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Nikola Pašić and the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1919–1926**

Abstract: This paper looks at Nikola Pašić's views of and contribution to the foreign policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS/Yugoslavia after 1929) during the latest phase of his political career, a subject that has been neglected by historians. His activities in this field are divided into two periods – during the Paris Peace Conference where he was the head of the SCS Kingdom's delegation and after 1921 when he became Prime Minister, who also served as his own Foreign Minister. During the peace conference, Pašić held strong views on all the major problems that faced his delegation, particularly the troubled delimitation with Italy in the Adriatic. In early 1920, he alone favoured the acceptance of the so-called Lloyd George-Clemenceau ultimatum, believing that the time was working against the SCS Kingdom. The Rapallo Treaty with Italy late that year proved him right. Upon taking the reins of government, Pašić was energetic in opposing the two restoration attempts of Karl Habsburg in Hungary and persistent in trying to obtain northern parts of the still unsettled Albania. In time, his hold on foreign policy was weakening, as King Alexander asserted his influence, especially through the agency of Momčilo Ninčić, Foreign Minister after January 1922. Pašić was tougher than King and Ninčić in the negotiations with Mussolini for the final settlement of the status of the Adriatic town of Fiume and the parallel conclusion of the 27 January 1924 friendship treaty (the Pact of Rome). Since domestic politics absorbed much of his time and energy, the old Prime Minister was later even less visible in foreign policy. He was forced to resign in April 1926 on account of his son's corruption scandal shortly before the final break-down of relations with Italy.

Keywords: Nikola Pašić, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Yugoslav state, foreign policy, peace conference, Pact of Rome

On 10 December 2016, it will have been exactly ninety years since Nikola Pašić (1845–1926), one of the most prominent statesmen in modern Serbian history, passed away. His political career spanning over five decades was an integral part of the turbulent past of Serbia in the last twenty years of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. During this time, Pašić became the leader of Radicals, the largest political party in the country, and opposed the absolutist rule of the Obrenović dynasty struggling for parliamentary democracy; he emerged as Prime Minister following the coup d'état in 1903 and presided over what is often referred to as the golden age of Serbia

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** It should be clarified that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) was the official name of the country until 1929 when it was changed to Yugoslavia. The latter name, as well as the term Yugoslavs (South Slavs) for its inhabitants, was often used even before 1929.

under King Petar I Kardjordjević until the outbreak of war in 1914; he led his country through all the trials and tribulations of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the Great War; and he maintained the key position in political life of the newly-formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) until his death in advanced age. Consequently, it is difficult to overstate the crucial role that the grand old man of Serbia played in all aspects of her internal and foreign policy, and, given the importance of Serbia in the build-up to and during the First World War, incommensurate with her size and strength, in international history of this troubled period.

Naturally, Pašić has been the subject of much historiographical interest, although his scholarly biography is yet to be written.¹ As a result of the emergence of Yugoslavia on 1 December 1918, Pašić's premiership during the First World War with special reference to the development of the Yugoslav question has received by far the most scholarly attention.² As for studies of Pašić's impact on the newly-formed SCS Kingdom, they are mostly concerned with internal politics, and particularly with the central issue of the tumultuous Serbo-Croat relations.³ In contrast, there is not a single work that focuses on the role of Pašić in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy – as opposed to the general surveys of that policy and a multitude of studies that address specific topics.⁴

¹ Most informative works on different aspects of Pašić's political life are *Nikola Pašić: život i delo*, Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa u Srpskoj akademiji nauka i umetnosti (Zaječar: Zadužbina "Nikola Pašić," 1995); Vasa Kazimirović, *Nikola Pašić i njegovo doba I-II* (Belgrade: Nova Evropa, 1990); Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić: prilozi za biografiju* (Belgrade: Plato, 2006); a masterly portrait of Pašić's contemporary is provided in Slobodan Jovanović, *Moji savremenici: o Nikoli Pašiću i Pismo iz Londona* (Belgrade: Beoknjiga, 2014), 9–104.

² Charles Jelavich, "Nikola P. Pašić: Greater Serbia or Jugoslavia?" *Journal of Central European Affairs* 11 (1951), 133–152; Alex Dragnich, *Serbia, Nikola Pašić and Yugoslavia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1974); Dragoslav Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krf-ska deklaracija 1917. godine* (Belgrade: Savremena administracija, 1967); Dragoslav Janković, "'Veliki' i 'mali' ratni program Nikole Pašića (1914–1918)", *Anali Pravnog fakulteta u Beogradu* 2 (1973), 151–167; Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje 1-2* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1985); Djordje Stanković, *Srbija i stvaranje Jugoslavije* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2009); Djordje Radenković, *Pašić i Jugoslavija* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 1999); Drago- van Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslovensko pitanje, 1914–1918* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1970); Vojislav Pavlović, *De la Serbie vers la Yougoslavie: la France et la naissance de la Yougoslavie 1878–1918* (Belgrade: Institut des études balcaniques, 2015).

³ Alex Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983); Djordje Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i Hrvati, 1918–1923* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1995); Gordana Jović-Krivokapić, "Nikola Pašić 1918–1926: kraj jedne karijere", *Tokovi istorije* 1 (2011), 32–45.

⁴ E.g. see Vuk Vinaver, "O spoljnopolitičkoj orijentaciji Jugoslavije, 1920–1925", *Zbornik za društvene nauke* 44 (1966), 23–59; Bogdan Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918–1941: diplomatsko-historijski pregled* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975); Bojan Dimitrijević

Partial exception to this omission are the treatments of the proceedings of the SCS delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, of which Pašić was the head.⁵ This apparent lacuna in the existing historiography is more understandable in the light of the fragmentary nature of primary sources – to a large extent, lost during the Second World War – that makes any attempt to determine Pašić's personal influence on foreign policy a difficult venture. Nevertheless, such an attempt is both necessary and possible; that is exactly what this paper proposes to do.

In view of his role during the Great War, Pašić was surprisingly not the first Prime Minister of the SCS Kingdom in the Cabinet formed on 7 December 1918. Although he was unanimously proposed for this position by all Serbian political parties and the representatives of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from the former provinces of the Habsburg Empire, Prince Regent Alexander refused to confirm his premiership, giving a taste of his autocratic ambitions. Stojan Protić, a fellow Radical, formed a coalition Cabinet instead – Pašić was not even its member.⁶ To Pašić's and his supporters' chagrin, Ante Trumbić, the head of the Yugoslav Committee which had represented the Habsburg South Slavs during the war and clashed with Serbia's Prime Minister, was appointed the Foreign Minister. The long-serving Serbian Minister in Paris, Milenko Vesnić, even offered his resignation on account of his dissatisfaction with Trumbić's inimical attitude towards Pašić and the entire Serbian government.⁷ On 22 December 1918, Protić's Cabinet appointed the delegation of the SCS Kingdom for the Peace Conference in Paris with Pašić at its head. Josip Smodlaka, a prominent Croat politician from Dalmatia, has claimed that he insisted on Pašić's appointment, since the latter had not been allowed to be Prime Minister.⁸ Be that as it may, the grand old man of Serbia found himself in Paris in early January.

and Stanislav Sretenović, "Spoljna politika Kraljevine SHS/Jugoslavije 1918–1941", *Istorija 20. veka* 26/2 (2008), 45–83.

⁵ Ivo Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: a Study in Frontiermaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Andrej Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919–1920* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1969); Dejan Djokić, *Nikola Pašić and Ante Trumbić: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010). Djokić's work is largely based on those of Lederer and Mitrović.

⁶ Branislav Gligorijević, "Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević i Nikola Pašić", in *Nikola Pašić: život i delo* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 1997), 428, has ascribed the Regent's ill will towards Pašić to his bitterness on account of the latter's handling of the Geneva declaration in November 1918 that enunciated the principles on which the Yugoslav state was going to be organised.

⁷ Radoslav Vesnić, *Dr Milenko Vesnić: gransenjer srpske diplomatije* (Belgrade: Prometej, 2008), 450–451.

⁸ Dragan Stojković, ed., *Zapisi Dra Josipa Smodlake* (Zemun: Mostart, 2012), 124.

Pašić was the only head of a major delegation, with the exception of Japan, who was not at the same time Prime Minister or President of his country. He led a seven-member strong political delegation located in the Hôtel de Beau-Site on the Rue de Presbourg that was supported by around 100 exceedingly able technical experts and secretaries. The all-important Political Section of the delegation was designed to reflect the composition of the SCS Kingdom founded on the premise that its population constituted a single – though three-named – Yugoslav nation. It thus consisted of three Serbs, Pašić, Vesnić, and the former Serbian Minister in London Mateja Bošković; two Dalmatian Croats, Trumbić and Smodlaka; and two Slovenes, Ivan Žolger, university professor and formerly a holder of a ministerial post in the Habsburg service, and Otokar Ribarž, a prominent leader from Trieste and the Slovene littoral. Pašić, Trumbić, Žolger and Vesnić were plenipotentiaries who took part in the deliberations of the conference, while the other three men were “governmental delegates” equal with them in decision-making process within the delegation. In his capacity, Pašić had a direct and strictly confidential communication with Prime Minister in Belgrade, which allowed him to relay his personal views on different issues raised in Paris. These views were not necessarily those of the delegation as a whole, of which he made clear, but they were eagerly awaited in Belgrade. Pašić was by no means the only delegate who could contact the government at will: Foreign Minister Trumbić and the Parisian Minister Vesnić had their own channels of communication.⁹ Despite the fact that he had no ministerial responsibility, the sheer reputation of the 74-year-old Pašić secured a considerable weight for his opinion both within the Yugoslav delegation and before the delegations of other powers.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the composition of Yugoslav delegation – Trumbić alone was a member of Cabinet – dictated that all the major decisions had to be made or approved of in Belgrade. Given the problems involved in the war-ravaged system of communications, this was a handicap for the delegation insofar it lacked authorisation to make decisions at crucial times; on the other hand, this could also provide a convenient excuse for avoiding or postponing difficult decisions.

This analysis will not detail the work of the SCS delegation regarding the delimitation with the neighbouring countries, since that has been done elsewhere.¹¹ It will examine in broad lines the views and contribution of Pašić, and offer an assessment of his activities in Paris. But to scrutinise Pašić's influence

⁹ Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 37–38.

¹⁰ Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 91–93.

¹¹ Apart from the cited monographs of Lederer and Mitrović, see also the latter's *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunijom 1919–1920: prilog proučavanju jugoslovenske politike na Konferenciji mira u Parizu* (Novi Sad: Forum, 1975); Bogdan Krizman, “Pitanje granica Vojvodine na Pariškoj mirovnoj konferenciji 1919. godine”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene*



Nikola Pašić [Politka Online]

and effectiveness, and indeed those of the entire SCS delegation, is to understand that the Yugoslavs laboured under extremely difficult conditions. The fledgling state had territorial claims against six of its seven neighbours, allies and enemies alike – the old Serbian border with Greece was the only one out of dispute. Worst of all, the formally allied Italy proved to be from the outset an incubus of every single Yugoslav aspiration in terms of territorial settlement and political stabilisation. The root of the trouble lay in Italy's designs on the Slovene and Croat-populated provinces of Istria and Dalmatia which had been promised to her under the terms of the secret Treaty of London concluded on 26 April 1915 in exchange for her entry into war on the side of the Entente Powers.¹² The encroachment on Dalmatia and large part of Istria was a blatant abrogation of the nationality principle as there were a few Italians living in these lands. As signatories of the London Treaty, Britain and France were bound to support Italian claims on the Yugoslav territories – in what became known as the Adriatic question – whereas the American President, Woodrow Wilson, the champion of the right to national self-determination, sided with the Yugoslavs.

But Italian enmity did not just stem from conflicting territorial claims; it was grounded in Rome's opposition to the very existence of any large and

nauke 24 (1959), 31–72; Desanka Todorović, "Pitanje jugoslovensko-bugarske granice na Mirovnoj konferenciji u Parizu 1919–1920", *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova IX* (1968), 63–126.

¹² Milan Marjanović, *Londonski ugovor iz godine 1915.: prilog povijesti borbe za Jadran 1914–1917* (Zagreb: JAZU, 1960); Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslovensko pitanje*, 1–75.

independent Yugoslav state. For the Italians, such a state was in itself a hindrance to Italian ambitions in the Danube basin and the Balkans, and posed an even greater obstacle insofar it was viewed as an instrument of French policy for containing Italy.¹³ It was against this background that Italo-Yugoslav relations were developing during the peace conference and afterwards. One of the major difficulties that the Italians created for the SCS Kingdom was that it was not recognised by the Principal Allies and the Yugoslav delegation was officially regarded as that of pre-war Serbia. The international *de facto* recognition would not be granted before the SCS delegates attached their signature to the Versailles Peace Treaty with the defeated Germany.¹⁴ Apart from this, the Italian delegation had decisive advantages over the Yugoslavs in Paris: it was a member of the Allied Supreme Council, along with France, Britain, the USA and Japan, that made all the final decisions; in that capacity, it reserved for the Supreme Council the solution of territorial disputes with the SCS Kingdom – the latter country, of course, had no say in its deliberations; it exerted influence in the territorial committees that decided on border disputes between small powers to the detriment of Yugoslavs. In addition, Italian troops were in occupation of the large slices of Dalmatia and most of Albania which provided another means of putting pressure on the SCS Kingdom.¹⁵ To facilitate its goals, the Italian government sanctioned in December 1918 the execution of the plan drawn up by General Badoglio for the purpose of disrupting the Yugoslav union using all available subversive activities short of war.¹⁶ Constant Yugoslav anxieties in regard to Italian hostility were thus far from being exaggerated.

On the evening of 18 January 1919, immediately after the official opening of the peace conference, an exceptionally important session of the delegation took place for the purpose of presenting a memorandum on Yugoslav territorial demands. Smodlaka argued that the Yugoslavs should absolutely adhere to the nationality principle and restrict their demands to those territories populated by their people. Pašić acknowledged the primacy of nationality principle, but made it clear that Italy's demands at the expense of the SCS Kingdom as an allied country and their own revendications at the expense of the former enemies fell into two distinct categories. Furthermore, he claimed, "it is not possible to draw a political border along ethnographic line, as the nations are mixed, and as much foreign population we take as many of our own people will remain to others." With General Pešić, head of the military mission, and Bošković strongly advo-

¹³ Vojislav Pavlović, "Le conflit franco-italien dans les Balkans 1915–1935. Le rôle de la Yougoslavie", *Balcanica XXXVI* (2005), 163–201.

¹⁴ Bogdan Krizman, "Pitanje međunarodnog priznanja jugoslavenske države", *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova III* (1962), 345–386.

¹⁵ Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 103–108.

¹⁶ Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 71–75.

cating maximalist demands based on strategic needs and for bargaining purposes, and Trumbić and Smodlaka – as well as Ribarž but not his fellow Slovene Žolger – standing for ethnic criterion, the cleavage in the delegation assumed an air of Serbo-Croat conflict of interest. General Pešić had no doubt that this was the case when he recorded, “Clearly, Trumbić and Smodlaka are protecting the Littoral alone [Dalmatia and Istria], and they care little for the rest.”¹⁷ In the following days, the dispute continued and it compelled Pašić to make his position clear. Apart from the pressing need to formulate territorial demands of the SCS Kingdom, Pašić was drawn out by Trumbić’s tactics. The latter tried to fasten on the nationality principle, invoking Regent Alexander’s manifest of 6 January 1919, which had laid stress on the “ethnographic borders of our entire people,” and asking for expert advice on the ethnographic area of South Slavs. Pašić especially focused on the territorial settlement with Bulgaria, for which he prepared his own memorandum, and Romania in the Banat region, and brushed away Trumbić’s remarks. The Foreign Minister and Smodlaka agreed that certain revendications were needed to secure the Vardar and Timok valley from Bulgarian attacks, but insisted that these be demanded for security reasons and not based on the implausible ethnic claims of their Serbian colleagues. While Trumbić preferred to conceal the true motives of his considerations, Smodlaka was straightforward: he opposed a more extensive annexation of Bulgarian territory because he believed that “the way we treat here Bulgarians, that is how Italy will treat us; with this, we give her cause and justification for her strategic encroachments on our territory.”¹⁸

A recent analysis has stated that differences between Pašić and Trumbić emerged, at least partly, due to their conflicting ideologies, “the nationality principle vs *Realpolitik*.”¹⁹ This appears to be a simplification of what in reality was hardly a clear-cut line of division. Pašić was mainly concerned with territorial acquisitions that would directly benefit pre-war Serbia and secure strategically more viable frontiers regardless of the nationality principle and especially at the expense of a former enemy. In that, he was a true practitioner of *Realpolitik*. Trumbić’s sole motivation by Wilsonian-minded principle of self-determination is highly doubtful, however. He did expound the nationality principle, but, in doing so, he was, just like Pašić, animated by more narrow “tribal” interests – delimitation of borders with Italy was an exclusively Croat (and Slovene) affair.

¹⁷ Bogdan Krizman and Bogumil Hrabak, *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS na Mirovnoj konferenciji u Parizu 1919–1920* (Belgrade: Institut društvenih nauka, 1960), 27.

¹⁸ Ibid. 28–34; Miladin Milošević and Bora Dimitrijević, *Nikola Pašić – Predsedniku vlade, strogo poverljivo, lično, Pariz, 1919–1920: Pašićeva pisma sa konferencije mira* (Zaječar: Zadužbina “Nikola Pašić,” 2005), doc. 4, no. 40, Delegation to Protić, 27 January 1919, and doc. 5, no. 87, Delegation to Protić, 1 February 1919.

¹⁹ Djokić, *Pašić and Trumbić*, 151.

A native of Dalmatia himself, Trumbić feared, along with Smodlaka, that Pašić's strategic requirements concerning the Bulgarian or Hungarian border might undermine Yugoslav superior moral position in the Adriatic and lend justification to excessive Italian claims. After all, it was hardly surprising that the Serb, Croat and Slovene delegates alike were more willing to make concessions when such losses were suffered by a "tribe" other than their own. Nevertheless, it has been rightly asserted that differences between them should not be overstated since "they maintained a remarkable show of unity when communicating with other delegations."²⁰

As for Pašić's general outlook on the conference, he was a careful observer of the workings of Great Powers in Paris despite their secretiveness and he had a great acumen to sense what was going on behind the scenes. In April 1919, Pašić penned an exceptionally perspicacious and prescient summary of his impressions of the peace conference. He observed that the French territorial claims on the Rhineland and the Anglo-French stance on reparations weakened the tenets of peace-making expounded by Wilson; consequently, the President had to confine his more idealistic visions to the creation of the League of Nations designed to guard the peace of the world in future. Pašić was not taken in by the enthusiastic predictions of a new and better world, since he foresaw that the mirage of the League of Nations would not usher in an era of peace and stability. In his view, based on the decades-long experience, the conference in Paris was no different from the 1878 Treaty of Berlin in that the "Great Powers decide international questions according to their own understanding and appreciation." Naturally, Pašić was mostly preoccupied with the issues that troubled the SCS delegation, and particularly the tortuous Adriatic question. By April the Yugoslavs had advanced proposals for President Wilson's arbitration and a plebiscite to be held in the contested zones, only to find both initiatives flatly refused by Italy. Pašić pointed out the hypocrisy with which the Great Powers applied different principles in territorial disputes:

True, everything must be subjected to a principle now: that of nationality where they [Great Powers] find it appropriate to apply that principle, then strategic principle where they find it appropriate to apply that principle, even if strategic principle is used not to protect the weaker nation from the stronger, but to use it against the weaker. To secure the stronger against the weaker, whose parts he ripped off from his entity, by taking other peoples' territory. Then economic, trading principle would be used to give to cities other peoples' lands and other peoples in order to prosper, to provide "hinterland," as Bosnia and Hercegovina was given to Austria-Hungary to secure the life and trade of Dalmatia. ... Italy must be secured against future Yugoslavia which does not have a single war ship, because peace could be disturbed if another neighbouring state has war ships. Peace is secured not only when Italy has war ships, but also when all sea

²⁰ Ibid. 67.

ports are in her hands. For in that case she is a master and any danger of a conflict is excluded. This is how future peace is intended to be ensured. Brute force will reign in the future, just as it reigned before this war.²¹

With this in view, Pašić clearly and succinctly formulated what the newly-minted SCS Kingdom could expect from the conference: "We will get what and as much as they find fit to give us." Nevertheless, he did not despair and was convinced that "our moral strength," demonstrated in the horrors of the Great War, was such that "in future we will reverse and avenge the injustice we suffer now."²² Apparently, Pašić did not succumb to the illusion that the new order that was being created in Paris would be permanent or durable. He thus viewed any proposal or a settlement from the standpoint of a position in which it would place the SCS Kingdom in case of a future conflict. For example, Pašić was dead set against the neutralisation of the Adriatic sea – the renunciation of the right to have a battle fleet – advocated by Trumbić, which he saw as an infringement on the sovereignty and an acceptance of Italy's domination of Belgrade's policy:

Neutrality is perfectly in Italy's interest, and to our detriment only. Italy can agree to it, but she will still have a large fleet at her disposal that she could use where and how she pleases. In case of war with Italy, we will be without a fleet and must place all our hope in the protection of the League of Nations, and it is doubtful that we will have any real assistance from that quarter. With neutralisation, we become a second-rate state. Freedom is defended by blood and arms, not by neutralisation and other ideas. When Europe or the whole world splits into two camps and wages war, then all theories and ideas and the entire international law crumble. What good was neutrality to Belgium in 1914? Do we have any guarantees that Italy will respect the neutrality of the Adriatic in case of war?²³

Based on the experience of peace-making in Paris, Pašić informed his government that the Supreme Council carefully excluded the representatives of minor powers from interfering with its decisions. Those delegates were occasionally invited to express their views on specific matters of immediate interest to their countries, but they were never told the Supreme Council's decisions before these were announced to all, or terms of peace were given to an enemy state. They were, Pašić wrote, "held here for the sake of appearance, so that the world believes that they have some rights in resolving the matters; it is dreary, but that

²¹ Nikola Pašić – Predsedniku vlade, doc. 19, Delegation to Protić, April 1919, personal, str. conf. [7463].

²² Ibid.; see also doc. 21, Delegation to Prime Minister, str. conf. no. 14, 15–17 April 1919.

²³ *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 221. Pašić reaffirmed his scepticism with regard to the League of Nations at the meeting of the Radical MPs held on 23 December 1920. Discussing international situation, he said for that organisation that it "does not give substantial guarantees for the future peace. We are all now in that League: both the victors and the defeated". See Djordje Radenković, *Pašić i Jugoslavija* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 1999), 538.

is the true state of things.”²⁴ Nevertheless, he was an arch realist and, as such, convinced that the only way for the delegation of a small power to have a measure of success was in close cooperation with Great Powers, former Serbia’s allies and the sole arbiters at the conference – with the exception of Italy. Through Vesnić’s regular communication with the Quai d’Orsay, Pašić was alert to French point of view and had an opportunity to sound out the Allies.²⁵ He confirmed his cautious attitude towards the Entente Powers on several occasions. When Trumbić wanted to raise officially the question of relations between the SCS Kingdom and Italy, France and Britain insofar these Great Powers were bound by the Treaty of London and still acted as arbiters of the Italo-SCS conflict within the Supreme Council, Pašić opposed his proposal.²⁶ For all its legal logic and fair-mindedness, such protest was outside the realm of political reality. Pašić also made clear his disagreement with the Cabinet’s proposal to threaten Yugoslavia’s withdrawal from the conference in case the Entente Powers refused to invalidate the Treaty of London or hand the Adriatic question to Wilson for arbitration. In his view, such a break with the Allies would be “fatal” in Yugoslavia’s parlous financial and political position.²⁷ In May 1919, Pašić was the only one out of five delegates who voted for the proposition that the entire former Austro-Hungarian territory should pay reparations rather than just new Austria and Hungary.²⁸ This was clearly a heavy burden for his country, but he seems to have accepted it as inevitable in light of the Entente’s political will. In this connection, Pašić’s handling of the minority clause of the St. Germain Peace Treaty with Austria, designed to protect the rights of minorities in the successor states, was also of interest. He set his face against signing the St. Germain Treaty – together with Bošković and against the opinion of five other delegates – since the application of the minority clause would extend to Macedonia, pre-1914 Serbian territory. This was such an upalatable demand that Ljubomir Davidović’s Cabinet resigned in protest. Finally, Pašić changed his mind on 12 November and advised the government to sign the treaty faced with the threat that the signing of a treaty with Bulgaria could come into question and realizing there could be further trouble in financial matters.²⁹

²⁴ Nikola Pašić – Predsedniku vlade, doc. 52, Delegation to Davidović, str. conf. no. 67, 30 August 1919.

²⁵ Zapisni Dra Josipa Smodlake, 161.

²⁶ Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS, 50–52; Bogdan Krizman, “Jadransko pitanje pred našom delegacijom na Pariškoj mirovnoj konferenciji do potpisivanja ugovora s Njemačkom (28. lipnja 1919.)”, *Jadranski zbornik III* (1958), 293–294.

²⁷ Nikola Pašić – Predsedniku vlade, doc. 13, str. conf. no. 1, Delegation to Protić, 13 March 1919.

²⁸ Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS, 126–127.

²⁹ Ibid. 182–183; Bogumil Hrabak, *Zapisnici sednica Davidovićeve dve vlade od avgusta 1919. do februara 1920*, *Arhivski vjesnik XII* (1970), 23–24, 55.

With small powers being ignored at the conference, there were only two ways in which the SCS delegation could influence decision-makers, aside from propaganda activities. First, it issued numerous memoranda that expounded its views on particular territorial issues and were submitted formally to the Supreme Council. Pašić took a lead in this respect and himself drafted a number of memoranda regarding all the disputed border areas.³⁰ Second, the delegates endeavoured, as Pašić explained to Belgrade, to “get in touch privately with certain experts in various commissions, who are entrusted with studying and making reports on the questions, which are of interest to us, under the guise of providing new information on the matter they examine or informing ourselves if the questions have been resolved and how etc.”³¹ This informal form of lobbying was usually more effective if the delegate managed to establish close relations with an expert whom he tried to win over for the Yugoslav cause. Pašić was engaged personally in lobbying important individuals, who held positions in the territorial commissions and belonged to the delegations of the Principal Allies. Among others, he had conversations with André Tardieu, chairman of the Commission on Romanian and Yugoslav Affairs; Philip Kerr, Lloyd George’s private secretary, President Wilson and Frank Polk, American plenipotentiary delegate.³² In Lederer’s estimation, Pašić’s interview with Wilson on 17 April 1919 was a success and it influenced the President to Yugoslavs’ benefit.³³ On the other hand, his efforts to arrange a meeting with Lloyd George bore no fruit.³⁴

Pašić’s attitude towards the particularly grave and long-drawn-out Adriatic controversy requires special attention. His fellow delegate Smodlaka has asserted that Pašić, and Serbs in general, were rather indifferent to the Adriatic question, all the more so if intransigence in this matter militated against their

³⁰ Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts [hereafter ASANU], Nikola Pašić Papers, no. 9874, The Ethnographic Border between the Slovenes and Italians, The Serbo-Croat-German-Hungarian Border, Delimitation with Romania in the Banat, Delimitation with Bulgaria; see also Pašić’s handwritten drafts in no. 14528/VIII-11, Serbo-Bulgarian Relations and the Rectification of the Border; no. 14528/VIII-18, Delimitation between the Serbs and Hungarians in Bačka; no. 14528/VIII-23, Notes and statistical data on the Banat and Baranja; no. 14528/VIII-31, Albania.

³¹ Nikola Pašić – *Predsedniku vlade*, doc. 52, Delegation to Davidović, str. conf. no. 67, 30 August 1919.

³² Nikola Pašić – *Predsedniku vlade*, doc. 12, Delegation to Protić, no. 510, 8 March 1919; doc. 23, Delegation to Prime Minister, str. conf. no. 17, 18 April 1919; doc. 49, Delegation to Prime Minister, str. conf. no. 64, 14 August 1919.

³³ Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 194. To prepare the ground for Wilson’s favourable reception of the Serbian claims against Bulgaria, Pašić had sent him the text of the two secret treaties concluded by Bulgaria with Austria-Hungary and Germany during the war (ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 14528/II-12, Wilson to Pashitch, 1 April 1919).

³⁴ ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 11571/26, Philip Kerr to Pashitch, 15 September 1919.

desiderata on the Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Albanian border, where Italians invariably obstructed Serbian interests.³⁵ Such view was no doubt affected by later Serbo-Croat differences, but it was nevertheless accepted in much of the Yugoslav communist historiography.³⁶ However, there is no evidence for such sweeping claims. On the contrary, the record shows that Pašić supported the Croat delegates who insisted in late June 1919 that the minimum territorial programme in the Adriatic be specified beyond which there would be no further concessions to Italy. Besides allowing for “a few islands to come under the League of Nations, with a plebiscite to follow later,” Pašić professed that any other concession would “encroach on the vital interests of the state.”³⁷ In this respect, Pašić’s view was opposite to that of a fellow Serb Bošković, who argued for a speedy agreement with Italy in order to improve Yugoslav prospects for more favourable territorial settlement in the eastern parts of the country.³⁸ The head of the SCS delegation further elaborated his views in a lengthy letter to the government in Belgrade in early January 1920. Besides specifying the maximum concessions that could be given to Rome, in accordance with the opinion of the delegation, he warned that the thrust of Italian policy was to create a situation in which the SCS Kingdom would be placed at its mercy. Through subversion and policy of encirclement with the Yugoslav neighbours, Italy would “surround us with agitations and disturbances, and put pressure on us from all sides to surrender and pursue such policy that would be in her interest.”³⁹ Thus Pašić looked at the problem of relations with Italy not as a matter of territorial bargaining that concerned one province of the country more than the other, but rather from the point of view of the Kingdom as a whole with all its geopolitical implications. He doggedly maintained that Italian sovereignty had to be rejected at any point along the coast from Pula southwards, including the islands.⁴⁰ Far from neglecting northern Adriatic, as Smodlaka contended, Pašić and, for that matter, the Belgrade government took care not to sacrifice Croatian interests there. It was no coincidence that Trumbić always set the tone of Yugoslav policy towards Italy.

³⁵ *Zapisi Dra Josipa Smodlake*, 145–146.

³⁶ E.g. see Julijana Vrčinac, “Spoljna politika Jugoslavije u periodu 1919–1941 godine”, in Dragi Milenković, ed., *Iz istorije Jugoslavije 1918–1945* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1958), 304.

³⁷ *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 155–156.

³⁸ Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 163–167.

³⁹ *Jadransko pitanje od Pariza do Rapala: zvanični dokumenti* (Belgrade: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, 1924), no. 7, Pašić to Davidović, 7 January 1920, Delimitation between the SCS Kingdom and Italy.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 231.

An important part of the Adriatic question concerned the status of Albania and, for that reason, Pašić referred to her as “the object of compensation”.⁴¹ It could have hardly been otherwise as Italian troops had occupied most of Albania on the basis of an inter-Allied military agreement. The Serbian army was in control of northern region of the country; it had to evacuate the town of Scutari under the duress of Allied pressure.⁴² According to the Treaty of London, Italy was to have the port of Valona and her hinterland and an exclusive influence in the rest of Albania, save the northern parts with the town of Scutari to be divided between Serbia and Montenegro and those in the south which should be attached to Greece. The SCS government firmly believed it was a matter of vital importance not to allow Italy to acquire the full sovereignty over Valona and her environs, and secure a complete control over the rest of Albania under the pretext of a League of Nations mandate. In the mind of the policy-makers in Belgrade, Italian entrenchment in Albania was a repetition of the unfortunate experience with the Austro-Hungarian mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴³ The Italian money, arms and propaganda fostered turmoil deep into the Yugoslav territory, in the provinces of Kosovo, Metohija and Macedonia with considerable Albanian population, as well as in Montenegro among the supporters of the former king, Nikola I Petrović, and furnished ample justification for Belgrade’s fears.⁴⁴ From the strategic point of view the Yugoslavs were also frightened of the peril of Italians “joining hands” from Albania with the Bulgarians across the Vardar valley in Serb Macedonia, thus cutting off the vital Belgrade-Salonica railway in the same fashion the Bulgarian army had actually done in 1915.⁴⁵ The stance on the Albanian question was formed accordingly. The SCS delegation in Paris plumped for the independence of Albania in her 1913 frontiers, after the First

⁴¹ Ljubodrag Dimić and Djordje Borozan, eds., *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci*, 2 vols. (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Vojno-istorijski institut, 1998), I, no. 968, Pašić to Davidović, 23 December 1919.

⁴² Dimo Vujović, “Oslobodjenje Skadra 1918. godine i stanje na crnogorsko-albanskoj granici”, *Istorijski zapisi* 1 (1960), 93–128.

⁴³ *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci* I, no. 852, Pašić to Protić, 18 April 1919; no. 968, Pašić to Davidović, 23 December 1919; no. 972, Memorandum on Albania submitted to Wilson [American President], undated; *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci* II, no. 12, The position of the Yugoslav delegation in relation to the memorandum of 9 December 1919, 8 January 1920.

⁴⁴ Vuk Vinaver, “Italijanska akcija protiv Jugoslavije na albansko-jugoslovenskoj granici 1918–1920. godine”, *Istorijski zapisi*, 3 (1966), 477–515; Dušan T. Bataković, “Srpsko-arbanaški sporovi oko razgraničenja i arbanaška emigracija sa Kosova i Metohije (1918–1920)”, in *Kosovo i Metohija u srpsko-arbanaškim odnosima* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2006), 279–298; Dmitar Tasić, *Rat posle rata: vojska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca na Kosovu i Metohiji i u Makedoniji 1918–1920*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2012).

⁴⁵ *Jugoslovenska država i Albanci* II, no. 14, Dr Trumbić’s expose at the meeting of the allied Prime Ministers on 10 and 12 January 1920.

Balkan War, under the slogan “the Balkans for the Balkan peoples.” Only if the stance of Great Powers had rendered that independence impossible to achieve, the delegates should have fallen back on the reserve policy – the absorption of the northern parts as far as the Drin river in order to gain the strategically more viable border.⁴⁶

To be sure, Pašić must have had his eye on the northern part of Albania centred on Scutari. Prior to the Great War, he had sought an outlet to sea for land-locked Serbia over the Albanian soil in the direction of the ports of San Giovanni di Medua and Durres. In fact, Austria-Hungary had promoted the formation of an independent Albania in 1913 to prevent Serbia’s access to the Adriatic. Nevertheless, in 1919, Pašić appreciated that obtaining the northern Albania at the price of having Italian troops permanently established in a strategically sensitive position for a new and still fragile state was too high a price to pay. He thus adhered to the official policy of the delegation and the SCS Kingdom, as evidenced by all the documents he produced. But Pašić advocated an active approach to Albanians to win them over to follow Yugoslavia’s lead in opposing Italian protectorate for which no effort and expense should be spared. In Paris, he himself worked with Essad-pasha Toptani, who had been the fulcrum of Serbian influence in Albania since before the war and remained so until his murder in June 1920.⁴⁷ Pašić also prompted Protić to revive previous agitation among the Albanian tribesmen in the north with a view to stiffening their resistance to Italian penetration. For that purpose, he recommended a restoration of the “Albanian department” in the Foreign Ministry.⁴⁸ It was, however, Protić’s successor Davidović who accepted his suggestion. The special Albanian section of the Political Department of the Foreign Ministry (also known as the Fourth section) was formed in August 1919 under direct control of Prime Minister to oversee and coordinate Albanian policy.⁴⁹ Pašić’s pursuit of active involvement in Albania was clearly a policy of insurance in case the Italians remained in that

⁴⁶ Dragan Bakić, “The Italo-Yugoslav Conflict over Albania: a View from Belgrade, 1919–1939”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25/4 (2014), 592–594.

⁴⁷ ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 14528, VIII-32, Pašić to Protić, personal, str. conf., no. 1974, 3 June 1919; for the background see Dušan T. Bataković, “Esad-paša Toptani i Srbija (1912–1915)”, and “Esad-paša Toptani, Srbija i albansko pitanje (1916–1918)”, in *Kosovo i Metohija u srpsko-arbanaškim odnosima* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2006), 201–237 and 257–298 respectively.

⁴⁸ ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 14528, VIII-32, Pašić to Protić, no. 36, undated but late January 1919; Nikola Pašić – *Predsedniku vlade*, doc. 16, str. conf. no. 8, 20 March 1919; *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 207–209.

⁴⁹ ASANU, Ivan Subotić Papers, 14576-V-4, Albania, The history of our policy in Albania in 1920 based on the Foreign Ministry’s Archives, Dossier Ar. 1- The situation in Albania, folio 1; The history of our policy in Albania in 1921, Subotić to Mitrović, 1 September 1933, conf. no. 15656/34, folio 79.

country; his actions bore the mark of his experience of Albanian affairs before and during the war. It is certainly unfounded to claim that “the cynical old man” hoped that Italy would dismiss the notion of the 1913 independent Albania and thus enable the SCS Kingdom to have Scutari.⁵⁰ Such contention assumes that he attached greater importance to obtaining northern Albania than to having the Italians removed from the country and deprived of a base for further inroad in the Balkans – and that is entirely unconvincing. The same author is much closer to the mark when he claims that Pašić came to doubt the likelihood of maintaining Albanian independence, which Wilson’s declaration of 23 April seems to have confirmed.⁵¹ Indeed, in September, Pašić penned a draft memorandum for the conference in which he advanced Yugoslav demands after “having been convinced that the Peace Conference does not intend to carry out the 1913 London agreement on Albania and does not intend to request from Italy to abandon Valona and her surroundings.”⁵² In such circumstances, he demanded the border on the Black Drin and Drin rivers, but also requested a plebiscite for the Mirdites and Malissors tribes, situated on the other side of the Drin, with a view to including them in the SCS Kingdom as an autonomous region. Pašić archived this note “until the time has come to submit it to the conf[erence].”

Pašić’s views markedly departed from those of other delegates in the aftermath of the Lloyd George-Clemenceau ultimatum of 14 January 1920. The British and French premiers presented a settlement of the Adriatic question on the following terms: the town of Fiume (Rijeka) and Zara (Zadar) to become free states under the guarantee of the League of Nations and the right to choose which country would represent them diplomatically; a corridor along the coast to link Fiume with Italy’s territory; the islands of Lošinj, Palagruža and Vis to be ceded to Rome; Italy’s sovereignty over Valona and the division of the rest of Albania between the SCS Kingdom and Greece, with the remainder to come under Italian mandate.⁵³ Lloyd George and Clemenceau threatened the Yugoslav delegation with the integral execution of the Treaty of London if Belgrade failed to comply. The ultimatum clearly tried to play on the card of compensating the SCS Kingdom in northern Albania for the concessions in Fiume and thus satisfying both the Italians and Yugoslavs. Krizman’s study suggests that Regent Alexander, who was in Paris in early January and saw much of Lloyd George, was responsible for such a move: he made no secret of his opinion that

⁵⁰ Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 120, 169.

⁵¹ Andrej Mitrović, “Mirovna delegacija Kraljevine SHS i deklaracija V. Vilsona od 23. aprila 1919”, *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* (Belgrade) X/1 (1968), 488.

⁵² ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 14528, VIII-34, Concept of a note on Albania, no. 4305, 2 September 1919.

⁵³ Ferdo Šišić, *Jadransko pitanje na Konferenciji mira u Parizu: zbirka akata i dokumenata* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1920), doc. XXVI.

acquiring Scutari and saving the Slovenes from the formation of an *état-tampon* around Fiume was more important than the latter town.⁵⁴ Lacking any clear-cut instructions from the government, the burden of decision-making was placed on the delegates whose opinion was divided.

Trumbić believed that the moment was not decisive. He was against the 14 January proposal and even claimed that he preferred the execution of the Treaty of London as less harmful to the essential interests of the country. He suggested to propose to Belgrade giving an evasive reply to the ultimatum and the other delegates, except Pašić, agreed. The latter was concerned about the consequences of refusing the Entente's proposal and decided to send his personal opinion to the government.⁵⁵ Indeed, in a letter written later that day Pašić argued for the acceptance of the Entente's offer in principle as being less of an evil than the Treaty of London – he still wanted to ask for the border proposed by Wilson in April 1919 and the exclusion of the port of Baroš from the Fiuman state. Characteristically, Pašić looked into the future: he thought that neither solution would resolve the conflict with Italy definitely. He also insisted on the importance of maintaining “not just sympathies, but also support of the Entente in a possible dispute with Italy”.⁵⁶ This was in keeping with Pašić's conviction that any solution to the Adriatic question reached in a bilateral arrangement with Italy would be less favourable to the SCS Kingdom than that in a settlement underwritten by the Allies.⁵⁷ And the Entente Powers were anxious to dispose of the Adriatic question before the fast-approaching end of the conference. On the other hand, Pašić was concerned about the capabilities of his country to withstand the prolonged period of tensions and dangers of a conflict. With this in view, he warned his colleagues in the delegation that it was time to settle the problem; their playing for time raised the question “what would situation be in time, whether [it would be] better or worse.”⁵⁸ It was, however, President Wilson who relieved the Yugoslavs of their dilemma, since he torpedoed Lloyd George's and Clemenceau's initiative.

The Italo-Yugoslav conflict outlived the peace conference. Pašić and Trumbić remained charged with conducting direct negotiations with the Italians as Britain and France dropped their mediating role. Trumbić was proved correct in his contention that the January ultimatum was not a decisive moment. Pašić was, however, right in his estimation that the position of the SCS Kingdom vis-à-vis Italy would grow weaker, if it was left to deal with Rome alone,

⁵⁴ Bogdan Krizman, “Saveznički ultimatum u jadranskom pitanju siječnja 1920. godine”, *Jadranski zbornik* 2(1957), 213.

⁵⁵ *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 250–251.

⁵⁶ *Jadransko pitanje od Pariza do Rapala*, no. 33, Pašić to Davidović, 24 January 1920.

⁵⁷ ASANU, Nikola Pašić Papers, no. 11573, Pašić's note, no date.

⁵⁸ *Zapisnici sa sednica delegacije Kraljevine SHS*, 254–255.

on a strictly bilateral basis. This was apparent in the instructions that Prime Minister Protić sent to Pašić and Trumbić before their meeting with the Italian delegation in Pallanza in May 1920. The two plenipotentiaries were given complete freedom to negotiate and specifically allowed to agree to full Italian sovereignty over Fiume, if they found it absolutely necessary.⁵⁹ But these talks were interrupted due to the resignation of the Francesco Nitti Cabinet in Rome. The last phase of the Adriatic question took place under the premiership of Vesnić, a former delegate in Paris. Pašić appreciated that resistance to Italy was going to collapse and he declined on account of ill-health to participate again in the SCS delegation. The government then appointed Vesnić, Trumbić and Kosta Stojanović, the Minister of Finance, to travel to Santa Margherita and continue the negotiations.⁶⁰ Before the Yugoslavs left for Italy and during their talks with Count Sforza, the Italian Foreign Minister, Britain and France, in particular, made it clear to Belgrade that it was imperative to reach an agreement with Rome and that it could not count on their mediation in case of failure.⁶¹ By this time, Wilson's political position in America had become so precarious that his potential intervention on behalf of the Yugoslavs was out of the question. Diplomatically isolated and with mounting difficulties at home, the SCS delegation faced increased Italian demands and had to yield – the result was the Treaty of Rapallo concluded on 12 November 1920.⁶² Italy was given more territory including the Snežnik plateau in the Dinaric Alps and territorial continuity with Fiume, which would become an independent state; Italian sovereignty was recognised over the islands of Cres, Lušinj, Lastovo, Palagruža and the small town of Zara with its Italian majority in the midst of the Slav population. With the incorporation of Snežnik, Italy was given “around 2,000 square kilometres and around 100,000 inhabitants more than she requested in January this year in Paris, and all the railway from Logatec to Rijeka, which was supposed to remain in our state in its entirety.”⁶³ Clearly, the final Adriatic settlement was a dismal failure for the Yugoslavs and it confirmed Pašić's political foresight.

In the wake of the January 1920 ultimatum, Pašić was mainly concerned with Albania. He had reason to believe, based on the experience with the Lloyd George-Clemenceau proposals, that it would be possible to attain his desiderata

⁵⁹ Archives of Serbia [hereafter AS], Varia Collection, V-73, Protić to Pašić and Trumbić, str. conf. no. 204, 7 May 1920.

⁶⁰ AS, Varia Collection, V-65, The Adriatic Question, memorandum by Milan Antić [Councillor at the Foreign Ministry], 25 February 1922, fols. 391–392.

⁶¹ Vojislav Jovanović, *Rapalski ugovor: zbirka dokumenata* (Belgrade: Udruženje novinara Narodne Republike Srbije, 1950), docs. 10–29, 35, 42, 60.

⁶² Ibid. doc. 46; Vesnić, *Milenko Vesnić*, 540–554.

⁶³ *Jadransko pitanje od Pariza do Rapala*, no. 112, Vesnić [from Santa Margherita] to [Momčilo] Ninčić [Deputy Foreign Minister in Belgrade], 10 November 1920.

in the north of that country. He urged the Cabinet in Belgrade to realise that Italy would be allowed to set her foot firmly in central Albania and that “we have to demand different and better frontier in the direction of the Albanian territories which would fall under Italian protectorate.”⁶⁴ In the first half of 1920, he remained in contact with Tihomir Popović, his close associate in the Foreign Ministry, who kept him informed about the developments in Albania and the actions of Serbian agents in that country. After the assassination of Essad-pasha, Pašić suggested an agreement with certain Marturi and other Albanian leaders with a view to expelling Italians and establishing some form of a confederation between the SCS Kingdom and Albania. His ambitious plan also envisaged an absorption of northern Albania as part of an agreement with the Albanians.⁶⁵ During the negotiations with the Italians in London in February 1920, Trumbić suspected Pašić of having his heart set on northern Albania to the exclusion of Fiume and, moreover, of dealing with Lloyd George behind the scenes.⁶⁶ There is, however, no evidence of any underhand deal with the British premier. The situation changed during the summer of 1920 when the rebellious Albanians drove Italian forces out of the country with the exception of the small island of Saseno off Valona. The Serbian army defeated the advancing Albanian forces and moved its positions further beyond the demarcation line held since the war.⁶⁷ Tirana took the initiative before the League to have her independence recognised – Albania was admitted to the Geneva organisation on 20 December 1921 – and consequently obtain the withdrawal of foreign troops from her soil. The League transferred the discussion of frontier problems in Albania to the Conference of Ambassadors, a permanent organisation of the Allied Ambassadors at Paris charged with the execution of the peace treaties.

After year and a half absence during the peace-making, Pašić returned to the SCS Kingdom and, on 1 January 1921, became Prime Minister – he also served as his own Foreign Minister. With the exception of the short-lived Davidović Cabinet (27 July – 6 November 1924), he would retain premiership until April 1926 and have a role in the conduct of foreign policy. Much of it had to do with the execution of the peace settlement, at least in early years.

⁶⁴ Ivo Andrić, *Diplomatski spisi*, ed. Miladin Milošević (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1992), Doc. 118, Memorandum written by Ivo Andrić, 30 January 1939, 216–226, 221.

⁶⁵ ASANU, Nikola Pašić Papers, no. 11712, Popović to Pašić, 12 March 1920; Bora Dimitrijević and Jelica Ilić, *Zaostavština iz Toronta, 1903–1926* (Zaječar: Zadužbina “Nikola Pašić,” 2015), docs. 41–42, Pašić to Popović, no date and 20 June 1920 respectively.

⁶⁶ Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 175; Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 276–281.

⁶⁷ Desanka Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države 1918–1923* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1979), 70–78.

The greatest danger for the SCS Kingdom and the newly-established order in Danubian Europe emanated from Hungary. The Treaty of Trianon was not signed before 4 June 1920 and the Hungarian ruling circles denounced the mutilation of the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen. Hungarian revanchist aspirations were linked with the possibility of a Habsburg restoration. For the SCS Kingdom, as well as Czechoslovakia and Romania, such prospect spelled an immense danger. These countries were unsettled with sizeable Magyar and German national minorities that would be naturally attracted to a Habsburg monarchy to which, after all, they had pledged their allegiance for centuries. All malcontents, especially in Croatia, could rally under the Habsburg banner to further their aims.⁶⁸ In the spring of 1919, Pašić and the entire Yugoslav delegation in Paris refused the Entente Powers' demand to contribute troops to suppress the Bolshevik revolution in Hungary, since they suspected a plot to restore the Habsburgs and revive some sort of a dual Austro-Hungarian state. To assist such a development in Hungary, Pašić was adamant, would be a "colossal sin that would destroy our unity and freedom."⁶⁹ In early 1920, there seemed to be the real danger of an attempt to reinstate the Archduke Joseph, and Belgrade and Prague joined forces to bring pressure to bear on the Conference of Ambassadors to prevent it. On 2 February 1920, the Allied Ambassadors accepted the resolution stating that the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty would be "neither recognised nor tolerated" by the Allied Powers.⁷⁰ The Yugoslavs, Romanians and Czechoslovaks wanted to have all the dynasties that had waged war on the Entente Powers and their smaller allies explicitly banned from taking the reins of government,⁷¹ but this was never effected.

The ex-emperor of Austria-Hungary, Karl I Habsburg – who had reigned in Hungary as King Károly IV – was in exile in Switzerland and he intended to reclaim his throne. It was with a view to preventing a Habsburg restoration and safeguarding the *status quo* that Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia signed on 14 August 1920 a defensive treaty directed against Hungary, thus initiating the alliance which came to be known as the Little Entente. Italy and Yugoslavia concluded their anti-Habsburg convention which formed part of the

⁶⁸ Bogumil Hrabak, "Frankovačka emigrantska secesionistička organizacija i Hrvatska legija u Mađarskoj (1919–1921)", *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 56 (1997), 97–123.

⁶⁹ Nikola Pašić – *Predsedniku vlade*, doc. 20. Delegation to Prime Minister, str. conf. no. 13, 14 April 1919; for a discussion of the Habsburg problem see Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na Konferenciji mira*, 186–192.

⁷⁰ Documents on British Foreign Policy, ed. Ernest Woodward and Rohan Butler (London: HMSO, 1946–), ser. I, vol. XII, no. 80, Derby (Paris) to Curzon, 2 February 1920; the text of the resolution is annexed.

⁷¹ Archives of Yugoslavia [hereafter AJ], London Legation, fond 341, fascicle I, Pašić to Gavrilović, 28 February 1920, conf. no. 64.

Rapallo Treaty.⁷² The Little Entente soon came to be tested. On 24 March 1921, Karl Habsburg sneaked out of his exile and reached Hungary via Austria. The escapade was met by a firm attitude on the part of Pašić who embarked on an energetic action in order to evict Karl from Hungary. He immediately proposed to Czechoslovakia, Romania and Italy to make a joint demarche in Budapest to the effect that their ministers would be withdrawn from Hungary if Karl did not leave the country; to jointly request from France and Britain to support their action in Budapest; and to lodge a protest in Bern because it allowed Karl to endanger European peace.⁷³ However, the Hungarian Regent, Miklós Horthy, persuaded the ex-emperor to leave Hungary, which the latter eventually did under the protection of the officers of the Entente Powers.

Karl's adventure had an important and lasting consequence insofar Romania joined the Little Entente: she signed an agreement with Czechoslovakia just eighteen days after Karl's expulsion from Hungary (23 April). On 7 June 1921, Pašić and the Romanian Prime Minister, Take Ionescu, concluded an agreement on the same lines in Belgrade. As Pašić put it to Beneš, this was "a significant accomplishment the purpose of which is to maintain peace and secure the peace treaties which are the foundation of the future of our countries." To further stress Beneš's contribution, who was in London at the time and thus unable to come to Belgrade, Pašić wrote that it was the moment "when our plans are coming into being and our work is being completed."⁷⁴ However, on 21 October 1921, Karl and the ex-empress Zita flew into Hungary, gathered some loyal troops and again descended on Budapest. Horthy reacted with force and stopped him after a minor skirmish on the outskirts of the capital. The Little Entente reacted even more decisively than in March and mobilization was ordered and implemented in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, though not in Romania. The Conference of Ambassadors struck a balance between Hungary and her neighbours: Budapest was requested to declare all the Habsburgs barred from wearing the crown of St. Stephen and the Little Entente to refrain from military measures. In early November, the Hungarian National Assembly passed a law

⁷² Carlo Sforza, *Diplomatic Europe since the Treaty of Versailles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 101–102; Ivo Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 307.

⁷³ AJ, London Legation, 341, fascicle I, confidential archive for 1921, Pašić to Prague, Rome and Bucharest Legations [forwarded to London Legation], 2 April 1921, conf. no. 4130; for an account of the Habsburg restoration attempts see Djordje Knežević, "Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i dva neuspela pokušaja restauracije Habsburga 1921. godine", *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* 18/1 (1967), 117–138 and Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1971), 153–160.

⁷⁴ AJ, London Legation, 341, fascicle I, confidential archive for 1921, Pašić to Gavrilović, 8 June 1921, conf. no. 7222; also Pašić to Gavrilović, 31 May 1921, str. conf. no. 486; Gavrilović to Pašić, 3 June 1921.

which excluded the House of Habsburg from the throne.⁷⁵ Pašić endeavoured in vain to utilise the crisis to wrest from the Entente Powers an effective disarmament of Hungary in which the Little Entente countries would take part.⁷⁶ Finally, the Conference of Ambassadors arranged for the former sovereign to be removed from Hungary – he was interned on the Portuguese island of Madeira where he died in April 1922. Pašić also had to comply with the terms of the Trianon Treaty unfavourable to Belgrade, after having attempted to retain the possession of the entire province of Baranja assigned to Hungary. He informed Bošković, now the SCS delegate at the Conference of Ambassadors, that the Serbian troops had withdrawn from northern parts of Baranja by 26 August 1921.⁷⁷

As has been seen, Romania's adherence to the treaties between Czechoslovakia and the SCS Kingdom completed the formation of the Little Entente, which would remain a permanent feature of international affairs in interwar Europe. Ionescu and Pašić also dealt with the final delimitation of the border between the two countries and, for that purpose, they decided to form joint committees.⁷⁸ The Romano-SCS alliance was further fortified through dynastic link. Pašić accompanied King Alexander in February 1922 to attend the betrothal ceremony in Bucharest between the latter and Princess Mărioara (Marija), a daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Marie of Romania – their wedding followed in June. Notwithstanding some minor differences concerning the treatment of Romanian minority, relations between the two neighbouring countries were cordial, largely due to their foreign policy alignment.

In the Balkans, the main attention of Pašić's foreign policy was riveted to Albania and Bulgaria. As for the former country, Pašić renewed his efforts to ensure diplomatic support for the change of border in favour of the SCS Kingdom. On his instructions, Mihailo Gavrilović, the Yugoslav Minister in London, sounded the Foreign Office in June 1921 as to their attitude towards the delimitation on the Drin river which would leave the port of San Giovanni di Medua on the Yugoslav side, but he was met with firm disapproval.⁷⁹ At the same time, the Yugoslav delegate at the Conference of Ambassadors explained at length to

⁷⁵ Knežević, "Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i dva neuspela pokušaja restauracije Habsburga 1921. godine"; Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska, 175–185*.

⁷⁶ AJ, London Legation, 341, fascicle 1, confidential archive for 1921, Pašić to Gavrilović, 3 November 1921, conf. no. 277 [contains a copy of a note sent to the Czechoslovak and Romanian governments].

⁷⁷ AJ, Bucharest Legation, 395-5-50, Pašić to Čolak Antić, 24 September 1921, conf. no. 11538.

⁷⁸ AJ, Bucharest Legation, 395-5-57: Procès verbal I, Minutes from the meeting between Pašić and Ionescu, 7 June 1921.

⁷⁹ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države, 128–129*.

his French colleague Jules Laroche, the Under-Secretary at the Quai d'Orsay, the need for Yugoslavia of having a secure frontier line towards Albania. The Frenchman asserted, however, that diplomatic constellation was such as not to admit of any substantial changes in the *status quo*, and reminded of the great opportunity lost at the Peace Conference when what he termed "French project" had been seized on by Pašić but declined by the Belgrade government.⁸⁰ A later retrospective of Yugoslav policy during this time recorded that "Pašić conducted negotiations with the Italians in July 1921 and agreed on the division of Albania between us and Italy under condition that we got a more favourable solution than that envisaged by the Treaty of London of 1915."⁸¹ There is no documentary evidence to support this claim and it seems contrary to the thrust of Pašić's policy to keep Italy out of Albania and the Balkans – the Italians were then reduced to the island of Sasseno – although he did hanker after an opportunity to obtain the northern regions. Pašić certainly tried to create a favourable situation for the SCS Kingdom's interests on the ground. For that purpose, he covertly supported the Roman-Catholic tribe of Mirdites which occupied a strategically important curve along the Drin in their rebellion against the Muslim-dominated Tirana government and the proclamation of their independent Republic.⁸² This was a clear violation of the official policy of supporting an independent Albania in the 1913 borders. The Yugoslav military action in support of the Mirdites uprising brought about the intervention of Great Powers as well as resignation of four Cabinet members.⁸³ The dissatisfaction caused within Cabinet indicated that Pašić's handling of Albanian affairs met with strong opposition in governmental circles. The assistance given to the Mirdites was insufficient and their rebellion was quelled by the forces loyal to Tirana. Following strong international pressure from Geneva, Belgrade withdrew all its armed forces from Albania by the end of 1921. Pašić's policy failed which was acknowledged by the

⁸⁰ AJ, The Foreign Ministry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 334-4-18, Jovanović to Ninčić, 2 June 1921, confidential no. 533; Circular dispatch from the Foreign Ministry to Legations abroad, 28 June 1921, confidential no. 5814. An exhaustive account of the Conference of Ambassadors' deliberations is given in ASANU, Subotić Papers, 14576-V-4, The history of our policy in Albania in 1921, Dossier Ar. 1 – The borders of Albania, folios 90–118.

⁸¹ AJ, Milan Stojadinović Papers, 37-28-208, Memorandum by Ivan Vukotić, 3 February 1939.

⁸² AJ, The Foreign Ministry of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 334-4-18, Todorović to Ninčić, 4 May 1921, confidential no. 601; Todorović to Pašić, 15 August 1921, confidential no. 1437. For a detailed account of the Yugoslav dealings with the Mirdites tribe see ASANU, Subotić Papers, 14576-V-4, The history of our policy in Albania in 1921, Dossier Ar. 4 – Mirditska Republika, folios 126–144 and Bogumil Hrabak, "Mirditi između Italijana, arbanaskih nacionalista i Srba (1918–1921)," *Istorija 20. veka 1-2* (1993), 35–51.

⁸³ Military Archives [Vojni arhiv – VA], registry 17, box 61, fascicle 14, doc. 1, unsigned memoirs, typed in Belgrade on 11 May 1952, folio 16.

resignation of his deputy in the Foreign Ministry, Tihomir Popović, who was in charge of Albanian matters.

Bulgaria was in the focus of Pašić's Balkan policy as that country sought to redress the consequences of her defeat in the Great War. In particular, the terrorist Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) made incursions into the Serb Macedonia from its strongholds on the Bulgarian territory with a view to detaching that province from the SCS Kingdom. The government of Alexander Stamboliyski's Agrarians in Sofia was unable to rein in the "Macedonians." Stamboliyski condemned the pre-war policy of King Ferdinand and professed his desire for a close friendship, and even a union, with the Slav brethren in the SCS Kingdom.⁸⁴ Pašić had doubts about Stamboliyski soundness; moreover, he suspected Bulgarian hints at the common interest of Sofia and Belgrade to secure an outlet to the Aegean Sea of being mere tactics to compromise the SCS Kingdom's international position.⁸⁵ His government kept a watchful eye on Bulgaria's execution of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly, especially the clauses on disarmament and limitation of armed forces, and lodged protests, together with Romania and Greece, to the Conference of Ambassadors on account of Sofia's breaches. Nevertheless, Stamboliyski's persistence and attempts to suppress IMRO won him some recognition in Belgrade, which resulted in the conclusion of the Niš agreement of 22 March 1923 on the measures to secure the mutual border. This seemed to be a major success for Belgrade but a short-lived one. The 9 June coup in Bulgaria carried out by fiercely nationalist right-wingers, including army officers and IMRO, claimed the life of Stamboliyski and established the Alexander Tsankov government deeply distasteful to Belgrade.⁸⁶ The relations between the SCS Kingdom and Bulgaria markedly deteriorated again.

To pursue his Balkan policy, Pašić wanted good relations with Greece. This was a continuation of his pre-1914 policy, of which the Serbo-Greek alliance treaty of 1913 concluded with Eleftherios Venizelos was a corner stone. During the Peace Conference, he resumed his cooperation with Venizelos, but Greek doubts that the Serbs might have designs on their port of Salonica (Thessaloniki) – in which Serbia had been granted a free zone for her commerce as part of the 1913 agreement – raised difficulties in establishing a true entente

⁸⁴ Ivan Ristić, "Politika sporazumevanja u vreme nerazumevanja (rad Aleksandra Stambolijskog na jugoslovensko-bugarskom zbliženju 1919–1923)", *Teme: časopis za društvenu teoriju i praksu* 36/3 (2012), 1033–1046.

⁸⁵ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 100–102. For Pašić's attitude towards the Bulgarians, see Ivan Ristić, "Nikola Pašić i Bugari: geneza ideoloških i političkih stavova", *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, 84 (2012), 87–109.

⁸⁶ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 200–206, 218–227; Živko Avramovski, "O stavu jugoslovenske vlade prema devetojunskom prevratu u Bugarskoj 1923. godine", *Istorija XX veka: zbornik radova IX* (1968), 133–155.

between the two neighbours.⁸⁷ As Slobodan Jovanović, his contemporary and famous historian, perceptively noted, Pašić believed that the security and stability of the Balkans required a firm Serbo-Greek axis as opposed to a Bulgaro-Albanian one; for that reason, he wanted as wide a Serbian-Greek frontier as possible.⁸⁸ Such policy informed the attitude towards Athens following the Greek disaster in Asia Minor in the war against the Turkish nationalists. Pašić and Momčilo Ninčić, Foreign Minister after January 1922, gave their guarantees to the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikolaos Politis, during his visit to Belgrade in November 1922 that they would keep in check Bulgaria and prevent her from exploiting Greek difficulties with the Turks.⁸⁹ Indeed, the SCS Kingdom supported the Greek claims in Thrace prior to and during the Lausanne Conference of 1923, disfavoured the establishment of a common Turko-Bulgarian border in that province. But Greek statesmen never dispelled their suspicions that the Serbs might join forces with the Bulgarians, their Slav brethren, for the purpose of ousting Greece from her Aegean littoral.

To discuss Yugoslav policy in the latter half of Pašić's premiership, it is crucial to appreciate that it was not entirely his handiwork. Regent and later King (after 1921) Alexander had been an important factor in the formulation and execution of foreign policy since 1914, partly because of the exigencies of war-time strategy and diplomacy and partly because of his personal ambitions. The British Minister in Belgrade, Sir Charles Young, described him in 1925 as "the guardian of the main lines of the foreign policy."⁹⁰ The King's influence, however, increased with Ninčić's assuming the foreign ministry portfolio. Although a prominent Radical of long-standing, the latter immediately came into conflict with Pašić and, according to the well-informed Czech sources, saw the economic Genoa Conference of 1922 as an opportunity for personal promotion.⁹¹ Ninčić became King Alexander's man, acting, as his ministerial colleague would later recall, as something of a King's "secretary for foreign affairs"; he "personally informed the King of his every step in the Foreign Ministry, introduced the practice of sending the copies of all political telegrams coming from abroad to King, and, besides, he would go straight to the Court after every Cabinet meeting to

⁸⁷ ASANU, Pašić Papers, no. 14528/II-10, Venizelos to Pašić, 21 January 1919 [in French] and Pašić to Venizelos [in French with Serbian draft], 5 February 1919. For a discussion of the Salonica issue see, Dragan Bakić, "The Port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy, 1919–1941", *Balcanica* XLIII (2012), 191–210.

⁸⁸ Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, 91–92.

⁸⁹ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 173–183.

⁹⁰ Forthcoming Dragan Bakić, *Britain and Interwar Danubian Europe: Foreign Policy and Security Challenges, 1919–1936* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 38.

⁹¹ Todorović, *Jugoslavija i balkanske države*, 160.

make a report.”⁹² In addition, King Alexander was in direct contact with some of the diplomatic envoys, his personal friends, especially those who occupied the most important Legations. Cases in point were Miroslav Spalajković, Minister in Paris (1922–1935), and Živojin Balugdžić, whose posts abroad included Athens, Rome and Berlin, although the former was also a friend of Pašić.⁹³ King Alexander’s impact on foreign policy, as will be seen, would be most tangible in the matter of SCS-Italian relations, the most troublesome aspect of international affairs for Belgrade.

Under Mussolini’s direction, with his visceral anti-Slav prejudice and grand imperialist designs, Italian attitude towards the SCS Kingdom increased the anxieties among the Yugoslavs. After the 9 June coup in Bulgaria, the position in the Balkans opened new possibilities for Italian intrigue. To preclude trouble from that quarter, King Alexander was anxious to come to terms with Rome and make the necessary sacrifices for that purpose. Since the Fiume settlement had proved unworkable and the town had been effectively occupied by Italian army, it was clear that it would have to be abandoned in any agreement. In a conversation with an Italian delegate at Geneva in September 1923, Ninčić pointed out that the King was his only true supporter in a consistent policy of rapprochement with Rome.⁹⁴ And indeed, Pašić was in no hurry to make an agreement with Italy as he thought that he could extract greater concessions: he wanted to have Zara and the island of Lastovo in exchange for Fiume. He was also concerned that Paris and London might take a dim view of an Italo-Yugoslav settlement, but King Alexander was in no mood to procrastinate and did not consider Fiume too high a price.⁹⁵ It was the King’s conception that prevailed and the Pašić government agreed to Italian annexation of Fiume, while the port of Baroš and Delta were separated from the Fiume municipality and given to the SCS Kingdom. This final territorial arrangement was accompanied by a treaty of friendship that was intended to mark the improvement of Italo-SCS relations. Disputes emerged between Pašić and Ninčić during the drafting of that treaty, and King Alexander then entrusted Spalajković with completing

⁹² Milan Stojadinović, *Ni rat ni pakt: Jugoslavija između dva rata* (Buenos Aires, 1963), 206; also Slobodan Jovanović, *Moji savremenici*, 68.

⁹³ Zoran Bajin, “Miroslav Spalajković (1869–1951): biografija” (PhD thesis, University of Belgrade, 2016), 355–384. There is no scholarly work on Balugdžić, but his portrait, based on the memoirs of his subordinate in Berlin, is given in Miloš Crnjanski, *Embahade* (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2009), ch. 1.

⁹⁴ Bogdan Krizman, “Italija u politici kralja Aleksandra i kneza Pavla (1918–1941)”, *Časopis za savremenu povijest* 7/1 (1975), 36.

⁹⁵ Branislav Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karadjordjević: u evropskoj politici* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010), 35, 37; Enes Milak, “Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i Rimski sporazum (1922–1924)”, *Istorija XX veka* 14-15 (1982), 143–146, 153–154, 158, 161, 169.

this task.⁹⁶ Pašić's reserves, however, should not be overstated, as they presumably concerned minor issues rather than the fundamentals of the impending treaty. That is clear from the fact that Pašić traveled to Rome himself and signed the friendship agreement with Mussolini (the Pact of Rome) on 27 January 1924.⁹⁷ This treaty was a gain for Belgrade in that it left a free hand to the SCS Kingdom to deal with troubles in the Balkans, namely the expected IMRO's incursions into Macedonia – the Albanian question lay dormant.

The Pact of Rome was intended to usher in a new era in the relations between the two Adriatic neighbours, but that was not to be the case. To begin with, Italy and the SCS Kingdom were at cross purposes. For Mussolini, the treaty was designed to sever the ties between Paris and Belgrade, and break up the Little Entente, a pillar of the French security system in the Danube region.⁹⁸ Thus he had played at first with the idea of a Franco-Italo-SCS agreement to neutralise French influence in Belgrade, only to drop it once he had realised he could make a bilateral deal with the SCS Kingdom. But he did not deceive Pašić. According to Jules Laroche, the latter saw through Mussolini's game and understood that an agreement with Italy could not be reached on a tripartite basis.⁹⁹ Pašić was also correct in anticipating French, though not British, discomfiture with a treaty of the alleged French protégé concluded with Italy seemingly without much regard for the susceptibilities felt in Paris. The Italian treaty also raised doubts in the Quai d'Orsay about the real Yugoslav motives and intentions. King Alexander himself had to assure the French in April 1924 that the Pact of Rome was not aimed against Greece and that its sole object, as far as he was concerned, was to keep the Italians at arm's length from the Balkans.¹⁰⁰ The French also suspected the Serbs of planning to invade Bulgaria under the excuse of eliminating the IMRO strongholds but, in reality, for the purpose of acquiring the Pernik coal mines. In their perspective, the conclusion of a friend-

⁹⁶ Bajin, "Miroslav Spaljković (1869–1951): biografija", 407.

⁹⁷ Milak, "Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i Rimski sporazum"; Alan Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton University Press, 1970), 135–165.

⁹⁸ William Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy: the Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1988), 44–46; John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals: the Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.

⁹⁹ Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska*, 253.

¹⁰⁰ Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata: da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski "satelit"* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985), 65; Antonina Kuzmanova, "Sur la rivalité franco-italienne dans la Petite Entente en 1924", *Études balkaniques* 29 (1993), 24.



Nikola Pašić and Benito Mussolini
 sign the treaty of friendship (the Pact of Rome) on 27 January 1924
 [National Library of Serbia, Af 42, from the album "The Little Entente Conference
 in Prague, July 1924"]

ship agreement with Belgrade would have the advantage of forcing it to be more amenable to advice of moderation from Paris.¹⁰¹

Still, the Yugoslavs were careful to cultivate Mussolini's goodwill and thus evaded to proceed with coming to an agreement with France despite the wishes of Paris. Pašić avoided visiting the French capital on his way back home from Rome, although Spalajković relayed to him President Millerand's and Prime Minister Poincaré's invitation.¹⁰² Belgrade continued to manoeuvre for the next two years, fearing Rome's ambitions in the Balkans and trying to stall them with a formal friendship and seeking for protection in Paris though without a formal agreement. Although the French suspicions of Yugoslav imperialist designs were much exaggerated, Belgrade was more assertive in its relations with the Balkan countries in the aftermath of the Pact of Rome. In November 1924, the Pašić government denounced the 1913 alliance pact with Greece due to the dissatisfaction over the Graeco-Bulgarian minority convention concluded two months earlier and the ineffectiveness of the arrangement concerning the Salonica free

¹⁰¹ Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata*, 67–68, 75; Stanislav Sretenović, *Francuska i Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca 1918–1929* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2008), 307–309, 318.

¹⁰² Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata*, 67.

zone. After prolonged negotiations, Athens surrendered to Belgrade's demands in August 1926 but the revolution that deposed General Pangalos prevented the ratification of the agreement – the dispute would be settled in 1929.¹⁰³ A study of Yugo-Greek relations has stated that it was Ninčić who drove policy in this case in the teeth of Pašić's opposition, but it offers no evidence.¹⁰⁴

The SCS Kingdom certainly pursued a determined policy in Albania, but this did not result from the accord with Rome. Quite the contrary, it was an expression of the unabated rivalry with Italy that would undermine the Pact of Rome and lead to a definite rupture between the two countries. When the pro-Italian bishop Fan-Noli overthrew Ahmed-Zogu in 1924, Pašić made an agreement with the latter, not confirmed in a written document, to support him to return to power in Tirana in exchange for Zogu's promise to settle the outstanding questions with the SCS Kingdom in Belgrade's favour. Although Zogu re-established himself in power, he turned into Italian protégé in the long run, as Rome provided financial means for the functioning of Albanian administration, which Belgrade could not afford.¹⁰⁵ The conversations that Ninčić held in Rome in February 1926 failed to find either a solution to the mounting Italo-SCS conflict in Albania or to settle the relations in the Franco-Italian-SCS triangle and stabilize the Balkans. Soon afterwards, in April, Pašić was forced to resign as Prime Minister on account of the corruption scandal in which his son was accused of being involved. Therefore, the handling of Italy was left entirely in the hands of Ninčić. It ended with the announcement of the Italo-Albanian treaty on 27 November 1926 (the Pact of Tirana), which stipulated that Italy would guarantee the "political, judicial and territorial status quo" in Albania. This was effectively the establishment of an Italian protectorate over Albania – and a heavy blow for the SCS Kingdom's foreign policy. It also set the stage for the conclusion of the Franco-SCS friendship treaty in November 1927 and a decade of hostile relations between Belgrade and Rome. But the foreign policy of the SCS Kingdom would then be in the hands of other governments. Ninčić, who banked his whole policy on the agreement and friendly relations with Italy, acting on instructions from the King, resigned from his position on 6 December 1926. Pašić passed away four days later.

Shortly after his death, Spalajković criticised Pašić that he had made a serious mistake concluding the Pact of Rome without making a simultaneous

¹⁰³ Bakić, "The Port of Salonica in Yugoslav Foreign Policy", 198–203.

¹⁰⁴ Aleksandra Pećinar, "Diplomatski odnosi Kraljevine Jugoslavije i Grčke u periodu poslednje vlade Elefteriosa Venizelosa (1928–1932)" (PhD thesis, University of Belgrade, 2012), 48–49.

¹⁰⁵ Bakić, "The Italo-Yugoslav Conflict over Albania", 597–601; Živko Avramovski, "Italijanska ekonomska penetracija u Albaniju 1925. do 1935. godine", *Istorija 20. veka* 5 (1963), 137–224.

agreement with France, because that created an illusion that the SCS Kingdom's Balkan policy would eventually have to be subordinated to that of Italy. "The late Pašić did not see clearly, and with old age his well-known caution was further increased."¹⁰⁶ This was certainly not a fair critique of Pašić's policy and Spalajković should have known better. First, there was no possibility of concluding a treaty both with France and Italy, because Mussolini would not have it. The Pact of Rome was not a lasting achievement but it at least provided a short respite from rampant Italian intrigue in the Balkans. Second, Pašić alone had advocated a settlement with Rome in January 1920 and that under more favourable conditions than those obtained later in the ill-fated Rapallo treaty. In the run-up to the Pact of Rome, he wanted to make a harder bargain with Mussolini, and he was perfectly aware of the repercussions that an Italian treaty would have in Paris – after all, it was King Alexander who precipitated the 1924 agreement. The outcome was not Pašić's favourite solution but he accepted it nevertheless as there was no feasible alternative. Pašić's diplomatic skill was considerable but not even he could perform miracles. In the aftermath of the Pact of Rome, Pašić seems to have been somewhat less personally involved in the conduct of foreign policy, partly because King Alexander and his loyal Ninčić took a leading part in this field and partly because he was absorbed in internal politics, which was exceedingly turbulent in the nascent and unsettled SCS Kingdom.

UDC 929 Nikola Pašić:327(497.1:450)"1919/1926"

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