

The Hungarian-Italian Support of the Croatian Separatism between 1928 and 1934

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Italy's and Hungary's Relations with Yugoslavia before 1928

When the Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini and his Hungarian colleague, István Bethlen signed the Italian-Hungarian Treaty of Friendship on 5 April 1927, the Kingdom of Serb, Croats and Slovenes, named also Yugoslavia¹ valued it as an agreement opposed to the Yugoslav state.² This valuation could be right because the existence of Yugoslavia mentioned the principal obstacle to the Italian foreign political ambitions. By that time it was a well-known fact that Italy searched Hungary's alliance partially to realize Italy's anti-Yugoslav plans. As the Italian ex-minister of Foreign Affairs had said in 1919, the main aim of the Italian foreign policy had been to obstacle a causal agreement between Hungary and Yugoslavia.³

¹ The name „Yugoslavia” became official just in 1929, but the specialist literature uses it before 1929 to make simple the text. In my essay I did so as well.

² A. VAGNINI, *Ungheria: la costruzione dell'Europa di Versailles*, Roma 2015, p. 192.

³ M. ÁDÁM, *A Kisantant*, Budapest 1981, p. 111.

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Italy had two reasons to be anxious because of Yugoslavia's existence. On one hand, Italy was convinced to enter into the First World War in alliance with the Entente States by the promises of the secret Treaty of London signed on 26 April 1915, but after the war these promises became untenable. France, Great Britain and Russia promised to Italy the possession of Trentino, Trieste, Gorizia, Pola, Zara, the Middle Dalmatia, the Brenner Pass, East Istria, and the influence on certain Albanian territories,⁴ but after the war the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy collapsed, and new States were created instead of it. From these Yugoslavia claimed the whole Istria and Dalmatia, as they were inhabited mainly by Slavs. In November 1918 the National Council of Fiume expressed the wish to be allowed to belong to Italy,⁵ which caused another conflict with Yugoslavia.

On the other hand – and certainly this was the more important reason – Italy, regarded to Europe, wanted to get influence in the Balkans and on the Danubian Basin,⁶ and it aimed hegemony in the Adriatic as well.⁷ To reach these ambitions, the first step was the knock-off of Yugoslavia for Italy. For that purpose the Badoglio Plan was elaborated which aimed the encirclement and the dissolution of Yugoslavia by intensifying its inner, ethnical conflicts. To construct this plan, Italy, beside Albania and Bulgaria, counted on the help of Romania and Hungary,⁸ because these two States had serious conflicts caused by the questions of territorial belongings with Yugoslavia. Actually, all of the successor States claimed territories from Hungary. The Peace Treaty of Trianon signed on 4 June 1920 satisfied the great part of these claims, so Hungary lost the two thirds of its territory, and many inhabitants who were Hungarians by their nationality remained outside of the borderlines. Hence the revision of the Treaty of Trianon occupied the first place in Bethlen's political theory, which meant Hungary's main political orientation between the two World Wars.⁹

⁴ I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani (hereafter DDI), Quinta serie, Vol. 3. Doc. 470. The text of the secret Treaty of London, 26 April 1915.

⁵ DDI, Sesta serie, Vol. 1. Doc. 134. Orlando to Bonin Longare, 13 November 1918.

⁶ G. CAROCCI, *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista*, Bari 1969, pp. 13–14.

⁷ Zs. L. NAGY, *Itália és Magyarország a párizsi békekonzferencia idején, 1919*, in: I. ROMSICS (ed.), *Magyarország és a nagyhatalmak a 20. században*, Budapest 1995, p. 83.

⁸ A. HORNYÁK, *Magyar-jugoszláv diplomáciai kapcsolatok, 1918–1927*, Újvidék 2004, p. 27.

⁹ M. ORMOS, *Bethlen koncepciója az olasz-magyar szövetségről (1927–1931)*, in: *Történelmi*

Both Italy's and Hungary's foreign political ambitions were disturbed by the Little Entente founded in 1920–1921 as a reticulation of bilateral agreements, in which Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Romania participated. This organization aimed at the conservation of the status quo created after the World War I.¹⁰ The Little Entente – though originally its foundation was not a French initiative¹¹ – soon became an ally of France. Italy, which supposedly was afraid of that France could have had influence in Central Europe, ad interim began to approach the Little Entente. To demonstrate this, Mussolini signed the Roman pact with Yugoslavia on 27 January 1924. On one hand it recognized the supremacy on Fiume, and, on the other hand, it pronounced the two State's neutrality if one of them causally would have been the sacrifice of a third State's aggression.¹² In 1926 Italy signed a similar agreement with Romania, and recognized Romania's right to possess Bessarabia, so the so-called Bessarabia Protocol, which had given this territory to Romania instead of Russia in 1920 by the Allies, could be ratified.¹³ This policy of approach to the Little Entente failed soon because in 1925 the Italian-Yugoslav relations spoiled. Its main reason was that Yugoslavia – for the proposal of the Croatian Peasant Party entered in the parliament in November 1924 with the leadership of Stjepan Radić – did not ratificate the Nettuno Conventions signed in July 1925, which would have given several privileges to the Italians living in Dalmatia.¹⁴

That is why Italy returned to its anti-Yugoslav policy started earlier, and began to search allies to execute Yugoslavia's encirclement. The first step for it was the pact of friendship and security with Albania signed in Tirana (first pact of Tirana). This pronounced that the two States would vice versa support each other to conserve Albania's political, judicial and geographic status quo.¹⁵ One year later, in 1927, Italy and Albania signed the second pact of Tirana which had an edge much more

Szemle, 1–2, 1971, p. 133.

¹⁰ ÁDÁM, p. 5.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² G. CANDELORO, *Storia dell'Italia moderna. Volume nono. Il fascismo e le sue guerre*, Milano 1992, p. 166.

¹³ CAROLI, p. 106.

¹⁴ CANDELORO, p. 166.

¹⁵ Gy. JUHÁSZ, *Magyarország külpolitikája 1919–1945*, Budapest 1988, p. 105.

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obviously anti-Yugoslav than the first had been. For the Badoglio plan's realization, among the Balkan States, Italy needed the alliance of Romania, what was gained by the treaties signed in 1926,¹⁶ and Bulgaria,¹⁷ to which the road led through the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionarna Organizacija, VMRO) founded in 1893 for the purpose to reach the autonomy of Macedonia or within a southern Slavonic federation, or within Bulgaria.¹⁸

Hungary – though Yugoslavia also received a part of territories inhabited by Hungarians – had an ambivalent attitude to the Yugoslav State. After the war Hungary was politically isolated, and the Little Entente's foundation encumbered the situation. It had two possibilities to break out from its isolation. The first was to approach one of the Little Entente States to weaken this organization's bond. Since Hungary thought Yugoslavia to be the most valuable, and it received the least Hungarian territories among the three States, Hungary decided to search for an alliance with Yugoslavia.¹⁹ This policy could work just temporarily, because Bethlen thought that Hungary had been threatened by the "Slavonic danger". This meant that the Little Entente and the Soviet Union would encircle Hungary if it would not regain the Carpathian which could defend Hungary from the Russian breaking and entering in the country. This Hungarian ambition could be helped by Italy, which was a natural enemy to the Slavs as the Slavonic hegemony had been opposing to the Italian interests. Hungary – according to Bethlen's theory – could approach Romania under the protection of Italy, because Romania had been afraid of the Russian expansion as well. The final aim of Bethlen was an Italian-Hungarian-German block, in which Italy and Germany would have equilibrated each other, made possible to Hungary – which in the meantime would have regained its loss territories – to reach its sovereignty and its hegemony in Central Europe.²⁰ So when – in 1926 – Italy approached Hungary with an offer which

¹⁶ The Italian-Romanian Treaty of Friendship signed in 1926 run out in 1930, and it was not prolonged. Its reason was that by that time the Romanian-Italian relations were spoiled because of the Italian propaganda and support of the Hungarian revisionist ambitions.

¹⁷ HORNYÁK, pp. 236–237.

¹⁸ B. JELAVICH, *A Balkán története II. 20. század*, Budapest 1996, p. 87.

¹⁹ HORNYÁK, p. 213.

²⁰ ORMOS, pp. 140–143.

would have made possible for Hungary to manage the Hungarian commerce across the port of Fiume, it was obvious for Hungary to choose the alliance with Italy,²¹ and not the Little Entente States which were not interested in the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, as they gained a great part of Hungarian territories.

After these events was signed the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship, which had a secret clause. It pronounced that the signatories would vice versa give political and diplomatic support to each other for the solution of the questions in which they were interested,²² so Italy would help the Hungarian treaty revision, and Hungary would give a hand for the weakening of Yugoslavia. After signing the treaty, Hungary was considered to be the main supporter of Italy’s anti-Yugoslav ambitions.²³ The excellent occasion to weaken Yugoslavia by rising its inner conflicts came in 1928, when the Croatian separatism began to take form.

The Relations of Hungary and Italy with the Croatian Separatists before the Assassination of Marseille

On 20 June 1928 Stjepan Radić was assassinated in the Serbian parliament by a Serbian radical, namely Puniša Račić, who was loyal to the Karađorđević House.²⁴ In August Radić died from his wounds, and the conflicts between Serbians and Croats became sharp-edged. The Croatian delegates left the parliament and formed a coalition in the one-time institution of the Sabor – the Croatian parliament – in Zagreb. This coalition included three parties. The first was the already mentioned Croatian Peasant Party, which new leader became Vladko Maček. It aimed the autonomy of Croatia within the Yugoslav State. The second party, led by the Serbian Svetozar Pribičević, was called Independent Democratic Party, and it also stood up for the federalist reconstructions of the State. The third member of the coalition was the so-called Croatian Block. This actually included two smaller parties, the Croatian

²¹ HORNYÁK, p. 228.

²² D. NEMES, *A Bethlen-kormány külpolitikája 1927–1931-ben*, Budapest 1964, p. 63.

²³ Archivio Segreto del Vaticano (hereafter ASV), Arch. Nunz. Jugoslavia. B. 4. Telegramma n. 7624. Pellegrinetti to Gasparri, 26 November 1927.

²⁴ E. GOBETTI, *Dittatore per caso: un piccolo duce protetto dall’Italia fascista*, Napoli 2001, p. 25.

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Party of Rights led by Ante Pavelić, and the Federalist Party, whose leader was Ante Trumbić.²⁵ The most radical person among the Croatian politicians was Pavelić, who wanted the utter independence of Croatia. He had good relations with those Croatian separatists who were forced to emigrate because of their political principles just after the foundation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, such with Ivo Frank, who lived in Budapest from the 1920s.²⁶

After the homicide of Radić, Hungary urged Italy to take up the Croatian separatists. Probably, its reason was that earlier the leaders of the Party of Rights, Pavelić, Gustav Perčec and Perčević – who lived in Austria – had visited Sándor Khuen-Héderváry, the vicarious of the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Budapest. Khuen-Héderváry promised them that the Hungarian Government would make possible the Croatian refugees' settlement in Hungary, and assumed the obligation of supporting the Croats with weapons in case of a Serbian-Croatian war.²⁷

In autumn 1928 the Hungarian Ambassador in Belgrade, Pál Forster summarized the Hungarian point of view regarding to the Croatian separatism in a letter to his Italian colleague, Carlo Galli. In the Hungarian Government's opinion, the Croatian movement was serious, but it was not able to make a revolution. Forster thought that Italy and Hungary had to make an agreement on their policy toward the Croats. From the letter Galli concluded that Hungary – though it judged the Croatian movement serious – did not wish to give a practical support to the separatists because of the risk of compromising in front of the other European States.²⁸

Forster's proposal made Italy to examine the Croatian question. As a first step, Italy thought to write articles in the Italian press about the historical arguments on the creation of an Independent Croatia. These articles could emphasize that Vladko Maček – who was thought by Hungary and Italy to be the most suitable person to govern Croatia – could count on the help of Italy if he had determined himself to

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 20.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 21.

²⁷ M. ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, Budapest 1984, pp. 57–58.

²⁸ Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASDMAE), AP 1919–1930. Jugoslavia. B. 1341. Fasc. Rapporti politici. Telegramma n. 5801. Galli to Mussolini, 24 September 1928.

act.²⁹ But the Italians still remained cautious, as the Croatian population – because of Istria, Dalmatia and Fiume – was a traditional enemy of Italy. Beside Hungary and Italy, the Croats continued a significant campaign in Austria and in Germany as well. In Germany they could publish two journals – the *Croatian Press* in English language, and the *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska* in Croatian language – until 1934.³⁰

In October 1928 Giacinto Auriti, the Italian Ambassador in Vienna informed Mussolini that there was a secret meeting of the Croatian leaders in Baden, where Hungarian diplomats also participated, and the result was the sign of a secret pact on the future alliance of Croatia and Hungary.³¹ There are no other documents which could certify the existence of this agreement, but it is a fact that Trumbić and Maček met the Hungarian diplomat Gábor Apor in Vienna, whom they explained that the Peasant Party – though, among sufficient circumstances, it would have been satisfied with the Croatian autonomy – first of all would have liked to reach the independence of Croatia.³² Beside this, Maček explained that he would have wished to approach Italy by Hungary's mediation.³³

In the middle of October the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lajos Walkó announced officially the existence of the relations between Hungary and the Croats. Walkó asked if Italy had already taken the first steps. Since Italy's answer was negative, Walkó offered the Hungarian transmission between the Italians and the Croats, because Walkó thought that a strict Italian–Hungarian collaboration would have been necessary in the Croatian question.³⁴ In his answer Mussolini communicated that the Italian Government was totally convinced on the seriousness of the Croatian Movement, so he would pay attention to their ambitions, and he

²⁹ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7. Doc. 24. Note without author and data.

³⁰ F. JELIĆ-BUTIĆ, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska 1941–1945*, Zagreb 1977, pp. 27–28.

³¹ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7. Doc. 39. Auriti to Mussolini, 15 October 1928.

³² ASMAE. AP 1919–1930. Jugoslavia. B. 341. Fasc. Rapporti politici. Telegramma n. 6195. 17 October 1928.

³³ A. HORNYÁK, *A magyar kisebbségi kérdés a magyar kormány délszláv politikájában a harmincas években*, in: A. HORNYÁK, *Találkozások-ütközések. Fejezetek a 20. századi magyar–szerb kapcsolatok történetéből*, Pécs 2010, p. 44.

³⁴ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7. Doc. 43. De Astis to Mussolini, 17 October 1928.

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was ready to cooperate with the Hungarian Government to determine a common orientation toward the Croats. He called up the Italian ambassador in Budapest, Ercole Durini di Monza to continue the negotiations on the Croatian question with Walkó. Mussolini thought that the Hungarian-Italian relations could have been strengthened by these conversations, too.³⁵

In the meantime a campaign has begun in the Hungarian press, managed by Ivo Frank. As a result, the public began to feel sympathy for the separatist ambitions of the Croats.³⁶ In return for the campaign Frank promised to Italy the execution of the Treaty of London.³⁷ In a memorandum written together with Pavelić they summarized the Croatian claims, and they explained that in exchange for the Hungarian and Italian help, the independent Croatia would have especially good relations.³⁸ Croatia would respect Italy's priority in the Adriatic, and it would be in consideration of the Italian economic interests.³⁹

1928 passed with sounding-out the situation. A turn was on 6 January 1929 when King Alexander I introduced the dictatorship in his country to resolve the inner, ethnic conflicts. The name "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" was officially changed to Yugoslavia in this year to express the transnationality of the empire.⁴⁰ As a response, Ante Pavelić emigrated in Italy where he found the Ustasha movement (Ustaša-Hrvatska Revolucionarna Organizacija), which aimed the independence of Croatia at whatever cost, included a causal armed conflict as well.⁴¹ Pavelić made a punctual programme just in 1933. According to this document, the Independent State of Croatia would unify all of the territories inhabited by Croats. In the decision-making regarded to the State could just participate the inhabitants who were Croats by their nationality. Neither aliens, nor other States could make decisions on the fate

³⁵ ASMAE. AP 1919–1930. Jugoslavia. B. 1341. Fasc. Rapporti politici. Telegramma n. 5426. Mussolini to Durini, 23 October 1928.

³⁶ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7. 41. irat. De Astis to Mussolini, 16 October 1928.

³⁷ P. ADRIANO – G. CINGOLANI, *La via dei conventi. Ante Pavelić e il terrorismo ustascia dal Fascismo alla Guerra Fredda*, Milano 2011, pp. 31–32.

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 48–49.

³⁹ GOBETTI, p. 23.

⁴⁰ D. SOKCSEVITS, *Horvátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*, Budapest 2011, p. 492.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 494.

of the Croatian State. The Croats had certain obligations toward the State, which meant that they had to live according to determined principles, such as having structured familiar life, following the catholic religion, having military virtues, and paying attention to the cultural development of the Croatian population. The Independent State of Croatia could be gained by inhabitants with these qualities.⁴² Pavelić emphasized that the Croats had represented significant cultural values, so they had deserved to have an independent national State.⁴³

Mussolini welcomed the foundation of the movement, and, trusting in a future revolution raised by the Ustasha, he assisted to the creation of it. Italy began the armament of the separatists, and the organization called “Servizio Segreto Croato” (Secret Agency of the Croats) promised to Pavelić war materials of 400 thousand liras.⁴⁴ With the possession of these new weapons, the Ustasha executed approximately one hundred assassinations between the foundation of the movement and the homicide in Marseille (1929–1934). Nearly the half of them were launched from Italy, Hungary and Austria.⁴⁵ Since the Roman pact signed in 1924 ran down on 27 January 1929, Italy had a possibility to consolidate its relations with the new Yugoslav regime. Although the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vojislav Marinković would warmly welcome the prolongation, or the renovation of the pact, Mussolini pointed out that “*this Treaty, which was not able to meliorate the situation, actually terminated before the end of the validity period. The renovation of a pact which never existed in reality would have not been a honest thing*”.⁴⁶ So it can be said that Mussolini had confidence in the separatists, and thought that the Ustasha would be able to help Italy to gain its ambitions.

After King Alexander I introduced the dictatorship, the Hungarians were not so sure in supporting the separatists as the Italians were. Actually, Hungary continuously

⁴² E. A. SAJTI (ed.), *Jugoszlávia 1918–1941: dokumentumok*, Szeged 1989, Doc. 71. The principles of the Ustasha Movement.

⁴³ B. KRIZMAN, *Pavelić i ustaše*, Zagreb 1978, pp. 117–119.

⁴⁴ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 8. Doc. 129. Grandi to Mussolini, (Without day), October 1929.

⁴⁵ ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (hereafter MNL OL). K 63. 118. csomó. 16–27. tétel. 1929. 90 pol./ 1929. szám. Hory to Walkó, 26 May 1929.

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vacillated between the Italian and the Yugoslav orientations from 1918, and this oscillation happened in 1929, too. Forster informed Galli that Bethlen would have been ready to make an alliance with Yugoslavia to make collapse the Little Entente, because by that time Bethlen thought that Italy has not been able to give practical help to realize the treaty revision. So – at least according to Forster’s letter – Bethlen determined himself to choose the Hungarian-Yugoslav alliance if the Serbs had offer an accord, but in the meantime the Hungarian Government continued the support of the Croatian separatism as well.⁴⁷

On 20 April 1929 Pavelić and Perčec travelled to Sofia, where they met one of the leaders of the VMRO, Vancha Mihailov. The Italian ambassador in Bulgaria, Renato Piacentini informed Mussolini that the three politicians had made an agreement on the future collaboration of the Croatian and Macedonian separatists to gain their independence. Their explanation was that the life of the minorities had been unbearable under the Yugoslav regime.⁴⁸

After the breve vacillation between the two political orientations, Hungary was ready to concretize the relations with Pavelić in the Summer. On 23 July 1929 Pavelić met Apor Gábor in Bologna, where Apor promised that the Hungarian Government would continue to pay attention to the Croatian question, and gave financial support to the Ustasha.⁴⁹ After making the connections in 1929, both Hungary and Italy tried to keep dark the support given to the Croatian separatists, because they did not want to make worse the relations with Yugoslavia.

In 1931 there was a chance to meliorate the Italian-Yugoslav relations. King Alexander I travelled to Rome and visited Mussolini to negotiate about the settlement of their disputes.⁵⁰ Yugoslavia was interested especially in a commercial agreement with Italy, but the king wished to make a political accord as well.⁵¹ Probably the king wanted to make an agreement with the Italian Government to make it finish

⁴⁷ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 7. Doc. 138. Galli to Mussolini, 4 January 1929.

⁴⁸ ASMAE. AP 1919–1930. Bulgaria. B. 927. Fasc. Questione macedone. Telegramma n. 2010/94. Piacentini to Mussolini, 24 April 1929.

⁴⁹ ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, p. 67.

⁵⁰ M. BUCARELLI, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922–1939)*, Bari 2006, p. 198.

⁵¹ DDI, Settima serie, Vol. 11. Doc. 238. Galli to Grandi, 23 February 1932.

the support of the separatists. Although Italy was also ready to have an accord with Yugoslavia, the negotiations failed because both of the two States had terms which were unacceptable for the other one. Yugoslavia wanted Italy to give up its revisionist claims against Yugoslavia, and the Italian ambitions regarding to the Balkan. Italy protested against this, and asked Yugoslavia to recognize the Italian positions in Albania.⁵² Since none of the two States wanted to execute these terms, the attempt of the accord failed and the struggle for the hegemony in the Balkan was continuing.

Nor the Hungarian–Yugoslav negotiations were more successful. The Hungarian Government hoped that the new Yugoslav regime would take measures to meliorate the relations between the two States,⁵³ but then, in 1932, the Yugoslav Government did not prolong the commercial agreement signed in 1926, and taxed customs tariff on the agricultural products. So those who had properties both in Hungary and in Yugoslavia could not anymore transfer their products freely. The Yugoslav Government probably wanted to put an end to the institute of dual-properties.⁵⁴

The year 1932 meant a turning point in the Hungarian-Italian support of the Ustasha movement. Hungary and Italy – the main supporters of the organization – were almost to make an agreement with Yugoslavia, which could have meant the loss of this valuable support for the Ustasha. That is why Pavelić and his fellows rose a revolution in Lika, which failed, but it piqued the hopes of Mussolini and the new Hungarian Prime Minister, Gyula Gömbös that the organization of the Croatians could gain some results in the collapse of Yugoslavia. During their meeting held in November 1932, in Rome, they made an agreement on giving more support to the Ustasha which was able to rise a revolution against Yugoslavia.⁵⁵ After this agreement the Croatian camp in Jankapuszta, which lied near to the Hungarian-Yugoslav frontier, was set into action. The camp was bought in 1931 by Gustav Perčec who lived in Hungary under the name Emil Horvát.⁵⁶ The aim of the settlement was probably

⁵² Ibidem, Vol. 12. Doc. 178. Galli to Mussolini, 27 July 1932.

⁵³ MNL OL. K 63. 118. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 1929. 160. pol. szám./ 1929. Forster to Walkó, 18 June 1929.

⁵⁴ HORNYÁK, *A magyar kisebbségi*, pp. 45–46.

⁵⁵ GOBETTI, 47.

⁵⁶ ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, p. 79.

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to have a place near to the Yugoslav borderline from where terror actions could be started.⁵⁷ In spring 1933 Italy also settled camps for the Croatian émigrés, which were coordinated by the prefect of Pisa, Ercole Conti.⁵⁸ The most important camps for Croatians were in Lipari, Bovigno e Brescia.⁵⁹

Galli tried to draw his Government's attention to the dangers of the support given to the Ustasha, but his anxiety had no response. Galli thought that the separatists formed the minority of the Croatian society, and the Ustasha movement was not sufficiently organized to gain its aims without external help. This was certificated by the fact that the separatists had been acting from 1920 and they did not be able to gain anything during thirteen years.⁶⁰ But soon the Ustasha, together with the VMRO, had an act which drew the attention of the whole Europe.

Hungary's and Italy's Role in the Assassination of Marseille

On 9 October 1934 King Alexander I and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs were assassinated in Marseille. The homicide was executed by a terrorist group of seven persons,⁶¹ and three of them started from Jankapuszta.⁶²

The assassination should not have been unexpected because in January 1934 there had already been an attempt to kill the king, when he had visited Zagreb. The delinquent was a young man called Petar Oreb, who lived in Italy, but a Hungarian passport was in his possession.⁶³ Oreb and his two fellows confessed that they had started from an Italian camp where the Croatian inhabitants had received armies with the purpose of using them for revolutions and assassinations in Yugoslavia.⁶⁴ These were said to Galli by the Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bogoljub Jevtić, so

⁵⁷ ADRIANO – CINGOLANI, p. 98.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ JELIĆ-BUTIĆ, p. 21.

⁶⁰ ASMAE. AP 1931–1945. Jugoslavia. B. 30. Fasc. Separatismo croato. Telegramma n. 6210/2459. 17 September 1933.

⁶¹ P. IUSO, *Il fascismo e gli ustascia, 1929–1941: il separatismo croato in Italia*, Roma 1998, p. 67.

⁶² M. FERRARA, *Ante Pavelić: il duce croato*, Udine 2008, p. 62.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁶⁴ DDI/7./14. Document 551. Galli to Mussolini, 12 January 1934.

Galli warned Mussolini to the fact that the Yugoslav political élite had known about the Italian support given to Pavelić and Perčec.⁶⁵

Within two days, the Yugoslav press began to accuse Italy with organizing the murder of the king,⁶⁶ because the murderer was in the group of Pavelić and Perčec which had started from Italy a few months before the sanguinary events with Italian documents.⁶⁷ What is more, the Yugoslavian emissary in the United States of America, Božidar Purić communicated with Galli that he knew about the meeting of the murderer with an Italian person in Zurich who had given instructions regarding to the assassination and sold to the delinquent of it.⁶⁸

Galli was very anxious on the outcome of the case. Just the photographs made by eyewitnesses calmed him because these photos showed that the murderer of King Alexander I and Barthou had been a Macedonian of Bulgaria who lived in Jankapuszta with the Croatian refugees before the events.⁶⁹ Galli suggested to Mussolini to benefit from this situation, and remove every Croatians from Italy who could be suspected with the assassination.⁷⁰ After a few days Pavelić and one of his fellows, Eugen Kvaternik were arrested in Turin,⁷¹ which was welcomed by the French press.⁷² So the assassination soon had only one accused, which was Hungary.

The reason for the blames against Hungary was the existence of the camp in Jankapuszta, where the Croatian refugees were living. The camp was revealed by the confession written in November 1933 by Jelka Pogorelec, who was the lover of Gustav Perčec. The booklet entitled *Tanje emigrantskih zločinaca* – literally it means *The Secret of the Wicked Emigrés* – appeared in the daily paper called *Novosti*, and it was translated into many languages.⁷³ The booklet, which editor was the Zagrebian Yugoslav Press, starts with a manipulative introduction. It says that Perčec

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ DDI/7./16. Document 48. Galli to Mussolini, 13 October 1934.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ DDI/7./16. Document 57. 51. Galli to Mussolini, 15 October 1934.

⁶⁹ DDI/7./16. Document 60. Galli to Mussolini, 15 October 1934.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ DDI/7./16. Document 73. Galli to Mussolini, 20 October 1934.

⁷² ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, p. 173.

⁷³ Ibidem, p. 79.

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made Jelka, who was “*honest, good and uncontaminated by her temperament*”, to cooperate with him in his political activities by promising matrimony to her.⁷⁴ One of the soldiers who were in connection with the Croatians living in Jankapuszta, colonel Tattay, made a report to the Hungarian Government about his impressions on the confession of Pogorelec.⁷⁵ Tattay started his report with the presentation of Jelka’s past. It was true that the woman was the girlfriend of Perčec, and this relationship began when Perčec had still lived in Zagreb. After the birth of their daughter Jelka became a showgirl, and travelled across the whole Europe. When she remained without job, she shackled up with Perčec in Vienna, where she made the acquaintance with the leader of the Yugoslav public relations office, and Perčec – who wanted to benefit from the information given – was not opposed to this acquaintance.⁷⁶

Being in possession of this information, it can be supposed that Jelka Pogorelec wanted to be a spy on purpose. The opening of the confession can certificate this assumption, too: “*I think that I am the most adequate person to debunk Ante Pavelić and Gustav Perčec, the leaders of the Croatian nation, to the public...*”⁷⁷ – Jelka wrote. Going on, she revealed that she had handled the correspondence of Perčec, so she had known all of the Croatian leaders living in Hungary,⁷⁸ which shows that in reality she had been very content with her role as the lover of Perčec. Nevertheless – after the comparison of the booklet with official documents – it should be recognized that Jelka had given some accurate information as well. Similarly, Tattay’s report also communicates both true data and falsifications as well.

According to the information given by Jelka Pogorelec, the life in Jankapuszta was very hard for the refugees living there. Every one of them had to work hard, and those who would have chosen their family instead of the fight for the Independent State of Croatia, had to suffer several cruelties and terror as well.⁷⁹ From Tattay’s report turns out that Jelka did not actually lived in Jankapuszta, but in Budapest. But

⁷⁴ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

⁷⁵ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 170 pol/934. The report of Tattay.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

Perčec made the mistake to take Jelka with himself to the camp, so she could have an insight to the life of the Croatians living there.⁸⁰ Tattay thought to be false that Jelka could have handled the correspondence of Perčec, according to him the woman visited the camp as a simple lover.⁸¹

According to the booklet, “*Perčec, Pavelić and their fellows are simply the payed henchmen of enemy States, and they did not do anything for their mother country, but they followed the orders of the Italian and Hungarian authorities, and did things which were not beneficial for Croatia, but caused damage to the whole country*” [to Yugoslavia – P. H.].⁸² So Jelka did not reveal only the camp of Jankapuszta, but the Hungarian–Italian support of the Ustasha Movement, as peers could see it. But the political interests of other European countries were to emphasize the significance of the Hungarian Ustasha camp. Mainly the French and the press wrote articles about Jankapuszta. Based on her experience she thought Italy to be the supreme supporter of the Ustasha. Pogorelec revealed that Perčec, Pavelić, and their ally, Vancho Mihailov, who was the leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, made a treaty with Italy, which said that in return of the Italian support the two organizations would facilitate the gain of Italy’s ambitions in the Balkans.⁸³ This could explain the reason of Italy’s support, as earlier Italy had not been sure to give it to the Croatians.

When this happened, Perčec and his fellows still lived in Vienna. Perčec, alias “Horvát Emil” bought Jankapuszta at the end of 1931 from Szálybely Gyula.⁸⁴ The Italian specific literature says that the Croatian leaders wanted to have a place near to the Croatian frontier whence the terror acts and the assassinations could be started.⁸⁵ In her confession Jelka wrote just a few pages about Jankapuszta, but she wrote a lot of information which could compromise Hungary. According to her booklet, Perčec ordered Hungarian soldiers as well to drill the Croatians living there. These Hungarians helped Perčec to terrorize those Croatians who wanted to choose their

⁸⁰ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 170 pol/934. The report of Tattay.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, p. 79.

⁸⁵ ADRIANO – CINGOLANI, p. 98.

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families instead of the emigration and the Ustasha ideology. The consequences of the terror were attempts of escaping, and in some cases, murders and suicide.⁸⁶ Tattay analyzed only the information about the Hungarian camp from the booklet,⁸⁷ which marked Jankapuszta to be more significant than it really was. If Tattay had analysed the whole booklet, Jankapuszta would become an insignificant episode among the other information.

But Tattay, instead of this, began to apologize. He explained that guns were not manufactured in the camp, nevertheless it was true that *“a part of the emigrés living in Jankapuszta have pistols for self-defence and they sometimes are taught how to use them”*.⁸⁸ Tattay denied that the Croatians living in Jankapuszta had been prepared for executing assassinations. Jankapuszta was created to give shelter to those Croatians who had been executed assassinations earlier.⁸⁹ But a few lines later Tattay wrote: *“The refugees living in Jankapuszta had a fever of excitement, and they were so fanatic that they had to be disciplined. That is why they had been obligated for military exercises beside the daily agrarian works. These military exercises meant audiences, and teaching how to command, and salute. Once in a week, on every Sunday they had to do scout exercises.”*⁹⁰ This phrase certifies that it was a fact that there had been military trainings in Jankapuszta. This fact is more underlined by the report of Tattay than by the booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

The assumption that King Alexander’s murderer came from Jankapuszta appeared on the day after the assassination in the French press.⁹¹ Its reason probably was that Jelka Pogorelec wrote in her confession that on the possessions of Perčec assassinations were organized and guns were manufactured.⁹² The French press –

⁸⁶ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

⁸⁷ MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 170 pol/934. The report of Tattay.

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ Ibidem. Here I used the word “scout” to describe the Hungarian word “levente” which meant a special youth corps in the Horthy era. The young people were trained both physically and mentally to be good soldiers.

⁹¹ ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. Telegramma. 3976. Without author and data.

⁹² MNL OL. K 63. 130. csomó. 16–7. tétel. 6267 pol/1933. The booklet of Jelka Pogorelec.

which used Jelka's booklet to make their blames against Hungary – probably utilized this point to underpin the French theory of the gun-manufacturing in Jankapuszta. Hungary tried to defend itself before the delegates of the Great Powers. Zoltán Baranyai, the permanent Hungarian delegate in the Council of the League of Nations, got the instructions from his Government on what to say about Hungary's role in the assassination of Marseille to the British Frank Walters, who was the secretary of the League of Nations. Walters made a note on the conversation.⁹³ According to this Baranyai told that the blames against Hungary had to be treated carefully because they originated from the French and Yugoslav press. In reality the only blame which could be brought up against Hungary was the lack of the security control of the meetings in coffee-houses, and the press of the Croatian refugees. Baranyai denied that Hungarians had trained the refugees living in Jankapuszta and had given guns to them. He underlined that the Little Entente States and their allies were interested in accusing Hungary, because these blames could weaken the Hungarian chances for a treaty revision.⁹⁴

At the beginning of November the secretary of the Foreign Affairs, Fulvio Suvich informed the Italian Ambassadors in Paris and in London, Pignatti and Fracassi, that the Yugoslav Government wanted to ask the Governments of France and Great-Britain to investigate the details of the assassination, searching for Croatian terrorists in Rome and in Budapest.⁹⁵ As Suvich wrote, Italy could not support a similar action which would not helped Hungary and Italy to explain the situation.⁹⁶ It means that Suvich was fully aware of Hungary's and Italy's great part in the assassination.

Within a few days the Hungarian Prime Minister, Gyula Gömbös met Mussolini in Rome. They talked about the assassination in Marseille and its consequences as well. Gömbös explained that Hungary had only given shelter to the refugees, but it was not involved in the assassination. That is why Gömbös thought that the support

⁹³ ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. T. 1261/1114. 2 November 1934.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ DDI/7./16. Document 102. Suvich to Pignatti and Fracassi, 1 November 1934.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

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of the refugees and the murder of the king were two totally different things which had to be separated from each other.⁹⁷

The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kálmán Kánya also met Mussolini to negotiate about this embarrassing case. Kánya told that Hungary and Yugoslavia made an agreement on the liquidation of the Croatian camps in Hungary's territory a few months before the assassination. Kánya made out that the agreement had been respected, and Jankapuszta had been liquidated, but it seemed that some Croats could have remained in the country.⁹⁸ The Hungarian Government's point of view was that Czechoslovakia's leader, Edvard Beneš was trying to blame Hungary the most. This statement was certified by a document which summarized the Czechoslovak point of view on the assassination in Marseille, and one of these points said that Hungary had to be impeached for the case.⁹⁹ But this plan of Beneš could not be realized because Italy – which earlier was glad that the murder had lived in Jankapuszta, and not in one of the camps in Italian territory – decided to stand up for Hungary.¹⁰⁰ The reason of Italy's decision was that Kánya repeated several times that if Italy had left the Little Entente and the Great Powers to impeach Hungary for the assassination, the Hungarian Government would have made public the role of Italy in the events.¹⁰¹

The general opinion in Europe thought both Italy and Hungary to be responsible for the case. It was a fact that the murderer had lived in Jankapuszta before the assassination, but it was evident, that Italy gave the financial support for the Croatian refugees to create camps in Italy and in Hungary.¹⁰² Vlatko Maček, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party wrote about the assassination in his memoir that he had always been against terror acts. When the murder happened he really felt with the queen dowager.¹⁰³ This can be confirmed by an official report sent to Mussolini, which says that Pavelić and Maček were enemies, and the most organized group

⁹⁷ DDI/7./16. Document 112. Note on the meeting of Gömbös and Mussolini. 6 November 1934.

⁹⁸ ADRIANO – CINGOLANI, p. 109.

⁹⁹ ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. T. 2115/1473. 26 November 1934.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, pp. 176–179; HORNYÁK, *A magyar kisebbségi*, p. 48.

¹⁰² ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. T. 6724/1842. 13 November 1934.

¹⁰³ V. MAČEK, *In the Struggle for Freedom*, s. l. 1957, pp. 154–155.

of the Croatians was not the Ustasha Movement, but the Peasant Party.¹⁰⁴ So the letter refers that the majority of the Croatian population was not for separatism from Yugoslavia, but wanted autonomy within the State by federalism.

The assassination in Marseille should not have surprised the Yugoslavian Government, because the terrorist organization aimed to kill King Alexander I. According to a note Alexander I was fully aware of this, so he lived armed also in his own palace because of the chance of attempts to murder him.¹⁰⁵ Even so the assassination happened, and – although the case was smoothen away¹⁰⁶ – it can be said that both Italy and Hungary were blamed deservedly after the killing of the king.

Summary

In my essay I presented the Italian–Hungarian support of the Croatian separatism from 1928 to 1934. The Croatian separatism began to take form in 1928, after the murder of the Croatian Peasant Party’s leader, Stjepan Radić. Hungary and Italy approached the separatists to “utilize” them for their own ambitions. Italy aimed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and Hungary had two aims with the support. On the one hand it wanted to weaken the Little Entente, which seemed to be realizable by weakening Yugoslavia. On the other hand, Hungary had future plans with the independent Croatia, as it wanted a strong alliance – either a personal union – with the Croats. Since the Italian–Hungarian Treaty of Friendship was formed in 1927, the two States were trying to harmonize their policy with the Croatian separatists.

In 1928 the allies thought to the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček to be the most competent person for the leadership of the Independent State of Croatia, but in 1929 Ante Pavelić founded the Ustasha Movement with the help of Benito Mussolini. This organization was supported both financially and morally by Hungary and Italy. The support given to the Ustasha was strengthened in 1932, after

¹⁰⁴ ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. T. 6724/1842. 13 November 1934.

¹⁰⁵ ASMAE. AP 1930–1945. Jugoslavia, Busta N. 55. Fasc. Re Alessandro (Marsaglia). T. 6377/1742. (Note). 13 October 1934.

¹⁰⁶ About the negotiations in front of the League of Nations after the assassination in Marseille see: M. ORMOS, *Merénylet Marseille-ben*, Budapest 1984.

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a revolution in Lika rose by the Ustasha, as it convinced Italy and Hungary about the capacity of the movement to rise a serious revolution to collapse Yugoslavia.

The consequence of the Hungarian-Italian support of the Ustasha was that these two States were accused with organizing the assassination of King Alexander I in Marseille, on 9 October 1934. Since a Yugoslav woman, Jelka Pogorelec wrote a confession in which she dedicated a few pages to the Croatian camp in Hungary, Jankapuszta, the Little Entente States and France began to blame mainly Hungary, but finally the case was smoothed away.

Abstract

In my essay I present the Hungarian-Italian collaboration in the support of the Croatian Separatism between 1929 and 1934. The Croats – although there were ethnic contrasts between the Croats and the Serbs just after the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – began to organize their separatist movement after the assassination of the Croatian Peasant Party's leader, Stjepan Radić in 1928. Both Hungary and Italy searched for the relations with the Croatian separatists because the causal dissolution of the Yugoslav State could help mainly Italy, but also Hungary, to reach their political ambitions. In 1929 the Ustasha movement was founded with the leadership of Ante Pavelić, and the separatism began to be radicalized. In 1932 Benito Mussolini and Gyula Gömbös agreed to give a greater support to the Ustasha, and camps were created for the Croatian refugees. The result of this support was that Hungary and Italy were blamed with the organization of the assassination of the Yugoslav King Alexander I in Marseille, on 9 October 1934.

Keywords

Italian-Hungarian Relations; Ustasha Movement; Croatian Separatism; Assassination in Marseille