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## D'ANNUNZIO, ITALY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF MONTENEGRO 1919-1920

*ABSTRACT: The aim of this work is not to focus on these well known aspects of the political and military action of D'Annunzio. Its purpose is rather to emphasize the connection between D'Annunzio's plans, and the national questions in the Western Balkans at the end of the World War I. Above all, this paper strives to shed some light on all the initiatives taken by D'Annunzio with the aim to restore the independence of the Kingdom of Montenegro. There is no doubt, in fact, that he was one of the last political leaders in Italy and in Europe who fully supported and tried to do all he could for the survival of Montenegro as an independent and sovereign State.*

*Specifically, there are three crucial questions, which the paper addresses: 1) when D'Annunzio seized Fiume in 1919 and ruled the city for 15 months, did he have a global plan for the political and territorial settlement of the Western Balkans or did he have in mind only the annexation of Fiume to Italy? 2) Provided that he had a plan for the Balkan nations and countries, what was the role which Montenegro was supposed to play in that strategy? 3) Did D'Annunzio try to accomplish his political and military plans alone with his entourage, or was he supported by the Italian government, or perhaps by some Italian political and military authorities?*

**KEY WORDS:** *Gabriele D'Annunzio, Fiume, Italy, Kingdom of Montenegro*

In Italian political and cultural life during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the controversial and provocative intellectual figure of Gabriele D'Annunzio played a relevant and, on some occasions, crucial role. The importance of D'Annunzio, not only as a poet and novelist, but also as a

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political leader and soldier, has been stressed in several scholarly works. In particular, a number of studies have focused on D'Annunzio's participation in the 1<sup>st</sup> WW, analyzed his activity in the Italian nationalistic movement, and dealt with his leading role in the occupation of Fiume/Rijeka (which – as is known – was seized by some hundreds of Italian war veterans and legionaries between September 1919 and December 1920 with the purpose of preserving the Italian national character of the city and preparing its annexation to the Italian Kingdom)<sup>1</sup>.

Needless to say, the aim of this work is not to focus on these well known aspects of the political and military action of D'Annunzio. The purpose of the article rather is to stress the connection between D'Annunzio's plans, on the one hand, and the national questions in the Western Balkans at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, on the other hand. Above all, this work is an attempt to shed some light on all the initiatives pursued by D'Annunzio aiming at restoring the independence of the Kingdom of Montenegro. There is no doubt, in fact, that he was one of the last political leaders in Italy and in Europe who gave full support and tried to do all he could for the survival of Montenegro as an independent and sovereign State.

Specifically, there are three crucial questions, which this work will address: 1) when D'Annunzio seized Fiume in 1919 and ruled the city for 15 months, did he have a global plan for the political and territorial settlement of the Western Balkans or did he have in mind only the annexation of Fiume to Italy? 2) Provided that he had a plan for the Balkan nations and countries, what was the role which Montenegro was supposed to play in that strategy? 3) Did D'Annunzio try to accomplish his political and military plans alone with his entourage or was he supported by the Italian government or, at least, by some Italian political and military authorities?

It is quite clear, from the archival evidence and from the published sources as well<sup>2</sup>, that D'Annunzio had a global plan aimed at reconfiguring

<sup>1</sup> On D'Annunzio's political thought and action, and on the occupation of Fiume/Rijeka, see: P. ALATRI, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1959; R. DE FELICE, *Mussolini il rivoluzionario (1883-1920)*, Torino, Einaudi, 1965, pp. 545 ss.; ID., *D'Annunzio politico 1918-1938*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1978; F. GERRA, *L'impresa di Fiume*, Milano, Longanesi, 1974, 2 Voll. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition); M. A. LEDEEN, *D'Annunzio a Fiume*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1975; R. VIVARELLI, *Storia delle origini del fascismo. L'Italia dalla grande guerra alla marcia su Roma*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991, Vol. I, p. 491 ss.; L. E. LONGO, *L'Esercito italiano e la questione fiumana (1918-1921)*, Roma, Ufficio Storico SME, 1996; A. ERCOLANI, *Da Fiume a Rijeka. Profilo storico-politico dal 1918 al 1947*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2009, pp. 95 ss.

<sup>2</sup> As for the archival sources, see: ARCHIVIO STORICO-DIPLOMATICO DEL MINISTERO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI (ASMAE), *Carte Sforza*; ARCHIVI DELLA FONDAZIONE DEL VITTORIALE DEGLI ITALIANI (AFVI), *Archivio generale fiumano*, and, *Archivio personale*; ARCHIVIO MUSEO STORICO DI FIUME (AMSF), *Carte Giuriati*; ARCHIVIO DELL'ISTITUTO NAZIONALE PER LA STORIA DEL

the political and territorial system, which had been established in the Western Balkans at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> WW with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. D'Annunzio, as well as many nationalistic activists and leaders, regarded the creation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Yugoslavia as a real danger for Italian power<sup>3</sup>. They considered the Yugoslav Kingdom as a sort of new Austria-Hungary built up by the French and British leaders so that the Italian aspirations to the Eastern part of the Adriatic shore could be frustrated and limited:

Since the beginning of our occupation of Fiume – as D'Annunzio wrote in a letter to Carlo Sforza, Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, on the 9th of July 1920<sup>4</sup> – we have been gathering all our thoughts and forces in order to find the way of tearing apart the Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenes, which is just a perfidious creation badly aimed at replacing the Austrian Empire and containing the Italian political and military power, and oppressing the weakest ones among the Balkan peoples. The relentless aversion opposed by the Yugoslavs stands out as the most severe obstacle to the fulfillment of our aspirations in the Adriatic Sea. We are convinced that, as long as Yugoslavia exists, we will never be completely free and safe in the Adriatic Sea. Thus, our final purpose is: «*Delenda Jugoslavia*» [breaking up Yugoslavia]. That will be our salvation.

Moreover, he didn't have faith in Yugoslav unity at all. He didn't believe that national groups, whose traditions, religions and languages were so different, such as the ones which were put together in the 1<sup>st</sup> Yugoslav experiment, could live in a common State. To D'Annunzio's mind and to

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MOVIMENTO DI LIBERAZIONE IN ITALIA (AISNSMLI), *Carte a Prato*. As regards the published materials, see: *Durini di Monza to Mussolini*, Budapest, 2nd of July 1927, in *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, Series VII, Vol. V, D. 313; L. KOCHNITZKY, *La Quinta stagione o i Centauri di Fiume*, edited by A. LUCHINI, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1922; T. ANTONGINI, *Vita segreta di Gabriele D'Annunzio*, Milano, Mondadori, 1938; G. GIULIETTI, *Pax Mundi. La Federazione marinara nella bufera fascista*, Napoli, Rispoli Editore, 1944; E. CAVIGLIA, *Il conflitto di Fiume*, Cernusco sul Naviglio, Garzanti, 1948; O. DI GIAMBERARDINO, *L'Ammiraglio Millo. Dall'impresa dei Dardanelli alla passione dalmatica*, Livorno, Società Editrice Tirrena, 1950; G. GIURIATI, *Con D'Annunzio e Millo in difesa dell'Adriatico*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> On the Italian nationalistic attitude towards the Adriatic question and the creation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Yugoslavia, see: A. TAMARO, *Italiani e Slavi nell'Adriatico*, Roma, Athenaeum, 1915; ID., *L'Adriatico golfo d'Italia* Milano, Treves, 1915; ID., *Il trattato di Rapallo*, in «Politica», November 1920, pp. 246 ss.; ID., *Origini e crisi della Jugoslavia*, ivi, October and November 1921, pp. 148 ss.; F. COPPOLA, *La "pace,, adriatica*, in «Politica», novembre 1920, pp. 234 ss. For an overall analysis, see: L. MONZALI, *Itliani di Dalmazia 1914-1924*, Firenze, Le Letter, pp. 78 ss.; ID., *The Italians of Dalmatia. From Italian Unification to World War I*, Toronto Buffalo London, University of Toronto Press, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *D'Annunzio to Sforza*, Fiume/Rijeka, July 9<sup>th</sup> 1920, in ASMAE, *Carte Sforza*, «1920. Raccoglitore». A copy of the letter is also in AFVI, *Archivio personale*, LXXX, 3-a.

the minds of many Italian political leaders as well, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was all but a viable State. It was immediately clear that the new Yugoslav State was a centralized State under Serbian control without any regard for the other national groups claiming locally based autonomies: the ruling dynasty was Serbian, the largest parties in the National Assembly were Serbian, the ruling leaders were Serbian and the army was firmly in the hands of Serbian military staff<sup>5</sup>. To sum up, Yugoslav was the name, but Serbian was the reality of this newly formed multinational Balkan country<sup>6</sup>. According to the news coming from Yugoslavia concerning the domestic political situation, a strong feeling of frustration and rebellion was spreading among all the non Serbian national groups, due to the failure of the Serbian leadership to grant autonomy and self-government to the other nationalities:

The Croats – so D’Annunzio wrote on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1920<sup>7</sup> – longing to free themselves from the Serbian oppression are turning to me, asking for help and support. [...] The “separatist” revolution is ready to break out ... I can lead this movement, I can enter the city of Zagreb as the leader who is going to release them, giving independence and liberty.

As a result, D’Annunzio and his entourage came into contact with some members of the anti-Yugoslav separatist groups and movements, such as the Croatian Ivo Frank and Vladimir Sachs-Petrović, leaders of the Croatian Party of Right, the Slovene Ivan Susterčić, the Kosovar Albanian Hasan Bey Pristina and Dervish Bey Lufty, the Macedonian Nikola Rizov, and the Hungarian from Vojvodina Georg Medveczky<sup>8</sup>. All of them did not accept the union of their national groups with the Serbs of Belgrade and tried to modify the political and territorial settlement established in Western Balkans, so that the principle of self-determination could be truly applied. Their final aim was

<sup>5</sup> *Sinigaglia to Giuriati*, Roma, October 30<sup>th</sup> 1919, in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder I.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive account and balanced analysis of the several national problems and deep ethnic contrasts, which broke out in Yugoslavia immediately after the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, see: I. BANAC, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1984. Also: B. KRIZMAN, *Hrvatska u prvom svjetskom ratu. Hrvatsko-srpski odnosi*, Zagabria, Globus, 1989; J. PIRJEVEC, *Il giorno di San Vito. Jugoslavia 1918-1992. Storia di una tragedia*, Torino, Nuova ERI, 1993; J. ADLER, *L’union forcée: la Croatie et la création de l’Etat yougoslave (1918)*, Chêne-Bourg, Georg, 1997; M. KOVAC, *La France, la création du royaume «yougoslave» et la question croate, 1914-1929*, Berna, Peter Lang, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> *D’Annunzio to Giuriati*, Fiume/Rijeka, January 6<sup>th</sup> 1920, in G. GIULIETTI, *Pax Mundi*, cit., pp. 84-85.

<sup>8</sup> *Sinigaglia to Giuriati*, Rome, October 30<sup>th</sup> 1919, in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder I; *Memorandum di V. Petrovich-Saxe a Mussolini*, Rome, December 15<sup>th</sup> 1932, edited in G. SALOTTI, *Gli «intrighi balcanici», 1919-20 in un memorandum a Mussolini di Vladimiro Petrovich-Saxe*, in «Storia Contemporanea», 1989, n. 4, pp. 699-701.

to achieve a higher degree of autonomy, if not complete independence, as in the case of Croats and Slovenes, or unification with the neighboring countries, where their ethnic kinsmen lived, as in the case of Kosovar Albanians, Hungarians from Vojvodina and Macedonian Bulgars<sup>9</sup>.

Last but not least in D'Annunzio's strategy, the government of Fiume/Rijeka came into contact with the Montenegrin leader Jovan Plamenac<sup>10</sup>. Plamenac wasn't just the leader of a separatist organization, but the Prime Minister as well as the Foreign Affairs Minister of the government in exile of the Kingdom of Montenegro. During the Great War, in 1916, King Nikola Petrović-Njegoš and his government had been forced to flee the country and go into exile to France due to the occupation of the Montenegrin territory by Austro-Hungarian troops. At the end of the war, the Montenegrin King was prevented from returning to his country, since the small Adriatic Kingdom was occupied once again, but this time by Serbian armed forces. The Serbian army was supposed to enter the country as a liberation force, but it was immediately clear that gaining overall control of all the political and administrative activities in Montenegro was the real aim of the Serbian military authorities. The new Serbian rule was soon legalized by the decision taken by the special Great National Assembly elected in November 1918 with the purpose of deciding on the future status of Montenegro. The electoral procedures largely favored the partisans of unilateral unification with Serbia, as the election was public, indirect and conducted under Serbian military scrutiny. The supporters of King Nikola were easily overcome: the elections resulted in a overwhelming majority standing for unification of Montenegro and Serbia under the Karađorđević rule, which was proclaimed by the National Assembly by a vote of 163 to 0. The decision of the Assembly was understood as a brutal annexation by a considerable part of the Montenegrin people, who did not accept the deposition of King Nikola and suppression of the Montenegrin sovereignty. As a consequence, old political and tribal divisions came up to the surface once again, causing a bipolarization of the country. The two halves of Montenegro soon clashed; between the end of December 1918 and the beginning of January 1919, Plamenac and other pro-independence leaders (the so-called *Zelenaši* – “Greens”) stirred up an insurgency against unionist political forces (*Bjelaši* “Whites”) and Serbian troops. Although a large

<sup>9</sup> G. GIURIATI, *Con D'Annunzio e Millo*, cit., pp. 148-151; M. BUCARELLI, “*Delenda Jugoslavia*”. *D'Annunzio, Sforza e gli “intrighi balcanici” del '19-'20*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», 2002, n. 6, pp. 19 ss.; F. CACCAMO, *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa». Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla conferenza della pace di Parigi (1919-1920)*, Milano, Luni, 2000 pp. 159 ss.; ID., *Il sostegno italiano all'indipendentismo croato*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», 2004, n. 6, pp. 23 ss.

<sup>10</sup> *Giuriati to D'Annunzio*, Roma, February 12<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AMSE, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder II. Also: M. BUCARELLI, “*Delenda Jugoslavia*”, cit., pp. 26-27.

part of the Montenegrin people supported the “Greens”, the rebellion soon collapsed. The insurgents were not as organized, well equipped and united as their opponents; they appeared to be more interested in provoking the intervention of the Great Powers than in spreading and protracting the unrest; moreover, as they tried to avoid bloodshed wherever possible, their military initiatives revealed to be irresolute and feebly conducted. Nonetheless, the situation in Montenegro from 1919 to the end of 1920 was far from being stable and pacified, since the insurgents went on fighting against the Serbian troops, organizing guerrilla actions, robbing banks and taking possession of trains and other military installations<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the fact that the Christmas rebellion did not succeed, the exile government ruled by Jovan Plamenac didn't give up the political and diplomatic action aimed at restoring the independence of the Kingdom of Montenegro, which had been cancelled by the controversial decision of the Podgorica Assembly. Among the Great Powers, only Italy tried to support the Montenegrin government in exile, helping in transporting the Montenegrin refugees led by Plamenac out of the country after the unsuccessful unrest, and shipping them from northern Albania to the Italian port of Gaeta. Later on, the Montenegrin refugees were moved to several camps in the central part of the Italian peninsula, where the Italian authorities allowed and endowed the formation of the “Montenegrin Legion”, a sort of King Nikola's army in exile<sup>12</sup>. Needless to say, Italian assistance wasn't priceless, as the “Montenegrin Legion” was totally dependent upon the Rome government's will and decision. The status of Montenegro (independence or unification with Serbia into a larger Yugoslav Kingdom) and the role of the Legion soon became a political card played by Italy in the long-standing dispute with the Belgrade government over the possession of the former Habsburg territories along the Eastern Adriatic coast. The so-called Adriatic question arose at the end of the Great War as a consequence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's defeat and fall, and reached its climax during the Paris Peace Conference. At the Conference, Italy's claims to the whole of Istria and to the central part of Dalmatia were confronted with Yugoslav identical demands for the entire

<sup>11</sup> On Montenegro's participation in the First World War and on the international aspects of the Montenegrin question, see: R. M. RASPOPOVIĆ, *Diplomatija Crne Gore 1711-1918*, Podgorica, Istorijски Insitut Crne Gore, 1996, pp. 590 ss.; D. ŽIVOJINOVIĆ, *Velike Sile e Crnogorsko pitanje*, Vol I, *Italija i Crna Gora 1914-1925*, Vol. II, *Nevoljin Saveznici 1914-1918*, Vol. III, *Kraj Kraljevine Crne Gore 1918-1921*, Belgrado, Službeni List, 1998-2002; F. CACCAMO, *Il Montenegro negli anni della prima guerra mondiale*, Roma, Aracne, 2008, pp. 101 ss.

<sup>12</sup> A. MADAFFARI, *Italia e Montenegro (1918-1925): la Legione montenegrina*, in «Studi storico-militari», 1996, pp. 100 ss.; F. CACCAMO, *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa»*, cit., pp. 169-170.

Dalmatian coastal region and for all of the Istrian districts up to Trieste/Trst and Gorizia/Gorica<sup>13</sup>.

The Italian requests were based on the Treaty of London, which had been signed in April 1915 by the Entente Powers and Italy, in order to guarantee to the Rome government the future possession of Venezia Giulia (including Trieste and the Istrian region) and of the central part of Dalmatia (from the district of Zara/Zadar to Capo Planka), as well as a great number of Dalmatian islands and the Albanian port of Valona/Vlorë; in return for all the concessions accorded by the Entente Powers, Italy had been asked to enter the war against its former allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary, as well as against the Ottoman Empire. The territorial expansion envisaged by the London agreement had a twofold reason: completion of the national unification process, with the annexation of Austrian districts inhabited by Italian populations, and fulfillment of strategic and military requirements, such as the control of the Alpine divide and the supremacy in the Adriatic Sea assured by the possession of part of Dalmatia and part of Albania<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> As regards the Adriatic question, a great number of studies have been published; among them, see: R. ALBRECHT CARRIÉ, *Italy at the Paris Peace Conference*, New York, University of Columbia, 1936; A. E. MOODIE, *The Italo-Yugoslav Boundary. A Study in Political Geography*, Londra, G. Philip & Son, 1945, pp. 151 ss.; P. ALATRI, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica (1919-1920)*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1959; R. MOSCA, *Dopoguerra e sistemazione europea. La conferenza della pace – La questione adriatica*, in *La politica estera italiana dal 1914 al 1943*, Torino, ERI, 1963; I. J. LEDERER, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference. A Story in Frontier-making*, New Haven e London, Yale University Press, 1963; A. TAMBORRA, *L'idea di nazionalità e la guerra 1914-1918*, in «Atti del XLI Congresso di Storia del Risorgimento Italiano (Trento, 9th-13th October 1963)», Roma, Istituto per la Storia del Risorgimento Italiano, 1965; D. ŠEPIĆ, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje, 1914-1918*, Zagreb, Školska knjiga, 1970; P. PASTORELLI, *L'Albania nella politica estera italiana 1914-1920*, Napoli, Jovene, 1970; D. ŽIVOJNOVIĆ, *America, Italy and the Birth of Yugoslavia (1917-1919)*, Boulder, East European Quarterly, 1972; ID., *Italija i Crna Gora 1914-1925*, Belgrado, Službeni List, 1998; M. G. MELCHIONI, *La vittoria mutilata. Problemi ed incertezze della politica estera italiana sul finire della grande guerra (ottobre 1918-gennaio 1919)*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1981; R. VIVARELLI, *Storia delle origini del fascismo. L'Italia dalla grande guerra alla marcia su Roma*, Vol. I, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1991; H. J. BURGWYN, *The Legend of Mutilated Victory. Italy, the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1993; R. WORSDÖRFER, *Il confine orientale. Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> On the Treaty of London of April 26<sup>th</sup> 1915, see: M. TOSCANO, *Il Patto di Londra. Storia diplomatica dell'intervento italiano (1914 e 1915)*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1934; ID., *Rivelazioni e nuovi documenti sul negoziato di Londra per l'ingresso dell'Italia nella prima guerra mondiale*, in «Nuova Antologia», August-September 1965; *Il negoziato di Londra del 1915*, ivi, November 1967; *Imperiali e il negoziato per il Patto di Londra*, in «Storia e Politica», 1968, n. 3. Also: P. PASTORELLI, *Le relazioni tra l'Italia e la Serbia dal luglio 1914 all'ottobre 1915*, in *Miscellanea in onore di Ruggero Moscati*, Napoli, ESI., 1985; ID., *Fiume e il Patto di Londra*, in «Clio», 1996, n.1; ID., *Dalla prima alla seconda guerra mondiale. Momenti e problemi della politica estera italiana 1914-1943*, Milano, LED, 1997.

The Yugoslav demands stemmed mainly from an extensive application of the nationality principle, according to which all of Istria and all of Dalmatia were to be considered Yugoslav lands due to the presence of Slovenian and Croatian populations. If there was no doubt that the majority of the Dalmatian inhabitants were ethnically Croatian, in Istria the picture was slightly different, as the region was at least half Slovenian and half Italian. Faced by a great number of domestic problems, which could put the existence of the newly formed Yugoslav Kingdom at risk, the Serbian ruling leaders decided to support all the territorial claims raised by Slovenian and Croatian politicians without any exceptions and hesitations<sup>15</sup>. With the aim of gaining consensus among non-Serbian national groups and strengthening internal cohesion, the Belgrade government tried to exploit to the greatest extent the harsh anti-Italian feeling which was increasingly spreading out among Slovenian and Croatian communities due to the presence of Italian troops in Istria and Dalmatia. At the end of the war, according to the armistice agreement with Austria signed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1918, Italian troops had been allowed to occupy all the territory along the Eastern Adriatic shore that Italy had been promised by the Entente Powers (including the city of Fiume whose occupation, even though not guaranteed to Italy by the Treaty of London, had been accorded due to security reason)<sup>16</sup>. As a consequence, some Slovenian and Croatian political leaders realized that in order to fulfill their national aspirations there were no other alternatives than merging with the Serbia into a new Southern Slav Kingdom, even though totally under Serbian control. During the winter of 1918-1919, forced to choose between Serbian domestic hegemony and Italian power policy in the Adriatic and in the Western Balkans, a part of the Slovenian and Croatian ruling class chose what they perceived as the lesser of two evils, unification with (or annexation

<sup>15</sup> *Zapisnici sa sednica Delegacije Kraljevine SHS na Mirovnoj Konferenciji u Parizu 1919-1920*, edited by B. KRIZMAN and B. HRABAK, Beograd, Institut društvenih nauka, 1960, Documentary Appendix: nos. 7 and 8; *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914.-1919.*, edited by F. ŠIŠIĆ, Zagreb, 1920, pp. 280-283 D. ŠEPIĆ, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje*, cit., pp. 379 ss.; I. BANAC, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, cit., pp. 115 ss.; J. ADLER, *L'union forche*, cit., pp. 279 ss.

<sup>16</sup> *Trattati e Convenzioni fra il Regno d'Italia e gli altri Stati*, edited by Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, Vol. XXIII, pp. 597-610; *Verbale del Consiglio supremo di guerra, ottava sessione – prima seduta*, Versailles, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1918, in DDI, Series V, Vol. XI, D. 791; L. ALDROVANDI MARESCOTTI, *Guerra diplomatica. Ricordi e frammenti di diario (1914-1919)*, Milano, Mondadori, 1937, pp. 188-210. Also: I. J. LEDERER, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, cit., pp. 71 ss.; D. I. RUSINOW, *Italy's Austrian Heritage 1919-1946*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969, pp. 84 ss.; M. G. MELCHIONI, op. cit., pp. 11 ss.; M. KACIN WOHNZ e J. PIRJEVEC, *Storia degli Sloveni in Italia 1866-1918*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998, pp. 30-33; A. APOLLONIO, *Dagli Asburgo a Mussolini. Venezia Giulia 1918-1922*, Gorizia, LEG, 2001, pp. 43 ss.



to) Serbia<sup>17</sup>. Facing Italy's expansionism, therefore, appeared to be the only linkage which could join together the Southern Slav populations. Common resistance against Italy's political and territorial plans was regarded as the only way of reaching a sort of interethnic truce. But this kind of unwritten agreement soon revealed to be a «double-edged sword». The Yugoslav government had no room for negotiation with Italy, as it wasn't allowed by Slovenian and Croatian nationalism to give an inch of Istrian and Dalmatian lands. But, as long as the clash of Italian and Southern Slav nationalism made impossible any solution of the Adriatic question, Italy's army continued to be present in Istrian and Dalmatian districts, causing further dissatisfaction and disillusion among Slovenian and Croatian populations, which started to blame the Yugoslav ruling leaders for the failure in achieving their national aims<sup>18</sup>. Pushed by both external and domestic pressures, the Belgrade government was stuck in a *cul de sac*, since it wasn't able to keep the promises made to Slovenes and Croats and to fulfill their national aspirations. In such a chaotic and troubled domestic situation, the anti-Serbian and anti-Yugoslav tendencies, which had never disappeared, gained new momentum and the separatist leaders looked for help and support in their fight against Serbian hegemony.

It was in this context, therefore, that some Italian leaders (both military and political ones) drew up plans aimed at exploiting the national and ethnic hatred, which had been permeating the Southern Slav Kingdom since its creation. The purpose of such a strategy was, above all, to exert pressure on the Belgrade government, so as to obtain the best possible conditions during the negotiations for the closing of the Adriatic question. But the plans were also meant to get prepared in case of internal collapse of the Yugoslav State, supporting and leading the separatist organizations, in order to establish

<sup>17</sup> *Dokumenti o postanku Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1914.-1919*, cit., pp. 227 ss.; *Rumbold to Balfour*, Bern, November 20<sup>th</sup> 1918, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print*, University Publications of America, Series F, Vol. 4, D. 3; *Sforza to Sonnino*, Corfù, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1918; *Russo to Sonnino*, Bern, November 8<sup>th</sup> 1918; *Pignatti to Sonnino*, Bern, November 13<sup>th</sup> 1918; *Bonin to Sonnino*, Paris, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1918, in DDI, Serie VI, Vol. I, DD. 30, 64, 140 e 220.

<sup>18</sup> *Zapisnici sa sednica Delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, cit., DD. 192-208. As regards the several leadership problems which arose in the making of the 1st Yugoslavia and broke out definitively at the Paris Peace Conference (especially in the relationship between the Serbian leader, Nikola Pašić, and the Croatian one, Ante Trumbić), see: A. N. DRAGNICH, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia*, New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1974; *passim*; D. STANKOVIĆ, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, Beograd, BIGZ, 1985, Vol. II, pp. 213 ss.; A. SMITH PAVELIĆ, *Dr. Ante Trumbić. Problemi hrvatsko-srpskih odnosa*, Monaco di Baviera, 1959; A. TRUMBIĆ, *Izbrani spisi*, Split, Književni Krug, 1986; I. PETRINOVIĆ, *Ante Trumbić. Politička shvacanja i djelovanje*, Split, Književni Krug, 1991 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition).

a political and territorial system, which at last could prove convenient for Italy's interests and aspirations<sup>19</sup>. General Pietro Badoglio, second-in-command of the Italian Army, presented a detailed plan (which was approved by Italy's government in December 1918) for stirring up national conflicts among Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, using ethnic, religious and social divisions wherever possible. Furthermore, during the early stages of the Paris Peace Conference, some Italian authorities tried to help the Croatian Peasant Party's leaders with a petition to be sent to the Conference claiming the right to self-determination for the people of Croatia. The Croatian Peasant Party was the largest political party in Croatia and at that time was in favor of a neutral Croat peasant republic, free from Serbian hegemony and independent from the Yugoslav Kingdom. Lastly – as it has been already recalled in the previous pages – the Italian government supported the Montenegrin government in exile and the Montenegrin refugees in their fight for the restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro as an independent and sovereign state<sup>20</sup>.

At first, the Italian strategy aiming at taking advantage of the Southern Slav internal divisions was executed by a number of agents and officials, who were charged with the task of holding secret talks with a number of separatist leaders in Yugoslavia<sup>21</sup>. But, after the seizure of Fiume led by D'Annun-

<sup>19</sup> G. SALOTTI, *Gli «intrighi balcanici» del 1919-20 in un memorandum a Mussolini di Vladimiro Petrovich-Saxe*, in «Storia Contemporanea», 1989, n. 4; F. CACCAMO, *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa»*, cit., pp. 159 ss.; ID., *Il sostegno italiano all'indipendentismo croato*, cit., pp. 23 ss.; M. BUCARELLI, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922-1939)*, Bari, B. A. Graphis, 2006, pp. 10-12.

<sup>20</sup> *Stjepan Radić to Maria Radić*, Zagreb, March 29<sup>th</sup>, June 14<sup>th</sup>, July 20<sup>th</sup> and August 18<sup>th</sup> 1919, in *Korespondencija Stjepana Radića (1885-1928)* edited by B KRIZMAN, Zagabria, Institut za Hrvatsku Povijest, 1973, Vol. II, DD. 5, 8, 53, 116 e 148; *Finzi to Marchetti*, Trieste, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1919, attached to *Badoglio to Sonnino*, Villa Italia, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1919; *Sonnino to Badoglio*, Paris, February 27<sup>th</sup> 1919, in DDI, Series VI, Vol. II, DD. 502 e 542. Also: ... *a Mussolini*, (author unknown), Rome, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1928, in ASMAE, *AP 1919-1930*, «Jugoslavia 1928», Box 1341. For further details, see: V. MAČEK, *In the Struggle for Freedom*, New York, Speller & Sons, 1957, pp. 81-82; B KRIZMAN, *Stjepan Radić – Život – Misao – Djelo*, in *Korespondencija*, cit., Vol I, pp. 35-37, and pp. 59 ss.; F. CACCAMO, *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa»*, cit., pp. 159 ss.; ID., *Il sostegno italiano all'indipendentismo croato*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», 2004, n. 6, pp. 23 ss.; M. BIONDICH, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilization 1904-1928*, Toronto, University Press, 2000, pp. 159 ss.

<sup>21</sup> *Finzi to Sforza*, «Promemoria sulla questione adriatica», (without date, but presumably between the end of October and the beginning of November 1919); *Colloquio con i Signori Susterlich, Duich e Sax*, (without date, but presumably between the end of October and the beginning of November 1919); *Progetto di accordo tra i fiduciari del governo italiano e i fiduciari dei governi provvisori croato e sloveno*, (without date, but presumably between the end of October and the beginning of November 1919) in ASMAE, *Carte Sforza*, Box 7, Folder VII.

Also: *Antonio Albertini to Luigi Albertini*, Rome, November 9<sup>th</sup> 1919, in L. ALBERTINI

zio in September 1919 in order to prevent the Paris Peace Conference from taking any decision adverse to Italy's national interests, D'Annunzio and his provisional government soon became the main and most effective communication channel. It was immediately clear that "the peculiar situation existing in Fiume" after D'Annunzio's arrival was extremely favorable for the accomplishment of the anti-Yugoslav plans drawn up by the Italian authorities:

The support for the accomplishment of such a strategy - as Giovanni Giuriati, one of D'Annunzio's closest assistants, wrote to Cesare Finzi Pettorrelli Lalatta, an Italian lieutenant colonel in charge of the intelligence section of the Italian III Army Corps deployed in Venezia Giulia<sup>22</sup> - which can be assured by unaccountable agents, as we proudly show to be, could easily avoid any recriminations arising by the official involvement of Italy's government.

As a result of the secret contacts between D'Annunzio's entourage and anti-Yugoslav leaders, the government of Fiume signed three agreements with the separatist representatives and with the Montenegrin government in exile during the year 1920. The first agreement, signed in Fiume on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 1920, was personally negotiated by D'Annunzio with the Montenegrin premier Plamenac. The aim of the pact was the restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro as an independent State, whose borders would extend to the Herzegovina region, the Bay of Kotor and Northern Albania. According to the covenant, the existence of an independent Montenegrin State was crucial to the balance of power in the Adriatic Sea. A common military and political action was provided with the purpose of "putting an end to the pains and sufferings of the heroic people of Montenegro", as well as "helping other Balkan populations to get rid of the Serbian yoke". D'Annunzio was committed to supporting the Montenegrin fight "depending on the resources at his disposal" and "to the greatest extent of his personal capabilities", sending arms, food and every other kind of material assistance required. In return, Plamenac offered the Italian government a "military, political and economic alliance", and acknowledged Italy's right to establish a naval station in the Bay of Kotor, "in case of war or menace of war"<sup>23</sup>.

Two months later, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1920, after several talks and contacts with the delegates of the other Yugoslav "oppressed nationalities"<sup>24</sup>, the

*Epistolario 1911-1926*, edited by O. BARIÉ, Vol. III, Milano, Mondadori, 1968, D. 1155, pp. 1322-1324.

<sup>22</sup> *Giuriati to Finzi*, [Rome], November 25<sup>th</sup> 1919, in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder I; *Sforza to Tittoni*, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1919, in AISNSMLI, *Carte a Prato*, Box 9. Also: G. GIURIATI, *Con D'Annunzio e Millo*, cit., p. 150.

<sup>23</sup> The text of the agreement was published by F. GERRA, *L'impresa di Fiume*, cit., Vol II, pp. 18-20. The original copy is in AFVI, *Archivio personale*, LXXVIII, 5.

<sup>24</sup> *Zoli to D'Annunzio*, Rome, June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, folder "Zoli, Corrado"; *Host-Venturi to D'Annunzio*, Rome, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1920, and, Venice,

government of Fiume signed two more agreements in Venice. The first one, which was negotiated by D'Annunzio's entourage with Croatian, Kosovar Albanian and Montenegrin representatives, called for a general anti-Serbia insurgency. The unrest would break out during the month of August, in Montenegro at first, then in Northern Albania and finally in Croatia. The uprising (which, in the end, was postponed) was obviously meant to give freedom to the national groups oppressed by the Belgrade government, as well as to occupy "all of Serbia's territory", so as to cancel the Serbian hegemony once for all. According to this anti-Serbian pact, the insurgents were to receive arms, ammunitions and financial aids from the government of Fiume, whose leader D'Annunzio was acknowledged as "the loyal and legitimate representative of victorious Italy"<sup>25</sup>.

The other agreement was a bilateral covenant between the government of Fiume and the Croatian separatist leaders with the purpose of defining new territorial boundaries in the Northern Adriatic Sea. The pact envisaged the creation of three independent and neutral States in Slovenia, Croatia and Dalmatia. Political and administrative borders between Italy and Slovenia would differ from military boundaries: the first ones would cut Istria in two according to the ethnic distribution of the local populations, whereas the second ones would coincide with the Treaty of London line, fulfilling all of Italy's strategic requirements. Independent Croatia would include only the old Habsburg Croatia-Slavonia and was supposed to accept the lost of Fiume to Italy's advantage. The Dalmatian Republic would cease a number of Dalmatian islands, such as Cherso/Krk, Arbe/Rab, Pelagosa/Palagruža and Vis/Lissa, which were to be turned over to Italy due to strategic reasons. Independent Dalmatia could join the Republic of Croatia upon a referendum, but without the cities of Zara/Zadar, Šibenik/Sebenico, Split/Spalato, Traù/Trogir and Ragusa/Dubrovnik, which would remain autonomous in any case and form a Dalmatian League ruled by a five-members Council<sup>26</sup>.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1920, a third agreement was signed in Fiume in order to involve Macedonian and Hungarian separatist leaders into the anti-Serbian unrest. The negotiations revealed to be extremely difficult due to the uncompromising stance taken by the Balkan delegates (especially by Albanian and Macedonian representatives) as to the definition of the new

July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1920; *Host-Venturi to [Finzi]*, Venice, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, fascicolo "Host-Venturi, Giovanni". Also: F. GERRA, *L'impresa di Fiume*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 6-10.

<sup>25</sup> *Trattato generale firmato tra i rappresentanti del Comandante D'Annunzio e i rappresentanti delle Nazionalità Oppresse dalla Serbia*, Venice, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AMSF, *Carte Giurati*, Folder IV.

<sup>26</sup> *Trattato particolare tra i rappresentanti del Comandante D'Annunzio e i rappresentanti della Croazia, Venezia*, Venice, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AMSF, *Carte Giurati*, Folder IV.

territorial settlement<sup>27</sup>. The new agreement was very similar to the one previously signed in Venice in July, calling for a general insurgency which was to break out between the end of November and the beginning of December 1920<sup>28</sup>. Despite the growing financial problems which the Fiume government had to deal with<sup>29</sup>, D'Annunzio pledged himself to send even larger amounts of funds, arms and ammunitions.

The final aim of such a body of agreements was the break up of the whole of Yugoslavia. Instead of a great multiethnic, centralized State, unable of granting local autonomy and self-government, such as the Yugoslav Kingdom was, D'Annunzio had in mind the creation of a political and territorial system capable of fulfilling the aspirations of each national groups. A system which was supposed to give freedom, self-determination and independence to all those nationalities, which considered themselves as oppressed by the Serbian rule. A system which in return would let the Italian Kingdom to spread its political and economic influence all over the Balkan region and give strategic and naval supremacy to Italy's armed forces in the Adriatic Sea<sup>30</sup>.

In order to accomplish such a revolutionary plan, the role of Montenegro was considered to be of crucial importance. The Montenegrin government in exile was supposed to be able to organize a large uprising inside the territory of Montenegro, which would be the first and most powerful blow to the Serbian rule. Once started in Montenegro, the anti-Yugoslav revolt was to spread all over the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. But the success of the Montenegrin unrest as well as of the general anti-Yugoslav insurgency relied upon the financial, material and military support which D'Annunzio was pledged to provide and which he was never able to collect in Fiume<sup>31</sup>. It was clear, thus, that the successful accomplishment of the plan was dependent upon the assistance granted to D'Annunzio by the government of Rome. Although D'Annunzio was constantly in contact with some Italian political leaders and military authorities, such as Carlo Sforza and Pietro Badoglio (just to mention the most important and highest level ones), he never received the aids and the material support required to let the Balkan revolution break out<sup>32</sup>. As

<sup>27</sup> Zoli to D'Annunzio, [October] 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, Folder "Zoli, Corrado". Also: F. GERRA, *L'impresa di Fiume*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 140 ss.

<sup>28</sup> The text of the agreement is in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder IV.

<sup>29</sup> Host-Venturi to D'Annunzio, October 9<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, fascicolo "Host-Venturi, Giovanni".

<sup>30</sup> D'Annunzio to Bonomi, Fiume, June 27<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio personale*, LXXX, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Host-Venturi to D'Annunzio, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, Folder "Host-Venturi, Giovanni"; Zoli to D'Annunzio, Fiume, [November] 25<sup>th</sup> 1920 in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, Folder "Zoli, Corrado"; Zoli to Sachs-Petrovich, Fiume, October 27<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder I. Also: F. GERRA, *L'impresa di Fiume*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 183-188; M. A. LEDEEN, *D'Annunzio a Fiume*, cit., pp. 264-268.

<sup>32</sup> Giuriati to D'Annunzio, Rome, February 4<sup>th</sup> 1920, AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, Folder

it has been previously stressed, the aim of such a strategy pursued by Italy's ruling leaders was, above all, to use the separatist movements and the question of Montenegro in order to exert as much pressure as possible on the Belgrade government during the negotiations for the closing of the Adriatic question. On one hand, through D'Annunzio and his entourage, Italy supported indirectly the anti-Yugoslav movements, trying to take advantages from the dissatisfaction of the non Serbian national groups; on the other hand, the government of Rome was ready to reach a positive agreement with Belgrade, in order to strengthen the Serbian hegemony (which meant to abandon the separatist groups and the Montenegrin government to their own fate) and at the same time fulfill the Italian national aspirations in the Adriatic Sea. D'Annunzio and his entourage in Fiume, the Montenegrin government in exile, the Croatian, Albanian and Macedonian secessionist leaders, all of them were just political cards, which Italy played in this sort of «Adriatic game».

In the end, it revealed to be a successful policy for Rome, as on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1920 (just three weeks after the last agreement signed in Fiume) the Italian and the Yugoslav governments signed the Treaty of Rapallo, which closed the Adriatic question, setting the boundaries between the two Kingdoms. According to the Treaty, Italy realized not all the territorial goals provided for by the London Pact, but most of them and the most important ones anyway: all of Istria, the city of Zara, four Dalmatian islands, the temporary internationalization of Fiume (which would be definitely annexed by Italy 4 years later). In return, the government of Rome officially recognized the creation of Yugoslavia, which meant that Italy ceased to support D'Annunzio's revolutionary plans, as well as any separatist movements and the independence of Montenegro<sup>33</sup>. Without any political and military support from Rome, D'Annunzio wasn't able to keep his promise and the anti-Yugoslav organizations revealed to be incapable of fighting against the Serbian political and military power, which was allowed to gain complete control all over the country. The Italian poet and soldier felt treated and deeply disillusioned. In drawing his revolutionary plans in the Balkans, he had considered and presented himself as a "loyal and reliable servant" of the country, but once the Italian-Yugoslav agreement was signed the Italian authorities not

"Giuriati Giovanni"; *Giuriati to D'Annunzio*, Rome, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1920, and, Venice, March 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 1920; *Giuriati to Sforza*, Rome, March 7<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AMSF, *Carte Giuriati*, Folder I; *D'Annunzio to Millo*, Fiume, March 10<sup>th</sup> e 22<sup>nd</sup> 1920, in O. DI GIAMBERARDINO, *L'Ammiraglio Millo*, cit., D. 53, pp. 273-274. *Host-Venturi to D'Annunzio*, Rome, May 18<sup>th</sup> maggio 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio generale fiumano*, Folder "Host-Venturi, Giovanni".

<sup>33</sup> *Trattati e Convenzioni fra il Regno d'Italia e gli altri Stati*, edited by Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, Vol. XXVI, pp. 775-782. Also: F. CACCAMO, *L'Italia e la «Nuova Europa»*, cit., pp. 304-305; M. BUCARELLI, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia*, cit., pp. 12-14.

only decided to cause the failure of D'Annunzio's anti-Yugoslav strategy, but forced him and his legionaries to leave the city<sup>34</sup>. The Treaty of Rapallo was, thus, D'Annunzio's political end, as well as the end of Montenegro as an independent State for more than eighty years.

Massimo BUCARELLI

### D'ANNUNZIO, ITALY AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF MONTENEGRO 1919-1920

#### *Summary*

In Italian political and cultural life during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Gabriele D'Annunzio played a relevant role not only as a widely known poet and novelist, but also as a political leader and soldier. A number of studies have already focused on D'Annunzio's participation in the 1<sup>st</sup> WW, analyzed his activity in the Italian nationalistic movement, and dealt with his leading role in the occupation of Fiume/Rijeka. The aim of this work, thus, is not to focus on these well known aspects of the political and military action of D'Annunzio. The purpose of the article rather is to stress the connection between D'Annunzio's plans, on the one hand, and the national questions in the Western Balkans at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, on the other hand. Above all, this work is an attempt to shed some light on all the initiatives pursued by D'Annunzio aiming at restoring the independence of the Kingdom of Montenegro, since he was one of the last political leaders in Italy and in Europe who gave full support and tried to do all he could for the survival of Montenegro as an independent and sovereign State.

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<sup>34</sup> *D'Annunzio to Bonomi*, Fiume, June 27<sup>th</sup> 1920, in AFVI, *Archivio personale*, LXXX, 3. Also: R. DE FELICE, *D'Annunzio politico*, cit., pp. 78-80, e pp. 90 ss.