed sympathy towards the Italian cause or stepped over the lines to desert. The information gained from them was extremely precious and the Command started to throw flyers in many languages over the enemy's trenches. They read: "Come to us, we will welcome you as brothers. Our land is also yours. We also fight for the freedom of all of you from the Habsburg monarchy's tyranny".<sup>19</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian *Strafexpedition* re-conquered the Valsugana in 1916, leaving several units of Slavic soldiers in the area. In this context, lieutenant Ljudevik Pivko, Commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bosnian regiment's 5<sup>th</sup> battalion, Slovenian and with anti-Habsburg feelings, started to share, in summer 1917, information on the rear and on the forces deployed by the imperial-royal army in agreement with Major Cesare Finzi (Pettorelli Lalatta), the German speaking head of the 1<sup>st</sup> Army's Information Office. They were in fact planning – simultaneously with the desertion of a troop of soldiers led by Pivko – the

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<sup>16</sup> See Gian Luigi Gatti, *La propaganda militare italiana verso il nemico nella Prima guerra mondiale*, in: *Le operazioni interforze e multinazionali nella storia militare*, Acta Tomo II, 39° Congresso della Commissione Internazionale di Storia Militare, Torino 1–6 settembre 2013, Ministero della Difesa-CISM, Roma, 2013; Marco Mondini, *Parole come armi: la propaganda verso il nemico nell'Italia della Grande Guerra*, Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra, Rovereto 2009.

<sup>17</sup> See Gordon A. Craig, *The World War I Alliance of the Central Powers in Retrospect: The Military Cohesion of the Alliance*, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Sept., 1965).

<sup>18</sup> See Cesare Pettorelli Lalatta, *L'occasione perduta. Carzano 1917*, Mursia, Milano 2007; Ljudevit Pivko, *Carzano 1917. Abbiamo vinto l'Austria-Ungheria*, LEG, Gorizia 2017; Luigi Sardi, *Carzano 1917*, Curcu&Genovese, Trento 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Cesare Pettorelli Lalatta, *L'occasione perduta. Carzano 1917*, Milano, Mursia 1967, 17.

penetration of Italian soldiers (largely present in the area, which was not the case with the Austro-Hungarians) in the Valsugana, in an action that would isolate the entire Army from the enemy and open the way for the occupation of Trento. The action, planned in detail by Cadorna, started in the night between 17 and 18 September, when Italian foot soldiers and riflemen crossed the enemy line without fighting: Pivko's men had previously poisoned the Austro-Hungarians' food and interrupted the electricity flow in the lines. However, the "dream of Carzano" was broken by the Italian tactic indecision and the lack of a strategic view. General Attilio Zincone, who was leading the action, employed inexperienced units with excessive equipment. The action was slowed down, causing the Command to order a retreat, leaving the vanguard exposed to the Austrian reaction. The episode demonstrated once again how the search among Austro-Hungarian lines was successful and how the weakest points in Vienna's military organization were to be found at its core, within its traditional multinational complexity.<sup>20</sup>

### *The policy of nationalities*

In reality, until 1917, France, England, the United States and Italy considered the preservation of the Danube Monarchy the vital stability factor in post-war Europe as well. However, Rome later pursued a strong political and military action aiming at striking the final blow at Vienna, following a "policy of nationalities" that could impact the Habsburg Empire from within.<sup>21</sup> All the Allies, actually, considered Vienna (and Budapest) the weakest capitals of the Central Empires as it was there that the nationalities' propaganda had to reap the best rewards of this action.<sup>22</sup>

In Italy, the policies supporting the "oppressed" nationalities of Austria-Hungary moved forward to include the recruitment of a large number of Slovenian deserters from the imperial-royal Army (an effect of the Carzano plan), as an addition to the several Czechs already employed as explorers and informants at the front. The defeat at Caporetto initially gave secondary priority to this strategy, which again became of great interest because of the internal pressure from nationalist and pro-nationalities clubs and because of the changed international context at the beginning of the following year. The beginning of 1918 was in fact characterized by the new moral mission among the Powers of the Entente, in favour of the freedom of peoples within multinational empires. The first step was the speech by English Prime Minister Lloyd George before the Trade Unions Congress at Caxton Hall on 5 January<sup>23</sup>, in which he underlined how, "in the context of

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<sup>20</sup> See István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism. A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1990.

<sup>21</sup> See Leo Valiani, *The End of Austria-Hungary*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1973.

<sup>22</sup> See Mark Cornwall, *The undermining of Austria-Hungary. The battle for hearts and minds*, Macmillan, New York 2000.

<sup>23</sup> See David R. Woodward, *The Origins and Intent of David Lloyd George's January 5 War Aims Speech*, *The Historian*, Vol. 34, Issue 1 (November 1971).

the new international order” in which Austria-Hungary would be separated from Germany, one of the war goals of the Allies was inspired by the “freedom of peoples under Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire”. The second step was the position adopted in favour of self-determination with the speech on the “fourteen points” by American President Woodrow Wilson at the Congress on 8 January.<sup>24</sup> The tenth point stated: “the peoples of Austria-Hungary, for whom we wish to ensure a place among the nations, must be given the broadest possibility for their autonomous development”. In a speech on 11 February, Wilson also clarified that, in the new arrangement of peoples and lands, it was necessary to step out of line from the “game, even though a great game, now discredited, of the balance of power”, and that every territorial establishment after the war “had to be decided in the interest and for the benefit of the populations involved, and not as part of any adjustment or compromise among claims from rival states”, without introducing new or “old elements of disagreement or opposition” which could threaten peace in Europe and in the world. The contrast and difference among the “national” principles by Wilson and the Bolshevik principles by Vladimir Lenin claimed by Russia was highlighted in the social factor. The socialist ideology was in fact based on the “national and social” revolution, while Wilson opposed the free choice for a “national revolution” to the idea of a “social” revolution (and allowing peoples to have the right to choose their form of government).<sup>25</sup> This message was addressed to the peoples inside the “dualist” Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which the call for autonomy and independence of nationalities could have relevant consequences. Vienna and Budapest, compared to Berlin, were the weakest among the Central Powers, especially when the military situation of the Entente got worse and the worst threat for Paris and London became real: a new destructive German military offence following the Russo-German Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed on 3 March.<sup>26</sup>

Until January 1918, the government of Rome did not express official objections to the English position on the right of existence for Austria-Hungary. Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino wanted in fact to honour the Treaty of London and preserve the Habsburg Empire. It is interesting to note that on 7 January the position of Benito Mussolini, the revolutionary and interventionist socialist director of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, appreciated the English Prime Minister Lloyd George’s speech in favour of the maintenance of Austria-Hungary and of a solution through a “tetralist” project (meaning a Monarchy with four entities: Austria, Bohemia, Hungary and Croatia), instead of through its dissolution, as he declared on 12 January.<sup>27</sup> The activity of many Italian groups, before and after the defeat at Caporetto, showed strong support for

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<sup>24</sup> See Robert M. Maciver, *Woodrow Wilson and Self-Determination*, Bulletin of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, Vol. 4 (1945–1946).

<sup>25</sup> See Erich J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990.

<sup>26</sup> See John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Brest-Litovsk, the Forgotten Peace: March 1918*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1971.

<sup>27</sup> See *Il Giornale d'Italia* (10 January 1918).

the “oppressed” nationalities and evident criticism of the “Austrophilia” in the Anglo-Saxon environment that was embodied in the activity of the *Corriere della Sera* run by Luigi Albertini (columnist and Senator of the Italian Kingdom) and the group around him.<sup>28</sup> In several articles, from mid-January to early February, with the section “On the Directives of History”,<sup>29</sup> Albertini and the *Corriere* attacked the official Italian position on respecting the London Pact, criticizing the pro-Austrian attitude starting from the Second Balkan War, asking Italy to directly support the southern Slavs, to find an agreement with the Yugoslavs and to “renounce” the London Treaty concessions (from which came the name “*rinunciatori*” for the group of the *Corriere*). This new goal attracted new supporters, in a constructive dialogue with *Il Popolo d’Italia* by Mussolini and with the famous nationalist and officer who was a very close friend of Albertini, Gabriele d’Annunzio (who by a letter on 19 January declared “I am pleased with the vigorous style used by the *Corriere* to defend our cause”).<sup>30</sup>

### *The POW legions*

The first result of these assumptions was the support to the organization of prisoners of war (POW) against their former armies: that is the case of Czech and Slovak former prisoners’ legions, recruited thanks to the propaganda by the National Council led by Tomáš Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Štefánik. Czechs and Slovaks had in fact been separated from other Austro-Hungarian prisoners already in Russia, Serbia and Italy, to be employed in the rear of the front. In reality, because of the opposition of Sonnino, Prime Minister Francesco Saverio Nitti and General Armando Diaz, Italy belatedly started propaganda on the rights of nationalities behind the lines of the enemy’s front and in the Austrian trenches. Štefánik’s charisma as a Czechoslovak activist “agitator” – also thanks to his influential friendships – made him known and listened to also in the *entourage* of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, and with the aid of Leonida Bissolati (an interventionist socialist, supporter of nationalities policy), he gave an impetus to the strategy for the establishment of the Czechoslovak legion. Responding to the need of soldiers and explorers on the Eastern front, as of January 1918 the Supreme Command employed around two thousand Czech former prisoners in the field. Finally, on 9 May, thanks to the persuasion of Bissolati, Orlando and Nitti, the establishment of the Czechoslovak legion started in conjunction with the Army Command.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter IV: *Il Congresso dei popoli oppressi*, in: Luigi Albertini, *Da Caporetto a Vittorio Veneto (ottobre 1917 – novembre 1918)*, III vol., Zanichelli, Bologna 1953, in: *L’Italia nella Guerra Mondiale*, II part of: *Venti anni di vita politica*, 5 vols (1950–1953).

<sup>29</sup> Luigi Albertini, *Sulle direttive della storia (Il problema dell’Austria)*, *Il Corriere della Sera* (3 February 1918).

<sup>30</sup> See L. Albertini, *Da Caporetto a Vittorio Veneto*, 244.

<sup>31</sup> See Leonida Bissolati, *Diario di guerra. Appunti presi sulle linee, nei comandi, nei consigli interalleati*, Einaudi, Torino 1934.

In March 1918, a new and stronger action against Austria-Hungary was necessary. The Allies, at that moment, had to choose between two different political approaches.<sup>32</sup> The first option envisaged “working on a separate peace with the Emperor” and therefore “leaving his land intact”, an option already tried “without success” (due to strong ties between Vienna and Berlin and the impossibility to offer irrefutable conditions to Vienna without creating a contrast with Italy). The second option, on the other hand, was not necessarily against the Habsburgs, as it did not collide with the “interests of the Catholic religion”, and was “in harmony with the goals declared by the Allies”. It was based on counting the nationalities within the Empire and on considering the number of Germans and Hungarians (21 million) relative to other national groups, Slavs, Italians and Romanians (31 million). This meant that it was possible to use the method of “rulers according to the ruled consensus” instead of that of “self-government” or of “autonomous development”. Furthermore, the idea that the Allies did not want to break up Austria and could offer support to existing anti-German organizations (such as the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and Polish national committees) was overcome. It was therefore also possible, in line with a branch of the Italian government aiming to disregard the Treaty of London, to support the nationalities’ policy in agreement with “anti-German races” in the Habsburg Empire. Hopefully, not a cluster of divided small states but a confederation of non-German states in Eastern and Danube Europe was to be created, while Germans and Austro-Germans could be free to establish the “Confederate States of Germany”.

#### *The Torre-Trumbić agreement*

The diplomatic negotiations with the Yugoslav counterpart therefore focused on the issue of the Italian eastern border, especially the borders of Istria and Dalmatia.<sup>33</sup> The first meeting was arranged in London in the previous months thanks to the activity of the influential pro-Yugoslav clubs, the ideological support of common newspapers (such as *The Times* and *The New Europe*) and the activity of well-known personalities, such as Wickham Steed and Robert Seton Watson. Ante Trumbić, a Dalmatian leader of the Yugoslav national movement, was the delegate representing southern Slavs and a counterpart to the Italians in the meetings with Orlando. The support to the policy of nationalities was officially launched with the speeches by

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<sup>32</sup> See Doc. nr 425: *L’Ambasciatore a Londra, Imperiali, al Ministro degli Esteri, Sonnino*, R.S. 1036/335, London, 18 March 1918, Attachment: “Propaganda in Austria-Ungheria (segreto)”, pp. 357–359, in: *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (DDI)*, V series, Vol. 10 (1 January – 31 May 1918), Commissione per la pubblicazione dei Documenti Diplomatici – Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Roma 1985.

<sup>33</sup> See Giovanni Amendola, Giuseppe A. Borghese, Ugo Ojetto, Andrea Torre, *Il Patto di Roma*, Premise of Francesco Ruffini, Quaderni della “Voce”, Firenze 1919.

President Orlando on 12 February and on 4 March. In this historical context, with the propaganda boost for all the “oppressed peoples” in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some well-known journalists (such as Albertini, Giuseppe Borgese and Giovanni Amendola) launched the idea of reorganizing a congress for the representatives of these nationalities to take place in Rome. In February, a preliminary meeting was held at the *Trento and Trieste Society* in Rome with the participation of Senator Francesco Ruffini and other Italian members of the Parliament, including Professor Maffeo Pantaleoni. Afterwards, an executive committee was set up to organize the congress, and Albertini’s proposal to send Andrea Torre, a journalist and member of the Parliament, to London for a meeting with Trumbić was accepted. Albertini underlined how Torre was sent not only with the “consent” but also “in agreement” with the government, despite this being a privately financed mission. The difficult negotiations among Torre, Trumbić, Borgese, Steed and Seton Watson had to go over the most sensitive issues in Italian-Yugoslav relations. These were summarized in the final joint declaration that featured seven main points. Three points concerned general proposals: the right of all peoples to build a national and unified state, with full political and economic independence; the shared acknowledgement that Austria-Hungary was the main obstacle to national rights and aspirations; the common cooperation against the oppressor. Then the representatives of the Italian and Yugoslav peoples agreed on the fact that the relations between Italians and Serbs, Croats and Slovenians – also known as the “Yugoslav nation” – had to start from recognizing the unity and independence of the already mentioned “Yugoslav nation”. To this, the idea of the Italian national unity completion as a vital interest for Yugoslavs was added, with Yugoslavs also declaring that freeing the Adriatic Sea and defending it from any present and possible enemy was important for both peoples that would therefore friendly cooperate on the matter. Article 7 of the joint declaration also affirmed that the minorities would be included in the new border of the state and “the respect for their language, culture and moral and economic interest would be recognized and granted”. Following the vital common interest and the idea of “Adriatic freedom”, the key point of the negotiations was expected to be the common goal of peacefully resolving territorial disputes on the basis of the principle of respecting peoples and nationalities and their right to decide on their fate. This document was sufficient for opening the road towards the Congress of Rome, overcoming the opposition of the French *Comité* for oppressed nationalities and of Jacques Bouillon and Franklin Fournol, transalpine deputies who tried to move the location of the Congress from Rome to Paris. Before leaving for Rome, Trumbić and the Yugoslavs were well aware of the complexity of the project. The delegation was in fact chosen with extreme care by Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, and included former ministers such as Stojan Stojanović (all close to Trumbić).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Doc. nr 491: *Il Ministro presso il Governo serbo di Corfù, Sforza, al Ministro degli Esteri, Sonnino*, T. GAB. 793/38, Corfù, 2 April 1918, in: DDI, V–10.

### The Rome Pact (1918)

The Congress in Rome started on 8 April, at the same time when the Clemenceau-Czernin controversy was taking place, caused by the imperial-royal Ministry for Foreign Affairs Ottokar Czernin's speech held on 2 April and by the overshadowed temptation of achieving a separate peace.<sup>35</sup> The idea of the Congress was greeted with enthusiasm and gathered the announced participation of many institutions and associations (such as the "Parliamentary Fascism", the *Dante Alighieri Society*, the "irredentist" Social-Democracy, *Latina Gens*), members of the Parliament (senators Albertini, Della Torre and Volterra, deputies Agnelli, Canepa, Di Cesarò, Di Scalea, Federzoni, Martini, Scialoia, Tascia Di Cutò), many journalists and public figures (Borgese, Forges-Davanzati, Giuriati, Lazzarini, Lorenzoni, Mantica, Mussolini, Ojetti, Pantaleoni, Paternò, Prato, Prezzolini, Salvemini, Silva, Spada). There were foreign representatives as well, among whom the French (Franklin Bouillon, Albert Thomas, Fournol, De Quirielle), the British (Steed, Seton Watson), the Americans (with Ambassador Nelson Page), but also the most relevant personalities: the leaders of the national Committees, such as Beneš and Štefánik (Czechs and Slovaks), Trumbić and Stojanović (Yugoslavs and Serbs), Skirmunt (Polish representative), Draghicescu and Mironescu (Romanians). The arrival of the foreign delegations (Romanian, Czechoslovak, Polish and Yugoslav) happened without any complication owing to the logistics and security of the Supreme Command of the Italian army.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the Congress envisaged a Rome "pact" to support nationalities and peoples against the Habsburgs.<sup>37</sup> Italian senator Francesco Ruffini, the chairman of the conference, explained the commitment of Italy that "Italy had to listen to the call of the oppressed nations under the dominance of the Habsburgs, because this memory is still too fresh, given that a huge part of its territory still lies under the Habsburgs and many Italian benevolent and noble sons are still stricken by their tyranny". He welcomed Bohemians, Yugoslavs, Poles and Romanians as brothers of the Italian people who carried the same burden; he recalled with gratitude the representatives of the allied nations. As an Italian, he then wished to remember the person who was

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<sup>35</sup> See L. Albertini, *Da Caporetto a Vittorio Veneto*.

<sup>36</sup> See AUSSME (Archivio Ufficio Storico-Stato Maggiore Esercito), *Fondo F-1, Prima Guerra Mondiale, 1915–18, Comando Supremo (vari uffici)*, busta 246, fasc. 7: "Rappresentanti nazionalità appartenenti alla Monarchia A.–U. intervenuti al congresso di Roma (9–10 aprile 1918)", f. 1, Foreign delegations' members: "Romeni: Floresco, Vice Presidente della Camera Romana; Mironesco, Senatore; Draghicesco: Direttore della "Independence Romaine"; Mandresco; Lupu. Czechi-Slovacchi: Benes; Stefanic; Hlavacec; Vesely; Ossursky, Rappresentante degli Slovacchi d'America. Polacchi: Sayda, Rappres. dei Polacchi della Posnania; Mozelewsky, Rappres. del Consiglio Nazionale in Svizzera; Zalesky; Zmorski, Dep. al Reichstag; Loret. Jugo-Slavi: Ante Trumbic, Presid. Comitato Jugo-Slavo; Mestrovic; Banianin; Gregorin; Trinastic, Rappres. degli Sloveni; Ambresiac, Rappres. degli Slavi della Dobrugia; Gazari: Dalmata; Stoianovic / Petrovic: Rappres. della emigrazione Jugo-Slava in Svizzera; Ivimaestic".

the first advocate of the principle of nationality: Giuseppe Mazzini. The delegates kept on working until 10 April, when Torre read the final declaration recalling the Torre-Trumbić agreement and accompanying it with a special Polish declaration against the Germans (which was the first anti-German stance made by the Polish). It was stated that with the Rome Agreement, finally, “the Entente, by common accord and officially, admitted that the Dual Monarchy has to be dismembered and the Allies are ready to support, with all the material and moral means, the now threatening efforts of the national entities within the Austro-Hungarian Empire who want to break the overbearing power of a minority of barely more than twenty million German-Hungarians”. England’s contribution to the success of this strategy was acknowledged by the strength of the speech by Wickham Steed, director of the *Times* foreign policy (“the most serious and the greatest authority of the English public opinion”) who declared in writing: *the Austro-Hungarian Empire is not a European state, instead it is an Asian Sultanate based on oppression, lacking any kind of civil spirit*. It was declared that in Rome delegates of thirty million Slavs and Latins were fighting against twenty million Germans and Hungarians and asking for rights, freedom and justice for the national entities against the “empire of violence”. The “Document of the Nationalities”, the final result of the Congress in Rome, not only aimed to have political significance, but also to create an association capable of surviving throughout the conflict by means of culture and commerce. The speeches by delegates and observers – such as Beneš, Trumbić, Draghicescu, Zamorski, Franklin Bouillon, Thomas, Steed – turned out to be of a different tone but still of great strength: the Italian government, however, missed it since none of its representatives took the floor. Actually, during the time elapsed between the Torre-Trumbić meeting in London and the opening of the Congress in Rome, thanks to Steed’s speech, even the Head of the French Government Georges Clemenceau and English Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Arthur Balfour accepted the proclamation of independence for all the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, while the Supreme Command of the Italian army and General Piero Badoglio arranged for the preparation of leaflets and fliers to be dropped over the enemy lines in order to spread the news of the current act of national mobilisation within the enemy’s ranks. Even so, Minister Sonnino had still not accepted the implementation of such strategy and blocked it until the situation was clearer. Only at the end of the Congress was Steed authorised by Sonnino to state that all the members of the Italian government, without any exception, were hoping for the conference’s success. However, the position of Sonnino (in favour of an “indirect” adherence to the Rome Agreement) was still in line with the Treaty of London in terms of the Italian territorial goals. The following day, Orlando’s direct support was made clear through the meeting with Yugoslav and other delegations. Then, on 25 April, during an interview with the French press, the Italian Prime Minister illustrated how the “well-known” Treaty of London had been

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<sup>37</sup> Pietro Santamaria, *Il Patto di Roma*, Tip. Failli, Roma 1918.

“negotiated against the hostile Austria” but at that moment, facing a “friendly Yugoslav state”, the “situation and the intentions” were necessarily changing.<sup>38</sup>

### *The collapse of Habsburg Empire*

The Rome Pact brought several implications and consequences, also due to the position of the Italian government on the issue of the Adriatic coast. A lively debate started over the sought “line of balance” between Italians and Slavs in Dalmatia and Istria. In general, the observers agreed on defining the Italian attitude as “double” on the issue of nationalities (at first for the different positions of Orlando and Sonnino). At the same time, however, several journalists and journals (among which *Il Giornale d'Italia*, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, *L'Idea Nazionale* and *La Perseveranza*) appreciated the resolution of Rome. The Rome Pact therefore caused relevant implications and consequences, also because of the position of the Italian government on the issue of the Adriatic coast. The consequences of the Congress were nevertheless important: on the one hand, the strategy of dissolving Austria-Hungary was implemented through the promotion and formation of legions made of Austro-Hungarian prisoners (Czech, Slovaks, Yugoslavs, Romanians and Poles) and through the active propaganda over the enemy lines incited to desert and change side. With the agreement of President Orlando and of the Minister of War Vittorio Zupelli with Štefánik, the “Czechoslovak legion” was officially established on 12 April under the authority of the Czech National Council and under the command of Italian General Andrea Graziani. Eleven thousand five hundred prisoners on fourteen thousand were employed in a new division (concerning Yugoslav soldiers, Sonnino did not accept loyalty for the King of Serbia and for future Yugoslavia).<sup>39</sup> The Central Commission for propaganda against the enemy, established in April with an official for each nationality and with the participation of deputies and officials from the Italian army – among whom commander Ugo Ojetti, the chief of the Commission and lieutenant colonels Giuseppe Donati and Umberto Zanotti Bianco – started its activity on 15 May 1918, when print letters for other languages were at last available. From that moment on, it was possible to write multi-lingual appeals, flyers, leaflets and periodicals on “freeing oppressed nationalities” on four pages in the four languages. Since mid-June, following the numerous victories in the field, the flyers were translated and printed in German and Hungarian as well. The material was dropped over the first line of the front with the use of rockets and planes as carriers. Many Austro-Hungarian soldiers captured in the fights in June carried with them these papers. Moreover, because of the fear of desertions German and Hungarian officials had to be placed in the front line, before the troops, which led to heavy casualties among them.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See *Le Journal des débats* (25 April 1918).

<sup>39</sup> See L. Albertini, *Da Caporetto a Vittorio Veneto*.

<sup>40</sup> See Letter nr 838: *Ugo Ojetti a Luigi Albertini*, Supreme Command, 22 June 1918, in: Luigi Albertini, *Epistolario. 1911–1926. La Grande Guerra, Il vol.*, ed. by Ottavio Barié, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milano 1968, 935–937.

The Allies' support to this strategy became possible by encouraging the anti-Habsburg propaganda among the Austrian-Hungarians. At the end of May, Vincenzo Macchi Di Celere, the Italian ambassador in Washington, underlined, in a report on the official position of the US Administration addressed to Sonnino, how the Department of State was deeply concerned in regard to the Congress of the oppressed nationalities in Austria-Hungary and how the US government was sympathetic with the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav aspirations for national freedom. In light of this support, Sonnino suggested to cooperate on the line suggested by Washington and to encourage Yugoslavs and Czechoslovaks to enrol in the Italian Army's legions formed by foreign soldiers.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, despite the strengthening of censorship, unrests and disturbances increased in the Habsburg lands – for instance in Bohemia, on 13 May, when the statement of the Congress of Rome's success was read during the meeting in Prague of Slovakian, Yugoslav, Polish, Ukrainian and Italian (with Enrico Conci, a member of the Parliament from Trentino) representatives.<sup>42</sup> In May, several official and unofficial meetings and congresses took place (even though the contrasts among different national movements increased) – for instance, the “International Congress for the Rights of Oppressed Nationalities”, organized in Rome by the Association *Italia Terza-Alleanza per la difesa dell'italianità e delle nazionalità oppresse*, an organization inspired with the Risorgimento ideals of Mazzini and Garibaldi, led by Efsio Giglio-Tos.<sup>43</sup> Relevant support also came from the position of the Freemasons: the Grand Orient of Italy, the largest Masonry in Italy, officially declared after the Congress that Italian Freemason brothers copied the Rome Pact as they already discussed it before April 1918.<sup>44</sup>

The impact of Italian army propaganda on the conflict can be assessed based on the following data: for six months, between 15 May and 1 November 1918, around 51 million flyers and nine newspapers were dropped over the front among the lines of the Austro-Hungarian army. A similar strategy was used on the Western front, were in spring 1918 Lord Northcliffe ordered the distribution of over a hundred thousand flyers a day over the German lines. This policy and strategy were without any doubt one of the most relevant factors for the final victory of the Entente and the achievement of Italian “Risorgimento”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Doc. nr 765: *L'Ambasciatore a Washington, Macchi Di Cellere, al Ministro degli Esteri Sonnino*, T. GAB. 1180/124, Washington, 30 May 1918, pp. 607–08, in: DDI, V–10.

<sup>42</sup> See Doc. nr 739: *Il Capo del Servizio Informazioni del Comando Supremo, Marchetti, al Presidente del Consiglio e Ministro dell'Interno Orlando, e al Ministro della Guerra, Zupelli*, N. R.R. 8717 A., Roma, 24 May 1918, pp. 588–89, in: DDI, V–10.

<sup>43</sup> See ASC (Archivio Storico Capitolino), *Fondo: Gabinetto del Sindaco, Busta: 461, posizione Guerra italo-austriaca*, prot.: 246; anno: 1918.

<sup>44</sup> See *Rivista Massonica*, anno XLIX, nr 05/04 (Roma, 30 April – 31 May 1918) 92–98.

<sup>45</sup> See *Il Risorgimento italiano: dibattito sulla costruzione di una nazione*, Giovanna Motta (ed.), Passigli, Firenze 2012; *The First World War: analysis and interpretation*, Antonello Biagini, Giovanna Motta (eds), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2015.

*The Adriatic Question and the Fiume Endeavour*

Within this international framework, at the end of the war the Adriatic Question remained the core of the Eastern frontier for Italy, where “permanent” national interests were traditionally placed,<sup>46</sup> and a difficult line was to be agreed, at the Peace Conference, between the pro-Italian London Pact (giving to Italy the dominion of the Eastern Adriatic, with Istria, Dalmatia and Valona) and the new claims of Yugoslavs after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.<sup>47</sup> A serious issue concerned the port city of Fiume. Fiume was, historically, a *corpus separatum* integrated within the Dualist Empire in the St Stephen Crown, and at the time of the armistice and the collapse of Austria-Hungary it was the harbour of Hungary on the Adriatic Sea. Its population was mixed (46,000 people: 29,000 Italians, 9,000 Croats, 4,500 Hungarians etc.). Along with Italians, its inhabitants were also Hungarian and German bureaucratic and commercial families, with a large Slavic community (mostly Croat Catholics, but also Orthodox Serbs).<sup>48</sup> The majority of the population expressed a clear choice for the annexation to Italy, but that was not allowed by the peacemakers of the Paris Peace Conference. In fact, Fiume was not considered by the London Pact, even if populated mainly by Italians, and because of Wilson’s opposition the perspective for this city to become Italian was impossible. Another solution was to constitute an independent little state, but by the spring of 1919 – at the time of the Italian delegation’s withdrawal from the Paris Conference – a party led by the nationalist Giovanni Host-Venturi was preparing an insurgent action, while other citizen associations were organizing the arrival of Italian volunteers.<sup>49</sup> Host-Venturi called all the soldiers to form a “legion”. In this context, in the midst of the Great Powers’ pressure and the growing tension between nationalists (for the annexation to Italy) and autonomists (supported by the Allies), in summer 1919 the clashes between French soldiers and Italians (incidents called in Italy *vespri fiumani*) forced the Italian soldiers to leave Fiume. Because of the opposition and the desolation of the Italian community with the exit of these soldiers out of the city, on 25 August, they stopped the march back in Ronchi: there, on 31 August, a group of Italian officials swore loyalty to the “holy cause” of Fiume, aiming at “complete and unconditioned annexation to

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<sup>46</sup> See Federico Chabod, *Italian Foreign Policy. the Statecraft of the Founders*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996.

<sup>47</sup> See Francesco Lefebvre D’Ovidio, Antonio Varsori, *Il ruolo internazionale dell’Italia nella storiografia italiana degli ultimi decenni*, and Massimo Bucarelli, *La questione adriatica nella politica estera italiana nel Novecento*, *Rivista italiana di storia internazionale* I, 2 (July–December 2018); *Parigi 1919. Una prospettiva globale sulla conferenza di pace*, *Rivista italiana di storia internazionale* II, 1 (January–June 2019); *La politica della pace: la Società delle nazioni tra multilateralismo e balance power*, Luca Micheletta, Luca Riccardi (eds), CEDAM/Wolters Kluwer, Padova–Assago 2016.

<sup>48</sup> See Edoardo Susmel, *La città della passione: Fiume negli anni 1914–1920*, Treves, Milano 1921.

<sup>49</sup> See Giovanni Host-Venturi, *L’impresa fiumana*, G. Volpe, Roma 1976, and Aspis 2019.

Italy", with the slogan "Fiume or death!" (*Fiume o morte!*). Gabriele d'Annunzio, the famous poet and soldier and the "hero" of war (the protagonist of the demonstrative and spectacular actions of February and August 1918, i.e. the "Bakar mockery" (*beffa di Buccari*) and the "flight over Vienna") replied to this call. On 6 September he demanded a "necessary action" from Ronchi with his followers, the best *Arditi* ("daring ones") and veterans for Fiume.<sup>50</sup> On 10 September, Austria signed the Peace Treaty at Saint German-en-Laye. A couple of days after, on 12 September, d'Annunzio departed from Ronchi with two hundred legionaries. Joined by several hundreds of units from Monfalcone and on the way, this military column (with around two thousand people) triumphantly entered Fiume.<sup>51</sup> The annexation to Italy was proclaimed and this *coup* sparked the Fiume endeavour, with the aim to build a "new Italy" in Fiume.<sup>52</sup> As requested by the Italian Army Command on 13 September, the Allied troops left: after assuming military authority, on 20 September d'Annunzio assumed the Fiume civilian power.<sup>53</sup> Hundreds of volunteers and veterans, nationalist and interventionist revolutionaries from Italy tried to go Fiume and join legionaries there. Meanwhile the Fiume Command, under Commander d'Annunzio and a Command Cabinet coordinated by Giovanni Giuriati, called for military supplies, food and financial aid from Italian supporters, such as Benito Mussolini and his newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*. However, the government of Francesco Saverio Nitti in Rome did not want to exacerbate the tension with Wilson (also because of the Italian need for American financial and economic aid) and tried to handle the international tension caused by this *coup*.<sup>54</sup> Thus General Pietro Badoglio was appointed special commissioner for the region of Venezia Giulia to find out a solution to the Fiume question.<sup>55</sup> Isolated, Fiume was locked down and the Red Cross supplied the city with necessities. The Commander of *Fiume d'Italia* called for assembly city's polls. On 26 October, with the abstention of the autonomists led by Riccardo Zanella, the National Union of Riccardo Gigante won the polls and confirmed the Commando's government. On 16 November, alongside the Italian national polls, it was the time for the Fiume citizens to elect a member to the Italian Parliament, but the election of Luigi Rizzo in the Fiume college (*ad hoc* constituted by the president of the National Council, Antonio Grossich), as expected, was not accepted by the government of Rome. In any case, two days before this poll, d'Annunzio together with his closest

<sup>50</sup> See Renzo De Felice, *D'Annunzio politico, 1918–1938*, Laterza, Roma–Bari 1978.

<sup>51</sup> See Marco Mondini, *Fiume 1919. Una guerra civile italiana*, Salerno Editore, Roma 2019.

<sup>52</sup> See Ferdinando Gerra, *L'impresa di Fiume nelle parole e nell'azione di Gabriele D'Annunzio*, Longanesi, Milano 1966; Andrea Carteny, *Between War and Revolution: the Adriatic Question and D'Annunzio in Fiume, building a New Italy (1918–1920)*, in: *Empires and Nations from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century*, Antonello Biagini, Giovanna Motta (eds), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2014.

<sup>53</sup> See Michael. A. Ledeen, *The First Duce: D'Annunzio at Fiume*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore–London 1977.

<sup>54</sup> See Paolo Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1976.

<sup>55</sup> See Pietro Badoglio, *Rivelazioni su Fiume*, De Luigi, Roma 1946.

comrades – among them Giuriati, Host-Venturi and the aviator and war hero Guido Keller – boarded a ship to Zara, where they were welcomed by Admiral Enrico Millo, governor of the region, and were warranted the Italian presence in Dalmatia.<sup>56</sup> On 23 November General Badoglio presented a draft agreement, named *modus vivendi*, and previously shared with Fiume representatives, based on the provisional Italian Army occupation and on the autonomy for the city, with the warranty on behalf of Italy that Fiume would never be annexed by the SHS (Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian) Kingdom. On 8 December, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlo Sforza adjusted the draft to fulfil the wishes of the population: the memorandum, based on the Wilson line and the constitution of a “Free State of Fiume” under the control of the League of Nations, was copied by the Italian delegation at the Paris Conference. Enthusiastically supported by the Autonomists and approved by the Fiume National Council, this solution was strongly rejected by the Nationalists. Therefore, a plebiscite was held on 18 December. This poll, expected to be in favour of the *modus vivendi*, was contested by D’Annunzio who claimed fraud and interrupted the scrutiny.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Badoglio resigned and the military commander of the region General Enrico Caviglia was called to replace him, with the mission to contain the excesses of d’Annunzio regime and find out a military solution for Fiume.<sup>58</sup> The Italian segments of the city, during this period, started to be avoided under the policy of the *colpi di mano*.<sup>59</sup> Coordinated by Keller, many Fiume pirates called “Uskoks” navigated around the Adriatic Sea stealing goods, food, arms and weapons that were to be supplied to the population.<sup>60</sup>

*“Fiumanism”, ideology of revolution and freedom*

With the failure of the compromise with Italy, the first phase of the endeavour ended: the Fiume experience was now clearly oriented to the revolutionary approach of d’Annunzio and his renewed entourage. From the cultural perspective, already in the first weeks of d’Annunzio’s regime, Fiume became the core of the avant-garde: many artists, poets, writers and intellectuals came to the city, attracted by the environment of freedom ensured by the *Imaginifico*.<sup>61</sup> The founder of Futurism, poet

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<sup>56</sup> See Giovanni Giuriati, *Con D’Annunzio e Millo in difesa dell’Adriatico*, Sansoni/Leonardo, Firenze–Roma 1954.

<sup>57</sup> See Mimmo Franzinelli, Paolo Cavassini, *Fiume, l’ultima impresa di D’Annunzio*, Mondadori, Milano 2009.

<sup>58</sup> See Enrico Caviglia, *Il conflitto di Fiume*, Garzanti, Milano 1948.

<sup>59</sup> See Antonella Ercolani, *Da Fiume a Rijeka. Profilo storico-politico dal 1918 al 1947*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2009.

<sup>60</sup> See Alberto Bertotto, *L’uscocco fiumano Guido Keller fra D’Annunzio e Marinetti*, Sassoscritto, Firenze 2009.

<sup>61</sup> See Maurizio Serra, *L’Imaginifico. Vita di Gabriele d’Annunzio*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2019.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, visited Fiume on 16 September.<sup>62</sup> Fascinated by the freedom of performance and creativity, back in Italy he stated that the artists finally took the power in Fiume. Naturism and homosexuality were freely practiced, the emancipation of women was ensured in the political life too, and in general the atmosphere of vitality appealed to many people. This environment is well described as the “party of the revolution”, because several revolutionaries of that time – both in arts and politics, such as socialists, revolutionary syndicalists Sorelianists, freemasons and militaries, veterans, fascists and nationalists – passed through or stayed in Fiume in this period.<sup>63</sup> Thus, in opposition to monarchists and conservatives, leftist nationalists and revolutionary syndicalists became supporters of the Commander. On 10 January 1920 Alceste De Ambris, an interventionist and revolutionary syndicalist with strong links with d’Annunzio, was appointed chief of cabinet. As d’Annunzio’s right hand, De Ambris initiated a new phase based on a national and international revolutionary strategy.<sup>64</sup> In fact, “Fiumanism” ideologically began to represent the Italian approach to freedom and revolution.<sup>65</sup> The weekly *La testa di ferro* (“the iron head”), the “free voice of Fiume legionaries”, started to be published in February 1920 by the *daring* Futurists (linked at the same time with Bolsheviks and with Benito Mussolini), such as the veteran *ardito* Mario Carli.<sup>66</sup> The “Yoga association”, a “union of free souls”, was founded and was able to realize ironic, symbolic and spectacular actions, gathering the most libertarian and radical legionaries, such as Giovanni Comisso and Guido Keller.<sup>67</sup>

### The Fiume League (1920)

A bureau for “external” relations was established under the direction of Belgian musician Léon Kochnitzky and in cooperation with the boxer and intellectual Henry Furst and Ludovico Toeplitz de Gran Ry (the son of Giuseppe Toeplitz, president of Italian Commercial Bank).<sup>68</sup> This sort of a “ministry of foreign affairs” aimed to export the Fiumanism and the revolution abroad, trying to link the Fiume Command with

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<sup>62</sup> See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Poema di Fiume*, Elettica, Massa 2019.

<sup>63</sup> See Claudia Salaris, *Alla festa della rivoluzione. Artisti e libertari con D’Annunzio a Fiume*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2002 and 2019.

<sup>64</sup> See Enrico Serventi Longhi, *Alceste De Ambris. L’utopia concreta di un rivoluzionario sindacalista*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2011.

<sup>65</sup> See Alceste De Ambris, *La questione di Fiume*, La Fionda, Roma 1920; Renzo De Felice, *Sindacalismo rivoluzionario e fiumanesimo nel carteggio De Ambris-D’Annunzio (1919–1922)*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1966.

<sup>66</sup> See Mario Carli, *Con D’Annunzio a Fiume*, Miranda, Foggia 1920 and 1992.

<sup>67</sup> See Simonetta Bartolini, *Yoga. Sovversivi e rivoluzionari con d’Annunzio a Fiume*, Luni, Milano 2019.

<sup>68</sup> See Léon Kochnitzky, *La quinta stagione o I centauri di Fiume*, translated by Alberto Luchini, Zanichelli, Bologna 1922, and *La stagione delle fiamme danzanti. Un diario di Fiume*, ed. by Antonella Colla, AGA, Milano 2013.

revolutionary governments, such as the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and to establish diplomatic relations with the Bolshevik Russia of Lenin.<sup>69</sup> In spring, the initiative to build a network between the small nations and minorities oppressed under the Versailles system of Great Powers was launched in the context of the international strategy of Fiume. Thus the “League of Fiume” was established as an antithesis to the League of Nations. Its aim was to coordinate and support national minorities and people oppressed by other nations and colonial regimes. This network developed contacts and links with representatives of many nationalities, such Egyptians, Indians, Persians, Cubans, Russians, Hungarians, Turks and Flemish people, mainly from the Balkan national communities under the Serbian rule (Montenegrins, Croats, Albanians, Macedonians and Hungarians). Kochnitsky, engaged more in the internationalization of Fiumanism than in any Balkan plot, found himself isolated and, finally, in contrast with the Commander, resigned on 2 July. The Fiume League, until autumn, was devoted to tackling these “Balkan intrigues”.<sup>70</sup>

#### *The Charter of Carnaro and the Rapallo Treaty*

Springtime was marked by the rift between the Command and the National Council, whose president Grossich was sent to Rome to make a deal with Nitti, on 27 May. From April, Roma was negotiating on the Eastern frontier with Belgrade, and in June, after the Hungarian signature of the Trianon Treaty, the Italian government changed. Indeed, as a consequence of the Valona crisis, Nitti left the government and Giolitti reassumed the leadership of Italy. In Fiume, d’Annunzio and De Ambris, at first discouraged by the conservative entourage to proclaim a democratic republic in Fiume, restarted this initiative in summer and on 12 August – the same day the Fiume “fascio of combat” was founded – a new constitution for Fiume was issued. The Charter of Carnaro contained ultra-democratic and republican elements inspired by the syndicalism of Alceste De Ambris through the nationalist and revolutionary poetics of d’Annunzio.<sup>71</sup> In the midst of the debate on the form of the state (between monarchy and republic), on 31 August this Charter was presented at the theatre “Fenice” (together with the announcement of a new military order for the “liberator” – *Nuovo Ordinamento dell’Esercito Liberatore*, drafted by Captain Giuseppe Piffer, *aide-de-camp* of d’Annunzio).<sup>72</sup> One week later the Italian “Regency” of Carnaro was

<sup>69</sup> See Antonella Ercolani, *Da Fiume a Rijeka. Profilo storico-politico dal 1918 al 1947*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2009.

<sup>70</sup> See Massimo Bucarelli, *Delenda Jugoslavia. D’Annunzio, Sforza e gli “intrighi balcanici” del ‘19–‘20*, Nuova Storia Contemporanea, nr 6 (November–December 2002).

<sup>71</sup> See Renzo De Felice, *La Carta del Carnaro nei testi di Alceste De Ambris e Gabriele d’Annunzio*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1973.

<sup>72</sup> See Federico C. Simonelli, *La costruzione di un mito. Rituali, simboli e narrazioni dell’Impresa di Fiume (1919–1921)*, a research thesis within the PhD program “Storia dei partiti e movimenti politici” (tutor: prof. Massimo Baioni), cycle XXVIII, academic year 2014–15, “Carlo Bo” University of Urbino.

proclaimed (thus leaving the door open to a possible reunification with the Italian Kingdom, but also continuing to weave the net of intrigues for a legionary *coup* in Italy with Mussolini). The Charter and the Military Order (together with the Fiume League for the propagation of Fiumanism abroad) constituted the pillars of a new state, based on a syndicalist-corporatist revolution and the volunteer-legionary “new man”.<sup>73</sup>

After Nitti, Giovanni Giolitti’s government followed the same strategy, seeking to reach a deal about Fiume in a direct negotiation with Yugoslavs. Sforza and Ante Trumbić (respectively Italian and Yugoslav ministers) paved the way for the agreement on the armistice line (the recognition of the Yugoslavs’ possession of Dalmatia, except the city of Zadar). On 4 November, aviators from Fiume flew over Rome distributing papers against the “murdered victory”, but on 12 November the Rapallo Treaty between Rome and Belgrade created the “Free State of Fiume”, which meant the political and international end of d’Annunzio’s revolutionary laboratory; even his meeting with General Caviglia was without results. On 20 December, d’Annunzio and the Fiume government refused to honour the Treaty because no Fiume representative had been involved in the negotiations and because the cession of the port of Baross and the Fiumara to the Yugoslavs was considered unacceptable. As a result, General Caviglia issued an ultimatum and on 21 December the state of war was proclaimed in Fiume, where the number of legionaries and soldiers (from two thousand at the time of the “holy entry” to nine thousand in the first period when Italian veterans were inspired with Italian patriotism)<sup>74</sup> was already around four–five thousand (one thousand of them displaced to take control of the islands of Kvarner Gulf).<sup>75</sup> On 24 December, the Italian navy attacked the city, bombing the headquarters and the office of the Commander. Following the events on Christmas day, bombing continued for several more days. D’Annunzio finally resigned on 28 December and the Fiume authorities accepted the Treaty on 31 December. The “Bloody Christmas” caused 50 dead and more than two hundred wounded. The Italian Army entered the city, while Fiume legionaries began to leave on 4 January. On 18 January, d’Annunzio left, marking the end of the “five hundred days” of the Italian and international revolution.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> See Carlo Ricotti, *La Carta del Carnaro. D’annunziana massonica autonomista*, Fefè, Roma 2015; *La Carta del Carnaro* (Il Nuovo Ordinamento dell’Esercito Liberatore), De Luca, Roma 2001; Gabriele d’Annunzio, *Il Nuovo Ordinamento dell’Esercito Liberatore*, in: *La penultima ventura. Scritti e discorsi fiumani*, ed. by Renzo De Felice, Mondadori, Milano 1974, and Luni, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> See Guglielmo Pecori Giraldi, *Relazione sui fatti di Fiume del Generale d’Esercito Pecori Giraldi. Osservazioni e proposte disciplinari al Ministro della Guerra*, Firenze, 22 giugno 1920, in: *AUSSME* (Archivio Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito), *fondo B1, Diari Storici, “Guerra Mondiale”*, vol. 1, pos. 151/E.

<sup>75</sup> See Luigi E. Longo, *L’esercito italiano e la questione fiumana, 1918–1921*, Ufficio Storico SME, Roma 1996.

<sup>76</sup> See Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Disobbedisco. Cinquecento giorni di rivoluzione: Fiume 1919–1920*, Mondadori, Milano 2019; Raoul Pupo, *Fiume città di passione*, Laterza, Roma–Bari 2019.

### *Conclusion*

In a nutshell, we can say that Fiume's *coup* was a revolutionary experience in Italian political history. D'Annunzio and the legionaries, along with veterans and *arditi*, officers and freemasons, Futurists and artists, avant-gardists and revolutionaries from all over the world took part in the largest anti-system movement produced by Italian culture since the revolutions of 1848. Fiume – as a part of Italian culture and civilization lost in the past and found in its renewed "Italianity" – embodied the future of a new nation in a new world, where nationalities and peoples had the right to be nations. This feeling, shared with minorities and communities under the rule of empires and powers, already emerged in the year before the European war, evolving in an international network for "oppressed nationalities" (somehow supported by Germany against Russia) at the Lausanne Congress (1916). After that, in 1917 Italy sought to overcome the defeat of Caporetto looking for new ideal energies and new allies inside the Austro-Hungarian enemy. That is how the support for the Congress of "oppressed peoples" (1918), held in Rome, laid the foundations for the constitution of new nations, such as Czechoslovakia, in line with the Italian Risorgimento. The Fiume League (1920), in the context of d'Annunzio's endeavour, attempted to build an international system alternative to the Versailles system. However, the failure of this last initiative kept the national question in the midst of international tensions in the inter war-period, during the half-century of real socialism in Eastern Europe, until today's European Union.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> See Marek Waldenberg, *Le questioni nazionali nell'Europa centro-orientale. Storia e attualità*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 1994; Antonello Biagini, Francesco Guida, *Mezzo secolo di socialismo reale: l'Europa centro-orientale dal secondo conflitto mondiale all'era postcomunista*, Giappichelli, Torino 1997.

**Andrea Carteny**

**DAL CONGRESSO DI LOSANNA, ATTRAVERSO L'ACCORDO ROMANO FINO ALLA  
LEGA DI FIUME, NAZIONI E NAZIONALISMI (1916-1920)**

**Riassunto**

La Grande Guerra ha segnato la fine di un periodo storico e l'inizio di un altro: il lungo XIX secolo si era concluso e il breve XX secolo era entrato in scena. Ispirate dal nazionalismo, le nazioni emersero come forti fattori politici, minando le basi di imperi e potenze multietniche, in particolare l'Impero spagnolo, l'Impero britannico, il Mediterraneo, l'Europa orientale e i Balcani, che erano le principali aree multietniche in cui stavano nascendo delle nazioni etno-religiose. L'azione politica che sosteneva i diritti delle nazioni senza stato era stata avviata negli anni prima dello scoppio della Grande Guerra. Le circostanze chiave che decisero l'esito della Prima guerra mondiale si erano verificate principalmente tra il 1917 e il 1918: la mobilitazione sociale e nazionale divenne un nuovo fattore ideologico che avrebbe portato all'ultima fase della guerra. Le nazioni e i nazionalismi furono fattori di debolezza nei paesi di imperi multietnici, durante la guerra e dopo l'armistizio in Russia, soprattutto nel 1916 e 1917, con l'appoggio della Germania; in Austro-Ungheria, per opera dell'Italia, nel 1918; poi, dopo la guerra, come contrappeso alla Società delle Nazioni, fondata da grandi potenze, nel 1920 fu fondata la Lega di Fiume (Anti-Lega delle Nazioni) per proteggere i popoli oppressi. In tutte queste circostanze, i movimenti politici e i governi incoraggiavano i nazionalismi e perseguivano politiche a sostegno delle nazioni, e Fiume incarnava il futuro della nuova nazione in un mondo nuovo, dove i popoli avevano il diritto di essere nazioni. Questo sentimento, portato da minoranze e comunità sotto il dominio di imperi e poteri, era già apparso nell'anno prima della Prima guerra mondiale e si era sviluppato in una rete internazionale di "popoli oppressi", in qualche modo con il sostegno della Germania contro la Russia, al Congresso di Losanna del 1916. Dopodiché, nel 1917, l'Italia tentò di rimediare alla sconfitta di Caporetto, cercando una nuova ideale energia e nuovi alleati tra i nemici austro-ungarici. Così, l'appoggio dato al Congresso dei "Popoli oppressi" (1918) tenutosi a Roma, pose le basi per la creazione di nuove nazioni, come la Cecoslovacchia, in accordo con il Risorgimento italiano. Lo scopo della Lega di Fiume (1920), nel senso dell'opera di D'Annunzio, era di costruire un vero sistema internazionale che fosse un'alternativa a quello di Versailles. Tuttavia, il fallimento di questa iniziativa pose la questione nazionale al centro delle tensioni internazionali durante il periodo tra le due guerre, così come durante mezzo secolo di socialismo reale nell'Europa orientale, fino all'Unione europea di oggi. Il sistema stato-nazione è il risultato di questa transizione ed è ancora al centro delle nostre circostanze storiche.

**Parole chiave:** Congresso di Losanna, nazioni, Questione adriatica, Lega di Fiume, nazionalismo, 1916-1920.

**Андреа Картени**

**ОД КОНГРЕСА У ЛОЗАНИ, ПРЕКО РИМСКОГ СПОРАЗУМА ДО РИЈЕЧКЕ ЛИГЕ,  
НАЦИЈЕ И НАЦИОНАЛИЗМИ (1916–1920)**

**Резиме**

Велики рат је означио крај једног историјског периода и почетак другог – дугом 19. веку дошао је крај, а кратки 20. век ступио је на позорницу. Инспирисане национализмом, нације су се појавиле као јаки политички фактори, који су подрили основе вишеетничких царстава и сила, и то, пре свега, Шпанског царства, Британског царства, Средоземља, источне Европе и Балкана, који су представљали главне вишеетничке области на којима су настајале етнорелигијске нације. Политичка акција која је заговарала права нација без државе покренута је у годинама пред избијање Великог рата.

Кључне околности за исход Првог светског рата одиграле су се углавном између 1917. и 1918 – друштвена и национална мобилизација постала је нови идеолошки фактор који ће довести до последње фазе рата. Нације и национализми били су фактори слабости у земљама вишеетничких царстава, у рату и након примирја – у Русији, посебно 1916. и 1917, уз подршку Немачке; у Аустроугарској, због деловања Италије, 1918. године; затим, након рата, као противтежа Друштву народа, које су основале велике силе, основана је Ријечка лига (Анти-лига народа) 1920. године, да заштити потлачене народе. У свим тим околностима, политички покрети и владе подстицали су национализме и водили политике као подршку нацијама, а Ријека је оличавала будућност нове нације у новом свету, где су народи имали право да буду нације.

То осећање, које су носиле мањине и заједнице под влашћу царстава и сила, појавило се већ у години пре Првог светског рата, а развило се у међународну мрежу „потлачених народа“, на неки начин уз подршку Немачке против Русије, на Конгресу у Лозани, 1916. године. Након тога, 1917. године, Италија је настојала да надомести пораз код Кобарида, тражећи нову идеалну енергију и нове савезнике међу аустроугарским непријатељима. Тако је подршка на Конгресу „потлачених народа“ (1918) који је одржан у Риму, поставила темеље за стварање нових нација, као што је Чехословачка, у складу са италијанским Ризорђиментом. Циљ Ријечке лиге (1920), у смислу Д’Анунцијевог деловања, била је изградња истинског међународног система који би био алтернатива версајском. Међутим, неуспех те иницијативе поставио је национално питање у средиште међународних тензија у међуратном периоду, као и током пола века реал-социјализма у источној Европи, све до данашње Европске уније. Систем нација-држава резултат је те транзиције и још увек је у основи наших историјских прилика.

**Кључне речи:** Конгрес у Лозани, нације, Јадранско питање, Ријечка лига, национализам, 1916–1920.





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