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Gabriele D’Annunzio’s Coup in Rijeka (1919–1920) in the Context of Italian-Yugoslavian Relations

Zarys treści: Artykuł zawiera omówienie przewrotu dokonanego przez Gabriele D’Annunzia w Rijecie i sprawowaniu przez niego władzy w tym mieście w latach 1919–1920. Słynny włoski poeta i uczestnik Wielkiej Wojny po dokonanych przewrocie próbował przyłączyć zajęte miasto do Włoch, choć jego działania nie były uzgodnione z rządem. Te wydarzenia przyczyniły się do kryzysu w stosunkach pomiędzy Włochami a Jugosławią, zaś kwestia statusu Rijeki w powojennym układzie geopolitycznym stała się także przedmiotem intensywnych rozmów przedstawicieli mocarstw biorących udział w konferencji pokojowej w Paryżu, tj. Francji, USA oraz Wielkiej Brytanii. Przebieg sporu włosko-jugosłowiańskiego o Rijekę z uwagą śledzili również wysłannicy europejskiego środowiska prasowego. W rezultacie przewrót dokonany przez D’Annunzia odbił się szerokim echem w całej Europie, zaś status problemowego miasta został podniesiony do rangi ważnego problemu w kontekście stosunków włosko-jugosłowiańskich.

Outline of content: The article presents an overview of the coup d’état carried out by Gabriele D’Annunzio in Rijeka, and his rule in that city in 1919–1920. Following the coup, the famous Italian poet and hero of the Great War tried to annex the city into Italy, although his actions were not agreed with the country’s government. These events contributed to a crisis in relations between Italy and Yugoslavia, while the issue of Rijeka’s status in the post-war geopolitical system became also the subject of intense talks between representatives of the major powers taking part in the Paris peace conference, i.e. France, the USA, and the United Kingdom. The course of the Yugoslavian-Italian dispute over Rijeka was also closely followed by the delegates of the European press. As a result, D’Annunzio’s coup echoed broadly across all of Europe, and the status of the problematic city was raised to the rank of an important matter in the context of the Italian-Yugoslavian relations.

Słowa kluczowe: przewrót w Rijecie (1919–1920), Włochy, Królestwo SHS, Jugosławia, Gabriele D’Annunzio, Il Vate, Carlo Sforza, Salvatore Contarini

Keywords: Rijeka coup (1919–1920), Italy, Kingdom of SHS, Yugoslavia, Gabriele D’Annunzio, Il Vate, Carlo Sforza, Salvatore Contarini

Introduction

Over the centuries, the port city of Rijeka has been the object of rivalry among various countries which aspired to establish its administration there: mainly Austria, Hungary, France, United Kingdom, Croatia and Italy. Each of these countries – in different system configurations – ruled Rijeka for at least a period of time. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth century the most fierce competition took place between Hungary,¹ Croatia,² and Italy, that is the states which in geopolitical sense were located the closest to this problematic city.³

The main object of the Rijeka rivalry was its sea port⁴ located in Kvarner Bay, whose strategic location and access to rich deposits of raw materials (mainly crude oil and natural gas) were a potential factor for economic growth. Economic issues were of particular importance during the Great War and after its end,⁵ although they were not the only reason for seeking domination over the city. The national structure of Rijeka was also significant. According to the census of 1910, the city's population reached 49,608, of which the most numerous ethnic groups were Italians and Croats. Meanwhile, according to data cited by Daniel Patafta, in 1918 Rijeka had 45,885 inhabitants, of which the largest ethnic groups were still Italians and Croats, but compared to data from 1910 onwards the Italian population of the city increased considerably, while the number of Croats shrank. Such a turn of events was the result of a wide-reaching colonisation campaign which was carried

¹ From 1867 on, Hungary formally co-created the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, under whose administration Rijeka remained until the fall of Austria-Hungary in the autumn of 1918. After the end of military operations, the status of the port city was unclear, and its regulation was discussed during the post-war peace conference in Paris. From 3 November 1918, the armies of the Triple Entente, i.e. the USA, United Kingdom and France, were stationed in the city, and on 17 November they were joined by Italian troops. Daniel Patafta believes that this was the moment when Rijeka's Italian occupation began. However, American, British and French troops were stationed there until September 1919, hence the words about Italian occupation seem a bit exaggerated. In fact, Italians carried out a wide propaganda campaign in Rijeka, which will be mentioned later on in this article; D. Patafta, "Promjene u nacionalnoj strukturi stanovništva grada Rijeke od 1918. do 1924. godine", *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, 36 (2004), no. 2.

² From 29 October to 1 December 1918, Croatia co-created the state of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, later becoming a part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. I discuss the rationale for the process of creating this state in another article. See K.S. Morawski, "Proces tworzenia Królestwa SHS wobec przeobrażeń Wielkiej Wojny (1914–1918)", *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio M: Balcaniensis et Carpathiensis*, (2016), no. 1–2, pp. 35–58.

³ For more on the history of Rijeka and the centuries-long rivalry over this city see also widely available review studies, such as the one on the official website of the City Council of Rijeka, translated into several languages. See *Kratka povijest grada*, Urząd Miasta Rijeka, <http://www.rijeka.hr> (access: 2 May 2017).

⁴ The sea port in Rijeka was built in the thirteenth century. Its existence was formally reported for the first time on 20 December 1281. At the beginning of the twentieth century it was already an extremely important sea port in Europe. J. Modestin, "Rijeka", in: *Narodna Enciklopedija Srpsko-Hrvatsko-Slovenačka*, ed. S. Stanojević, vol. 3, Zagreb, 1928, pp. 927–929.

⁵ Ibid.

out by Italy on Rijeka's territory and began during the Great War, while Croats or residents declaring their affiliation with Illyria were gradually displaced towards Zagreb, the centre of Croats' cultural, identity and religious links to one nation. Many representatives of the Croatian nation emigrated to the United Kingdom and other western nations also during the Great War.⁶

When discussing the nationality structure of Rijeka in 1910 and 1918, we should note that the 1910 census was carried out under Austro-Hungarian administration, which guaranteed high accuracy and reliability of its results. However, the data from 1918 was obtained during the ongoing World War I, hence its accuracy should be considered lower than that of the 1910 results. The nationality composition of the city in 1910 and 1918 is presented below in table 1.

Table 1. Nationality composition of Rijeka in 1910 and 1918

Nationality	1910		1918		Comments
	Number (in thousands)	Number (in % of total population)	Number (in thousands)	Number (in % of total population)	
Italian	23,283	46.9	28,911	62.5	
Croatian- Illyrian	15,731	31.7	9,092	19.6	Croatian, including residents declaring their origins in the land of Illyria
Slovenian	3,937	7.94	1,674	3.6	
Hungarian	3,619	7.29	4,431	9.6	
German	2,476	4.99	1,616	3.5	
English	202	0.41	n/d	n/d	
Czech- Moravian	185	0.37	n/d	n/d	Mainly Czech from Moravia
Serbian	70	0.14	161	0.4	
French	40	0.08	n/d	n/d	
Polish	36	0.07	n/d	n/d	
Romanian	29	0.06	n/d	n/d	

Source: own material, based on Patafta, *Promjene u nacionalnoj strukturi*, pp. 685, 691.

The heterogeneity in terms of nationality on Rijeka's territory was therefore an excuse to seek a takeover of the city by those states which wanted to secure the interests of citizens residing there. Taking into account the data from table 1,

⁶ It is difficult to precisely quantify the scale of Croatian emigration to the West during the Great War, but the existence of this phenomenon is indicated by numerous documents gathered by Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević; see *Jugoslavija 1918–1988. Tematska Zbirka Dokumenta*, eds. B. Petranović, M. Zečević, Beograd, 1988.

this was of particular significance in the case of Italy and Croatia but less so in the case of Hungary, of which three Italy showed the greatest determination in its efforts to take over Rijeka, as the only country among them which at the time of the Great War had a uniform structure and a stable situation in the geopolitical landscape of Europe. It is also worth remembering that since 1915 Italy belonged to the camp of the Entente, while Croatia and Hungary were part of the camp of the Central Powers.

Therefore, the question of Rijeka was raised by Italy soon after the start of the Great War. Taking over the control of the city was an element of Italy's expansive policy in the Adriatic region, which could be called the politics of irredentism, forming a part of the country's foreign policy concept from the nineteenth century onwards.⁷ The existence of such a policy in the period of the Great War is confirmed by the fact that under the provisions of a secret pact between the Triple Entente states and Italy, signed on 26 April 1915 in London, Italy was guaranteed South Slavic territories, at the time controlled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, although it should be noted here that the pact did not annex Rijeka into Italy.⁸

The secret London pact did not enter into force in the end, but after the Great War ended in 1918, Italy was relentless in its efforts to dominate the Adriatic region, and did not give up the idea of taking over Rijeka. Albania, deprived of effective military facilities, could not obstruct these efforts, but 1918 saw the creation of a state with a potential to inhibit the expansive efforts of Italians. It was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS),⁹ the first formal entity of a united Yugoslav state, whose founders and representatives in international politics sought to reduce Italian aspirations.

Such actions were a consequence of regular clashes in Yugoslavian-Italian relations during the interwar period. The first clear reflection of the difficult relations between Rome and Belgrade in the discussed period was indeed the issue of Rijeka. During the diplomatic disputes between the two countries, in September 1919 the power in Rijeka was taken over during a coup by the Italian poet and

⁷ The concept of Italian irredentism involved, among other things, the unification of territories inhabited by people of Italian origin or Italian speakers. These territories included vast South Slavic lands, i.e. Dalmatia, Istria, Gorizia and Gradisca, as well as the city of Rijeka. The founder of this concept is believed to be Giuseppe Garibaldi, and its popularity in various mutations (mostly fascist) increased during the two world wars. Italian irredentism has been written about by e.g. Arrigo Petacco and Duško Večerina, see A. Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed: The Story of Italians from Istria, Dalmatia, Venezia Giulia (1943–1953)*, Toronto, 1998; D. Večerina, *Talijanski Irredentizam*, Zagreb, 2001.

⁸ On the grounds of this pact, Italy was guaranteed the Austrian Littoral with Trieste, Istria, Gorizia and Gradisca, northern Dalmatia with Zadar, Šibenik and most Dalmatian islands (excluding Rab and Krk), and so ethnically Croatian and Slovenian territories; "Londonski pakt", in: *Jugoslavija 1918–1988*, pp. 54–56.

⁹ In this article, I use the name "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes" interchangeably with the name "Yugoslavia".

war hero, Gabriele D'Annunzio. This led to an open conflict between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS, and to diplomatic consternation on the international scene.

The main purpose of this article is therefore to examine the course of the conflict over Rijeka between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS in 1919–1920. The structure of the text is made up of parts including an explanation of the status of Rijeka in the early post-war period, the characteristics of the political competition between the great powers involved in the peace talks in Paris, as well as an overview of the activities undertaken as part of the foreign policies of Italy and the Kingdom of SHS regarding Gabriele D'Annunzio's coup.

The findings in the article have been largely based on newspaper articles published in the period of the Italian-Yugoslavian conflict over Rijeka. The Polish press has proved a valuable resource in this respect, as it relied on reports from foreign correspondents and followed the developments in Rijeka with great interest. An important basis for the findings has also been the press in France, a state within whose borders peace arrangements took place after the end of the Great War, as well as the most important newspaper in the Kingdom of SHS at the time, i.e. *Politika*, which expressed the views of the Yugoslavian government and monarchy. These reflections have been aided by the basic subject literature on the Italian-Yugoslavian relations in the interwar period, as well as to the relations between Italy, Croatia and Serbia before the creation of the Kingdom of SHS. In the article the author relied also on archival materials, obtained i.a. from the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, and on the extremely valuable source material contained in the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian National Encyclopaedia from 1928, discovered in a Belgrade second-hand bookshop.

The status of Rijeka and the peace conference in Paris

The truce in Compiègne, signed on 11 November 1918 between the Entente states and the German Empire formally ended the Great War (1914–1918). The Kingdom of Serbia was on the winning side, and that meant that the Yugoslavian state,¹⁰ formed less than three weeks later, joined the post-war peace negotiations from a privileged position.

The issues of settling the borders of the Kingdom of SHS after the end of the Great War were the overriding aim in the foreign policy of Prince Alexander Karađorđević, regent on behalf of King Peter I and the actual monarch of the country. It was Prince Alexander's suggestion that resulted, in late December 1918, in appointing Nikola Pašić as the head of the Yugoslavian delegation at the peace conference in Paris. This nomination was a wise move on the part of the

¹⁰ The Kingdom of Serbia was the most important part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, not least because of the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty ruling there, as well as the Serbian character of most governments in the country.

heir to the throne, who thus ensured Yugoslavia would have a charismatic and experienced negotiator in Paris. Prince Alexander had enough confidence in Pašić's diplomatic talent to assure a Slovenian delegate from Trieste in a conversation that he would not allow "even one inch of Slovenian land to be taken away"¹¹ as a result of the peace conference resolutions. The political attitude of the Kingdom of SHS towards the conference in Paris was also reflected in the statement of the minister of nutrition and reconstruction of the country, Miloje Ž. Jovanović,¹² who in early January 1919 stated that Serbs would rather starve to death than betray the common South Slavic cause.¹³

Apart from Pašić, the Yugoslavian delegation included the head of the Foreign Ministry, Ante Trumbić (who was a Croat), as well as diplomats from Serbian and Slovenian territories, Milenko Radomar Vesnić and Ivan Žolger respectively. The group of advisers was formed by Mato Bošković (a Serb), Josip Smodlak (a Croat), and a group of Slovenes: Otokar Rýbař, Lambert Ehrlich, Fran Kovačić and Matija Slavič.¹⁴

The Yugoslavian delegation approached the Paris peace conference with high hopes, as in principle relations with Italy could only be really regulated through negotiations.¹⁵ Expansive aspirations of the royal government of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando regarding the South Slavic territories were the key problem in the foreign policy of the Kingdom of SHS in the early post-war period.¹⁶

A particularly problematic issue in the Yugoslavian-Italian relations was the Rijeka question. From late November and early December of 1918, military leadership was held there by General Francesco Saverio Grazioli, who on orders from the Italian government began an extensive propaganda campaign in the city,

¹¹ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 31 December 1918, no. 281, p. 2.

¹² Miloje Ž. Jovanović took over the ministry of nutrition and reconstruction of the country in the government of Stojan Protić at the end of 1918 *Устави и владе Кнежевине Србије, Краљевине Србије, Краљевине СХС и Краљевине Југославије (1835–1941)*, Београд, 1988, pp. 199–200.

¹³ B. Novak, *The Austro-Slovenian Frontier Question at the Paris Peace Conference 1919*, Chicago, 1954, pp. 27–28.

¹⁴ The permanent group was formed by chairman Pašić, as well as Trumbić, Vesnić and Žolger, a group of government experts – Bošković, Smodlak and Rýbař, as well as special experts – Ehrlich, delegated to the matters of Carinthia, Kovačić, dealing with Styria issues, and Slavič as a specialist in the affairs of Prekmurje; Novak, *The Austro-Slovenian Frontier Question*, pp. 27–28.

¹⁵ The issue of establishing the boundaries of the Kingdom of SHS with neighbouring countries has been elaborated on, among others, by Renata Zawistowska, who in her article "Ustalenie granicy Węgier z Chorwacją i Serbią po I wojnie światowej" (*Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, 48 (2013), pp. 157–181) discussed the Hungarian-Yugoslavian relations in this area. Of note are also the works of Lajčo Klajn, the author of *The Past in Present Times. The Yugoslav Saga* (Lanham, 2007, p. 7), discussing the conditions for regulating the borders of the Kingdom of SHS with other states.

¹⁶ In Poland, the issue of *sensu stricto* foreign policy of the Kingdom of SHS has been described by Hubert Kuberski, however in his article published in the magazine "Glaukopis", the key directions of Yugoslavia's international activities in the early years after the Great War have been discussed rather sparingly. See H. Kuberski, "Południowoślōwiański 'bękart Wersalu'", *Glaukopis*, 2009, no. 13–14, pp. 100–130.



1. Leading Yugoslavian diplomats at the Paris Peace Conference and the peace treaty negotiations during the period of 1919–1920: Ante Trumbić, Nikola Pašić, Milenko Radomar Vesnić, and Ivan Žolger. Source: Library of Congress from the collection of George Grantham Bain, <http://www.loc.gov> (access: 21 July 2016)

attempting to create an artificial impression that Rijeka was in a historical sense a part of Italy.¹⁷ Yugoslavian diplomacy firmly protested against such a turn of events, and at the Paris peace conference which started on 18 January 1919 it successfully postulated that the Rijeka issue be internationalised.¹⁸

The main advantages of the effectiveness of Yugoslavian diplomacy regarding Italian aspirations lay in institutional and official stability. During the period of the most intense conference debates over the shape of the borders of the Kingdom of SHS, no major changes were made to the personnel and structure of the diplomatic institutions of the country, while Italian diplomacy was destabilised on a regular basis. Thus, negotiations over Rijeka with the Yugoslavian side were opened by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Baron Sidney Sonnino, who resigned from his position on 23 June 1918 along with the resignation of Orlando's government partly as a result of discord among Italian politicians over the Rijeka issue. Prime Minister Orlando proposed an agreement with the Kingdom of SHS, while minister Sonnino strived to increase the Italian expansion on the Adriatic Sea. The unfavourable situation of the Orlando government was made worse by the reconfiguration of political forces in Italy. The importance of Filippo Turati's

¹⁷ "Kronika polityczno-społeczna", *Monitor Polski*, 1918, no. 236.

¹⁸ "Konferencya pokojowa", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 21 January 1919, no. 16, p. 2.

socialists and Luigi Sturzo's Christian Democrats was increasing, while Francesco Saverio Nitti's radicals maintained a strong and stable position. In mid-1919 the latter managed to form a government on which the responsibility to continue the peace negotiations in Paris rested.¹⁹

The actions of Prime Minister Nitti, as well as the heads of diplomacy in his government, i.e. Tommaso Tittoni²⁰ and later Vittorio Scialoja, were marginalised as a result of the act carried out by Gabriele D'Annunzio. The Italian poet and active participant in the Great War, referred to as Il Vate,²¹ carried out a coup in Rijeka on 12 September 1919, entering the city with a group of armed volunteers, and two days later announcing its annexation on behalf of Italy.²²

The group of D'Annunzio's volunteers included grenadiers and soldiers of assault troops, who had machine guns and an armoured car.²³ After the attackers entered the city, the Italian general Vittorio Emmanuele Pittaluga, who was stationed in Rijeka, tried to stop their progress. Seeing him, D'Annunzio uttered the following words: "You need to fulfil orders of the government which pursues a bad policy, therefore shoot your brothers",²⁴ after which the general warmly embraced Il Vate, thus giving up the attempt to stop the Rijeka coup.²⁵ D'Annunzio also appealed to Italians living in the city: "Italians of Fiume!²⁶ In a world full of cowardice and turmoil, Fiume is today a symbol of freedom, in this world full of cowardice and turmoil there is only one pure thing: Fiume, there is only one

¹⁹ M. Marsella, "Enrico Corradini's Italian nationalism. The 'right wing' of the fascist synthesis", *Journal Of Political Ideologies*, 9 (2004), p. 216; P. O'Brien, *Mussolini in the First World War. The Journalist, the Soldier, the Fascist*, New York, 2005, p. 15, 147.

²⁰ Due to his poor health, Tommasini resigned in November 1919.

²¹ Il Vate, or the poet. This lofty nickname, derived from Latin, reflected the unique characteristics of its holder. During the upheaval D'Annunzio was a prominent artist, having authored dozens of works, including the famous novel *The Triumph of Death (Trionfo della morte)* from 1894. Il Vate could easily use his artistic talents when dealing with politicians. Among those he charmed was, for example, Konstanty Skirmunt, who had the opportunity to meet D'Annunzio during his service as a Polish envoy in Rome from 1919 to 1921. The Polish diplomat recalled the meeting in the following way: "I will not forget the charm he exuded with his wonderful Italian speech – he was a great writer and a great patriot". K. Skirmunt, *Moje wspomnienia 1866–1945*, introduction and editing by E. Orlof, A. Pasternak, Rzeszów, 1997.

²² A few days earlier, on 10 September 1919, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye a peace treaty was signed with Austria, which formally granted the Kingdom of SHS Bosnia, Herzegovina, extensive Dalmatian territories, Carniola and Styria, while Italy was given i.a. the Austrian Littoral with Gorizia and Gradisca, the Free City of Trieste, Istria and some of the Dalmatian Islands. The coup in Rijeka was an unexpected blow for Yugoslavia, and in the political sense an outright disaster in the light of the provisions from Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

²³ "Gabryel D'Aannunzio zajął na czele ochotników Rjekę na rzecz Włoch", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 16 September 1919, no. 252, p. 1.

²⁴ "Dramatyczne zajęcia w Rjece", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 17 September 1919, no. 253, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Fiume is the city's Italian name, although today the name Rijeka is used in all languages except Hungarian; "D'Annunzio maître de Fiume", *Le Figaro*, 15 September 1919, no. 257, p. 2.

truth, it is Fiume, there is only one love and that is Fiume! Fiume is like a lighthouse shining over a sea of lies... I am a soldier and volunteer, exhausted by war, I believe that I am fulfilling the will of the entire Italian nation by announcing the annexation of Fiume!"²⁷ The words spoken by Il Vate were not reflected in his expectations – the Italian nation, or at least its government representatives, were not planning to annex Rijeka through a coup.

The political and press responses after the coup in Rijeka

D'Annunzio's coup d'état was initially disregarded both in the press and in the conference circles in Paris. The newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* published on its pages the indifferent information quoting D'Annunzio's letter, written shortly before he marched on Rijeka. The sentence betraying his intentions was aptly poetic: "Tomorrow's dawn will be a beautiful dawn".²⁸ Such turn of events meant that D'Annunzio's takeover of Rijeka was not an accident, but a planned action. We can presume that the Italian poet was pleased when *Le Figaro* unthinkingly referred to him as the "master of Fiume". On the other hand, from 14 to 16 September 1919 the Belgrade paper *Politika* thundered about it and openly wrote about a raid on Rijeka, its annexation and the Italian dictatorship.²⁹

In the following days the thunderous tone of *Politika* did not desist. Also the French press realised that the events in Rijeka could have negative consequences for maintaining world peace. From 15 September 1919, *Le Petit Parisien* informed about Prime Minister Nitti's condemnation of D'Annunzio's coup, and drew attention to the consternation of the Italian delegation in Paris. The events in Rijeka began to be called what it was – a coup.³⁰ The next article in the French daily wrote about the French President Georges Clemenceau's agitation during the peace conference as the effect of D'Annunzio's coup. The number of the poet's supporters took a worrying shape, according to *Le Petit Parisien* approximately 10,000 lower-ranking military.³¹

Meanwhile, the Polish press, unlike the French, did not write about Fiume, but about Rijeka.³² The pages of *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* reported that the

²⁷ Translation by the author, based on G. Reale, *Un faro luminoso che splende in mezzo ad un mare di abiezione* (parte seconda), <http://www.eticamente.net/2014/09/un-faro-luminoso-che-splende-in-mezzo-ad-un-mare-di-abiezione-parte-seconda.html> (access: 30 April 2017).

²⁸ "Le coup de main de D'Annunzio sur Fiume désavoué par le gouvernement italien", *Le Petit Parisien*, 14 September 1919, no. 15559, p. 1.

²⁹ "Препад на Ријечи", *Политика*, 14 September 1919, no. 4172, p. 2; "Препад на Ријечи", *Политика*, 15 September 1919, no. 4173, pp. 1–2.

³⁰ "M. Nitti le condamne", *Le Petit Parisien*, 15 September 1919, no. 15560, p. 1.

³¹ "Le Conseil Suprême a délibéré hier sur les événements de Fiume", *Le Petit Parisien*, 16 September 1919, no. 15561, p. 1.

³² The name of Fiume was at that time used also by i.a. the Swiss newspaper "Gazette de Lausanne" and the American *New York Times*. The international circles seemed to become divided

number of D'Annunzio's volunteers reached 35,000 men, however these estimates in comparison to *Le Petit Parisien's* should be considered as considerably inflated.³³ In any case, D'Annunzio's actions were not identified with the official position of the Italian government. Successive articles published on the pages of the IKC and other Polish newspapers attest to this attitude. In a report from the celebrations of the 49th anniversary of the unification of Italy there was no mention of D'Annunzio's wilfulness,³⁴ and he was perceived merely as marginal in the current politics of the Italian government, while *Głos Polski* dismissed Il Vate as a man with delusions of grandeur.³⁵

However, the Prime Minister Nitti gathered positive reviews in the Polish press. *Głos Polski* considered him to be a champion of "good Italian policy",³⁶ while at the same time noting the problems that Nitti faced as a result of D'Annunzio's coup. It was supported by the reaction of English diplomats, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the events in Rijeka, and even threatened to send their fleet to the Adriatic coast. The strong English response was conditioned by the ongoing negotiations between the Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Nitti. The head of the English government felt deceived by Nitti's assurances about his intention to find a compromise regarding the Rijeka issue, when D'Annunzio marched into the city under the Italian flag, created a provisional government on behalf of Italy, and at the same time rejected the suggestions of Italian generals to withdraw from the city.³⁷ Lloyd George's trust towards the Italian government dipped significantly, especially as, according to *Gazeta Lwowska*, the last English soldiers stationed in Rijeka were mocked and whistled at by D'Annunzio troops.³⁸

France took a different position from England regarding the events in Rijeka, and was willing to reduce the importance of D'Annunzio's coup in the diplomatic circles, in an attempt to maintain the balance between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS. Meanwhile, the Americans declared that they could accept the Italian demands regarding Rijeka; this position was delivered by the US senator Henry

at that time with regard to the name of Rijeka into Slavic (including Polish and Yugoslavian) and Western (including French, Swiss, and American). See "D'Annunzio condottiere", *Gazette de Lausanne*, 16 September 1919, no. 253, p. 1; "Wilson won't discuss Fiume until D'Annunzio goes", *New York Times*, 25 September 1919, no. 22528, p. 1.

³³ Meanwhile, *Gazeta Lwowska* reported D'Annunzio's three and a half thousand volunteers. The same was probably meant also in the account of the Kraków-based *Kurier*, although the printed information indicated a number ten times higher; see "Armia D'Annunzia wynosi 35.000 ochotników", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 18 September 1919, no. 254, p. 7; "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 20 September 1919, no. 217, p. 2; "Le Conseil Suprême a délibéré hier sur les évènements de Fiume", *Le Petit Parisien*, 16 September 1919, no. 15561, p. 1.

³⁴ "W dzień święta zjednoczenia Włoch", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 20 September 1919, no. 256, p. 1.

³⁵ "Echa poetyckiego zamachu stanu", *Głos Polski. Dziennik Polityczny, Społeczny i Literacki*, 18 September 1919, no. 256, p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Zajęcie Rieki przez ochotników włoskich", *Postępy*, 18 September 1919, no. 215, p. 2.

³⁸ "D'Annunzio wziął Rijekę", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 16 September 1919, no. 213, p. 3.

Cabot Lodge.³⁹ Moreover, D'Annunzio was favourably described in the American press. According to the reports of *Gazeta Lwowska*, Il Vate was being compared in the USA to the nineteenth-century hero of Italian unification, Giuseppe Garibaldi.⁴⁰

The American position was inconsistent and incomprehensible due to the friendly relations between Prince Alexander and the President of the USA, Thomas Woodrow Wilson. On 12 February 1919 the heir to the Yugoslavian throne was even a guest at an audience with Wilson, where they discussed the shape of post-war borders on the Balkan territory, with particular focus on the Adriatic problem.⁴¹ France, the USA and the United Kingdom thus failed to form an effective, unanimous and compromise policy regarding the Rijeka crisis, taking into account the context of the Italian-Yugoslavian relations.

The fiasco of diplomatic efforts in the Rijeka crisis issue

From September 1919 Southern Slavs in Rijeka were being persecuted by D'Annunzio's supporters. Press headlines reported Italian round-ups of "Yugoslavs".⁴² Far from disregarding these reports, the authorities of the Kingdom of SHS considered a military recapture of the city.⁴³ There were efforts to appease the tense situation during the talks in Paris, where on 20 September 1919 guidelines were sent to the military coalition in Opatija, according to which the troops faithful to the Italian government were to leave Rijeka. All the soldiers remaining in the city were to be given an ultimatum to leave Rijeka within twenty-four hours. After they failed to meet this ultimatum, the coalition troops were to enter the city.⁴⁴

Admiral Enrico Millo⁴⁵ tried to avert the situation, and in agreement with the Italian government travelled to the vicinity of Rijeka to win over D'Annunzio's

³⁹ At that time, senator Lodge was serving as head of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Senate. He was an influential politician. His view could therefore raise legitimate concerns on the side of the Yugoslavian government, as well as affect the disappointment of the prince regent Alexander; "Zamach stanu d'Annunzia", *Głos Polski. Dziennik Polityczny, Społeczny i Literacki*, 17 September 1919, no. 255, p. 2.

⁴⁰ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 25 September 1919, no. 221, p. 3.

⁴¹ Архив Југославије (hereafter: AJ), Збирка Јована Јовановића Пижона, ref. no. 80–10–48/862, "Регент Александар у аудијенцији код Вилсона", телеграм.

⁴² "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 23 September 1919, no. 219, p. 3.

⁴³ "Afera D'Annunzia", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 19 September 1919, no. 216, p. 5.

⁴⁴ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 20 September 1919, no. 217, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Activities of Admiral Millo were not aimed at achieving stability in the region. From November 1918 he served as the Governor of Dalmatia – another contested territory in the Yugoslavian-Italian relations. Obtaining influence in Rijeka could strengthen his position in this contested region. Such a scenario seems all the more likely that Admiral Millo was a respected military man who could naturally count on army's support, while D'Annunzio represented Italian intelligentsia. M. Knox, *To The Threshold of Power, 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*, vol. 1, New York, 2007, pp. 250–251.

supporters. However, Il Vate gave instructions to arrest Admiral Millo immediately on his arrival in Rijeka.⁴⁶

The countries of the Entente did not have a solid plan for intervention in Rijeka, and differed in their attitudes to D'Annunzio, who was gaining increasing support in the Italian army. In all, the ultimatum of the military coalition was never issued, and the variant of an open armed conflict was replaced by ineffective diplomatic methods. In this way, in October 1919 the idea of implementing President Wilson's concept was revived; a few months earlier he had developed a model of dividing the disputed territories between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS. According to the concept, Italy would be offered Trieste and Pula, and Yugoslavia – Rijeka and Ljubljana. Italy would also receive the Učka massif and the islands of Vis and Lošinj, but would give up any claims to northern Dalmatia. The Yugoslavian fleet would be reduced in size, and the disputed territories demilitarised.⁴⁷ This concept was rejected in April 1919 by Baron Sonnino, but a few months later, with no other solution at hand, representatives of American diplomatic circles proposed taking it into account again.

In any case, in the context of Wilson's concept and the plans to implement it the words of Milenko Vesnić seemed rather vague. In the autumn of 1919 the Serbian diplomat stated that his country had always intended to maintain friendly relations with Italy, and that the Adriatic question should be resolved with a compromise. He opined that "In order for such a solution to occur, Italy, as a Mediterranean power and master of the Adriatic Sea, must renounce any intention to extend its sovereignty onto one of the points of our coast. However, should Italy insist on its aspirations, this would produce a result opposed to the interests of both countries".⁴⁸ Naturally, Vesnić meant Italians waiving their claim to Rijeka. Such a variant was also taken into account within Wilson's concept, but the Yugoslavian side simultaneously sought to regain Trieste. The position of the Kingdom of SHS was strong enough for the Yugoslavian diplomats in Paris to talk openly of the possibility of an armed intervention in Rijeka. A possible conflict was not perceived on the Yugoslavian side as a war with Italy, but only with the rebel D'Annunzio. Military recapture of Rijeka was supported even by Prince Alexander himself.⁴⁹

And so, in early October 1919 armies were moved from Belgrade and Zagreb into the areas around Rijeka, under Serbian and Croatian flags. According to *Le Petit Parisien*, the population of the Kingdom of SHS supported an armed intervention against D'Annunzio.⁵⁰ At the same time twelve American warships gathered on

⁴⁶ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 24 September 1919, no. 220, p. 2.

⁴⁷ O'Brien, *Mussolini in the First World War*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 1 October 1919, no. 226, p. 2.

⁴⁹ "W przededniu wojny Jugosławii z Włochami", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 4 October 1919, no. 270, p. 7.

⁵⁰ "Les volontaires sud-slaves veulent marcher sur Fiume", *Le Petit Parisien*, 3 October 1919, no. 15578, p. 3.



2. Headline in *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* highlighting the threat of a war over Rijeka. Source: “Wojna między Jugosławią a Włochami?”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 9 October 1919, no. 275, p. 6

the Adriatic coast, threatening to block the Italian fleet. Officially, the Americans set out on a mission to maintain peace in the region, but their positions on the Adriatic pointed indirectly to the support given to Yugoslavia in keeping with the anti-Italian expansion policy promoted by President Wilson.⁵¹ Even in the face of these events, D’Annunzio announced that he had no intention of leaving Rijeka.⁵²

On 9 October 1919, the paper *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* published a telling commentary on the events surrounding the Italian-Yugoslavian dispute over Rijeka. It was thought that a war may take place: “the tension between Yugoslavia and Italy has grown enormously”.⁵³ Rumours reached the Polish press that King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy announced he would abdicate if D’Annunzio did not withdraw. It was speculated that a possible successor of the king might be a friend of D’Annunzio, the Duke of Aosta.⁵⁴ The French and Serbian press did not mention similar plans, but on the pages of *Le Petit Parisien* it was reported that there was a possibility that the Duke of Aosta would travel to Rijeka in order to negotiate with D’Annunzio. However, the idea met with the Duke’s refusal.⁵⁵

It is worth noting the interesting press analyses surrounding the intensified conflict over Rijeka in the second half of 1919. In *Dziennik Poznański* it was said that Italy’s claims to Rijeka and the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea were based on historical issues, as Italians considered themselves the heirs of the Republic of Venice, which included Istria and Dalmatia.⁵⁶ However, the Yugoslavian aspirations were conditioned by ethnographic matters, since Italians were an immigrant community within the disputed territory, and Southern Slavs were the native

⁵¹ “Położenie w Rjece zaostrza się coraz bardziej”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 6 October 1919, no. 272, p. 7.

⁵² “D’Annunzio refuse d’évacuer Fiume”, *Le Petit Parisien*, 12 October 1919, no. 15587, p. 1.

⁵³ “Wojna między Jugosławią a Włochami?”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 9 October 1919, no. 275, p. 6.

⁵⁴ This referred to Prince Emanuele Filiberto d’Aosta, born on 13 January 1869; “Afera d’Annunzia przyczyną abdykacji króla?”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 15 October 1919, no. 281, p. 8.

⁵⁵ “Le Duc D’Aoste n’ira pas en mission à Fiume”, *Le Petit Parisien*, 8 October 1919, no. 15583, p. 3.

⁵⁶ The Republic of Venice existed between 697 and 1797. Its territories under the rule of the last Doge of Venice, Lodovico Manin, indeed included Istria and Dalmatia, but not Rijeka.

inhabitants. In any case, this state of affairs was reflected by the smaller number of Italians than South Slavs on the northern coasts of the Adriatic Sea (but not in Rijeka itself!). This is confirmed also by the fact that, according to the cited article, “if we look at the ethnographic map, even a German one, we will see that the whole North Adriatic coast is inhabited by three branches of one Yugoslavian nation”.⁵⁷

The problem of Italian aspirations on the contested territory was, according to the newspaper, also a cultural problem, an attempt to “Italianise” territories populated by people with a developed national identity, attached to their South Slavic heritage. According to the quoted article, “the suburbs of Trieste alone have a Slavic character, not unlike Pulja or Rijeka”.⁵⁸

The last issue related to the Italian-Yugoslavian dispute over Rijeka were economic matters. Italians demanded the annexation of the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea, as in this way they would have direct links with the ports of Trieste and Rijeka. However, these were not links developed through a compromise, historical process or natural political circumstances, but only as a result of Italian expansion and the resulting discrimination and attempts to destroy the Southern Slavs.⁵⁹

It is also worth noting that from 1882 Rijeka had the third largest refinery in Europe, which as a result of Milutin Barać’s efforts had achieved a leading position in oil extraction. The control of “black gold” deposits was an invigorating factor for every country, and in particular for Italy, striving for independence in the refining industry, as in early 1920s this segment of the Italian industry was controlled by two large companies, the American Standard Oil and the British-Dutch Royal Dutch Shell. It is no wonder that Italians wanted to keep Rijeka at all costs. Some studies have suggested that the activities of D’Annunzio were inspired by Nitti’s government, and that *Il Vate* simply got out of hand,⁶⁰ however, such opinions are not supported by facts.

Power play around the Rijeka dispute

At the end of 1919, the Entente states had yet to find a constructive way to settle the Rijeka dispute. In the subsequent months, one proposal chased another, offering different concepts of resolving the Italian-Yugoslavian problem. Nitti’s government developed a plan to create a buffer state, consisting of Rijeka territory as well as some of the Adriatic coast. The existence of such a state was supported by D’Annunzio, however on condition that Italian administration would be established within it.⁶¹ The concept was accepted by the English and French,

⁵⁷ “Jugosłowiańszczyzna i Włochy”, *Dziennik Poznański*, 17 October 1919, no. 240, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Crude Oil Processing in Rijeka 1882–2004*, ed. V. Đekić, Rijeka 2004, p. 16.

⁶¹ “Rjeka będzie wolnem państwem”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 16 October 1919, no. 282, p. 8.

but opposed by Americans. The Yugoslavian opinion was not taken into consideration at all.⁶² However, the rulers of the Kingdom of SHS, contrary to the view presented in September 1919 by Senator Lodge, could count on President Wilson, who increasingly openly advocated limiting Italy's expansive policy, adding to the inconsistency of American foreign policy in this matter.⁶³

Due to the US opposition, Nitti's concept fell through, and Americans went even further in their actions when on 9 December 1919 Wilson's trusted official, a member of the American Commission To Negotiate Peace, Frank Polk, announced a memorandum which questioned Italy's right to Rijeka and the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea. These rights were granted to the Kingdom of SHS.⁶⁴ The content of the memorandum was supported by the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, as well as the head of the political section of the British delegation in Paris, Eyre Crowe.⁶⁵ The Yugoslavian side's reaction to the memorandum was somewhat ambiguous, as in addition to the Adriatic issue it included provisions according to which the signatories of the document were to recognise the independence of Albania. This meant that the strong influences of the Kingdom of SHS in northern Albania would be substantially restricted, and that a possibility of Italy's expansion to the Albanian territory would present itself at the same time. Yugoslavian diplomats were not convinced by assertions in the memorandum securing the interests of the Kingdom of SHS in northern Albania, including the provision of control, use and possible expansion of railway communication with major cities in the region.⁶⁶

Despite the efforts of American diplomacy, the provisions of the memorandum were not implemented. Meanwhile, on 14 January 1920 the leaders of England and France unexpectedly signed an agreement with Italy which gave the latter Rijeka and part of the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea in exchange for a guarantee that Italy would waive any claims to Northern Albania. The agreement was a reversal of the content of the December 1919 memorandum. Such a policy of the coalition was condemned by President Wilson, who threatened that

⁶² It is worth noting that on 27 November 1919 in Neuilly-sur-Seine a treaty was signed with Bulgaria, under which Yugoslavia was granted Macedonian territories with Strumica. These arrangements did not affect the Adriatic question, but without a doubt had a soothing effect on the Yugoslavian diplomacy in Paris. After all, the question of the Kingdom of SHS's claims to the Bulgarian territories met with the approval of the Entente states, and in Bulgaria the provisions of the treaty were considered a national disaster. L.I. Hassiotis, "Macedonia, 1912–1923. From the Multinational Empire to Nation State", in: *The History of Macedonia*, ed. I. Koliopoulos, Thessaloniki, 2007, p. 257.

⁶³ "Ameryka odrzuciła żądanie włoskie co do Rjeki", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 31 October 1919, no. 297, p. 7.

⁶⁴ E. Luku, "The Diplomacy of the Great Powers Towards Albania in the Context of the 'Adriatic Question'", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3 (2012), pp. 292–293.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 292–293.

Americans would withdraw from the peace treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919. In this situation, both the English and the French deemed the provisions of January agreement with Italy to be void, and the impasse in the Adriatic issue deepened.⁶⁷

At the beginning of February 1920, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* reported that the Italian fleet stationed at Ancona and an infantry regiment in Venice received orders from the Italian government to recapture Rijeka. The soldiers rebelled and declared that they would rather join D'Annunzio than to bombard Italian cities. By Italian cities the soldiers meant also Rijeka. This situation precisely reflected the degree of complexity in the Adriatic issue.⁶⁸ It was due to the protracted attempts to regulate the status of Rijeka and the northern coast of the Adriatic, as well as due to a conflict with Albania,⁶⁹ and intensified activity of Italian communists and fascists, that on 15 June 1920 Nitti's government resigned. The next Prime Minister of Italy was a statesman and head of four earlier offices, Giovanni Giolitti, who appointed Count Carlo Sforza as Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁷⁰

A brilliant comment on the change of government in Italy was published in *Kurier Poznański*, which on 18 June 1920 wrote about the attempt to take control of the confusion which Italy was experiencing at the time. The task was given to "an 80-year-old old man, whom Italian crowds, overwhelmed with war enthusiasm, wanted to kill as a traitor to the national cause, who was the most hated politician in Italy".⁷¹ In reality, Giolitti opposed a war with Germany, and favoured an alliance with this country. The appointment of Giolitti's government proved the success of this option of foreign politics. His government was to provide the country with a solution to the Adriatic and Albanian issue, as well as maintain a strong and unyielding policy in relations with the Americans, the English and the French, against whom the Italians harboured a grudge because of their shaky attitudes during the peace conference talks.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Wyprawa włoska przeciw D'Annunziowi", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 7 February 1920, no. 37, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Albanians resisted Italian aspirations. The dispute culminated in battles of Vlora fought in June and July of 1920. Albanians, led by Ahmet Lepenica, Qazim Koculi and Selama Musai, on 12 June 1920 managed to push the Italians out of the city. That day, Selam Musai died a hero's death, protecting his younger comrades-in-arms with his own body. The conflict ended with an Albanian-Italian protocol, signed on 2 August 1920, according to which Italians relinquished their claims to Vlora. The ceasefire was declared three days later. The French press wrote about the start and end of the conflict, although it is worth noting that in early August 1920 the topic dominating *L'Écho de Paris*, and *Le Figaro* was the looming Bolshevik attack on Poland; "Accord italo-albanais", *L'Écho de Paris*, 4 August 1920, no. 13136, p. 3; "Accord italo-albanais", *Le Figaro*, 4 August 1920, no. 216, p. 2.

⁷⁰ "Nowy gabinet włoski", *Głos Polski. Dziennik Polityczny, Społeczny i Literacki*, 18 June 1920, no. 159, p. 2.

⁷¹ "Przesilenie polityczne w Europie", *Kurier Poznański*, 18 June 1920, no. 137, p. 1.

⁷² Ibid.

A summary of the dispute over Rijeka and the Northern Adriatic coast was presented in July 1920 in *Przegląd Narodowy*: “satisfying all the demands of the Italian nationalists regarding the Adriatic Sea, aimed at making it a *mare nostrum*, is impossible and would lead to a war with Yugoslavia, whose outbreak seems probable in the future”.⁷³ It is also worth referring to another text published in *Przegląd Narodowy*, as it was this magazine which in August of that year drew attention to the role of France, which at that time began to seek support among Central and East European countries and in the Balkans, particularly in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The forming official links between the countries raised Italy's concern and contributed to Rome's stricter policy regarding the Adriatic territories.⁷⁴ It is worth remembering that fascists tried to use the unstable international situation which Italy was in at the time, for instance in propaganda, headed by *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, a fascist veteran organisation formed by Benito Mussolini on 23 March 1919 in Milan.⁷⁵

Successful diplomacy of Count Sforza

However, the head of diplomacy in Giolitti's government was an opponent of fascists and, above all, a politician of compromise. It is Count Sforza who should be given credit for bringing about a breakthrough in Italian-Yugoslavian relations. The Tuscan diplomat had been in diplomatic service in Belgrade, and during the Great War proclaimed the need to normalise Italy's relations with Serbia. And so Count Sforza, already in July 1920, began negotiations with the head of Yugoslavian diplomacy, Trumbić. The seasoned Italian diplomat assured his partner in the talks that even in the name of loss of popularity in his own country, he was ready to defend Italy's interests and build a lasting friendship with the Kingdom of SHS.⁷⁶

⁷³ “Przegląd spraw bieżących: polityka zagraniczna”, *Przegląd Narodowy*, 20 (July 1920), no. 5, p. 803–804.

⁷⁴ “Przegląd spraw bieżących: polityka zagraniczna”, *Przegląd Narodowy*, 20 (August–September 1920), no. 6, p. 947–948.

⁷⁵ On 9 November 1921, the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* transformed into the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*). A very interesting study, which describes the formation of Italian fascism after the Great War, is a propaganda publication by the fascist Ugo Cuesta *Nel Solco del Littorio. Corso di cultura fascista*, published in Bologna in 1940. Already in the introduction, the study claimed that Italy was in the process of building a “new fascist humanity in the times of Mussolini”. The ideological perspective of Italian fascists in the publication reflected the way they did politics, also in the Yugoslavian context. According to Cuesta, “The fascist state wants to maintain the best possible relations with all those who have been enlivened with good will [...] fascism has eliminated a serious dispute with Yugoslavia [...] the fraternal ties between the Italians and Hungarians are dear to the hearts of both peoples”. The publication contained many more absurdities of this sort.

⁷⁶ Count Carlo Sforza's diplomatic activities after the Great War has been described by the Italian historian Emilio R. Papa, *Stati uniti d'Europa nel pensiero di Carlo Sforza (1919–1946)*, in: *1945–1946 Le origini della Repubblica*, ed. G. Monina, Soveria Mannelli, 2007, pp. 119–152.

At the same time, both Count Sforza and Trumbić led cautious negotiations with the Americans, the English, and the French, gradually isolating the influence of these countries on the Rijeka issue.

Negotiating an Italian-Yugoslavian agreement were accelerated by further activities of D'Annunzio, who on 8 September 1920 proclaimed the so-called Italian Regency of Carnaro (Reggenza Italiana del Carnaro), a quasi-state including Rijeka and the surrounding territories. D'Annunzio sought to annex the Regency to Italy on the principle of broad autonomy. At that time, Il Vate's position was established in Rijeka to the point that on 12 September 1920 a series of postage stamps with his likeness was issued. The stamps, printed by the Milan company Bertieri & Vanzetti, were one of the symbolic attributes of D'Annunzio's power in Rijeka.⁷⁷ The date of their issue was not accidental, as they entered circulation on the anniversary of the coup carried out by Il Vate. On this day, four special stamps designed by Adolfo de Carolis were also printed. Each of them was a propaganda symbol of the coup in Rijeka. In November 1920, postage stamps with the name of the Italian Regency of Carnaro⁷⁸ were printed. These insignificant, it would seem, gestures in fact reflected D'Annunzio's strengthening power in the city.

In any case, the formation of Giolitti's cabinet meant better quality of Italian-Yugoslavian relations. Further initiatives of Count Sforza led to meetings between representatives of Italy and the Kingdom of SHS, held on 7 November 1920 in Rapallo, in the district of San Michele di Pagana.⁷⁹ The Italian side was represented by Prime Minister Giolitti, Foreign Minister Sforza, and Minister of War Ivanoe Bonomi, and Yugoslavian – by Prime Minister Vesnić (in the position from May 1920), Foreign Minister Trumbić, and Finance Minister Kosta Stojanović. The result of the five-day talks between the politicians was the signing of a treaty which regulated most of the contentious issues. Provisions of the agreement were a success for the Italian diplomacy, because – according to Henryk Batowski – the treaty of Rapallo: “implemented [...] the majority of Italian demands”.⁸⁰

Based on the decisions of the treaty signed on 12 November 1920, Italy was given the Austrian Littoral of Trieste, entire Istria with a large number of surrounding islands, western Carniola, two Dalmatian islands and the city of Zadar, while

⁷⁷ Data based on the album *Poštanske Marke Rijeke. Fiume 1918–1924*, available at <http://www.fiume-book.net> (access: 5 September 2016). Given the name of this page, we can safely assume that its authors are Italians or Hungarians. In any case, the album has two names: Croatian and Italian. Reproductions of the stamps have been given comments in English.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Earlier, on 12 October 1920, Count Sforza and minister Trumbić met in Venice. See Wielkopolska Biblioteka Cyfrowa, <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl>, Polish military attaché – reports from Rome and Belgrade from 1920–1923 (the Stanisław Sierpowski collection), information paper of 15 October 1920, no. 46776/II.

⁸⁰ H. Batowski, *Między dwiema wojnami 1919–1939. Zarys historii dyplomatycznej*, Kraków, 2001, p. 55.



3. Gabriele D'Annunzio (leaning on a walking stick) among his supporters in Rijeka in 1919. Source: photo by Arturo Avolia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org> (accessed: 30 April 2017)

Yugoslavia received Dalmatia.⁸¹ However, the existence of the Carnaro Regency was not recognised, and Rijeka was named the free and independent city of Fiume.⁸² According to Paul N. Hehn, as a result of the treaty's provisions half a million Southern Slavs found themselves within Italian borders, while only a few hundred Italians – within the borders of the Kingdom of SHS.⁸³

It is worth remembering that the representatives of the Yugoslavian government offered several alternative solutions to the issue of the status of Rijeka and the northern coast of the Adriatic Sea (for instance revisiting the debate on the Wilson concept). However, Italians rejected most of these proposals.⁸⁴ The day after signing the treaty, the Polish Telegraphic Agency sent a telegram to Warsaw from Rome, which informed that Italy had been granted direct access to Rijeka and authority over Zadar, as well as several islands off the Adriatic coast. The success of the Italians was attributed primarily to the effective actions of Count Sforza.⁸⁵

However, in the first official government document after the signing of the treaty, Yugoslavian authorities announced that Italy had granted Yugoslavia “some”

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 55–56.

⁸² This state of affairs was regulated by article four of the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty.

⁸³ P.N. Hehn, *A Low Dishonest Decade. The Great Powers, Eastern Europe and the Economic Origins of World War II*, New York–London, 2002, p. 45.

⁸⁴ “Rokowania Jugosławii i Włoch”, *Kurier Poznański*, 13 November 1920, no. 262, p. 2.

⁸⁵ “Umowa włosko-jugosłowiańska została zawarta”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 13 November 1920, no. 311, p. 7.

territories and formed the Free State of Rijeka. The wording of this document showed the marginalised role of Yugoslavia during the negotiations – the document mentioned granting certain territories, rather than obtaining them by way of a compromise, and did not include the name Fiume, which was to apply in both countries.⁸⁶ The Belgrade newspaper *Politika* consistently wrote about Rijeka, i.a. in the reprint of the signed treaty which was considered to be unfair.⁸⁷

Removal of D'Annunzio from Rijeka

After the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty was signed, the Rijeka issue became secondary in the foreign policy of Vesnić's government. D'Annunzio, on the other hand, was not going to relinquish the city. Il Vate did not accept the Italian-Yugoslavian arrangements, declared himself *duce* of the Free State of Fiume, and declared war on Italy. These decisions sealed his fate. At the end of 1920, Italian army under the command of General Enrico Caviglia marched on Rijeka. On 25 December, the press informed about martial law announced by D'Annunzio in the Carnaro Regency, and the death threat he issued against anyone who dared to enter "his country".⁸⁸

Meanwhile, an account in *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* of 29 December 1920 informed of the siege of Rijeka by Italian troops, and D'Annunzio's retreat.⁸⁹ It turned out that Il Vate's forces were not sufficient to oppose the Italian army. While in Rijeka itself there were attempts to fight, supporters of D'Annunzio surrendered in Zadar and other territories of the Northern Adriatic coast. In reality, the Italian advance on the city occurred in a way aimed to recapture it as bloodlessly as possible. General Caviglia assumed that Rijeka's food supplies would allow it, according to his estimates, to be blockaded for two weeks. Meanwhile, other territories controlled by D'Annunzio became affected by famine. Il Vate himself issued an address to the residents, in which he called the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty a "nasty hoax".⁹⁰

Another account in *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, from 30 December 1920, informed that D'Annunzio threatened to blow up the main port and government buildings in Rijeka. The threats were taken seriously by General Caviglia,

⁸⁶ AJ, Двор Краљевине Југославије, ref. no. 74–1/21, "Предлог закона о уговору између Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца и Краљевине Италије, потписан у Рапалу", 12 November 1920, уговор.

⁸⁷ "Савез за Италијом", *Политика*, 13 November 1920, no. 4512, p. 1–2.

⁸⁸ "Ze świata", *Gazeta Lwowska*, 25 December 1920, no. 294, p. 3.

⁸⁹ After the treaty of Rapallo was announced, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, began using the name of Fiume, while the editions of this newspaper prior to 12 November 1920 used the name Rijeka. At the beginning of 1921 it reverted to the original version, acknowledging the artificiality of the name Fiume.

⁹⁰ "Wojska włoskie zajmują Fiume", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 29 December 1920, no. 355, p. 1.

who knew that Il Vate still had a number of young supporters on his side, ready to implement the most absurd ideas of their leader. General Caviglia compared D'Annunzio to a nationalist Lenin.⁹¹ Despite these concerns, the Italians decided to carry out an attack in the centre of the city. Quoting “Il Popolo Romano” as their source, European media reported that General Caviglia attacked the government palace, where D'Annunzio lived.⁹² As a result, demonstrations of poetic and artistic circles were held in Milan. They were organised by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who called on all Italian intelligentsia to support D'Annunzio.⁹³

The Belgrade *Politika*, from 25 December 1920 onwards widely commented on the situation in Rijeka. In addition to the information on the blockaded city⁹⁴ the editors also described D'Annunzio's own attitude, mocking him on the newspaper's pages. They wrote about a “fallen Garibaldi”, about Il Vate's unsuccessful attempts to win over supporters in Croatia, and, expecting his fall, ironically summarised the period of his rule in Rijeka.⁹⁵

The French press did not remain passive towards the events in the city. “L'Écho de Paris” cited the terms of surrender which D'Annunzio announced just before the attack of General Caviglia on the government Palace. Il Vate demanded annexation of the Regency of Carnaro to Italy along with some Dalmatian territories, which under the Italian-Yugoslavian treaty were granted by the Kingdom of SHS.⁹⁶ These demands towards the Italian-Yugoslavian arrangements were absurd. The mere mention of the name of the Carnaro Regency by Il Vate was supposed to show that he lost contact with reality. And so, when General Caviglia rejected the terms of the surrender issued by D'Annunzio, rumours about Il Vate's alleged death leaked to the press, and suicide was suggested.⁹⁷

The problem of Rijeka under the rule of D'Annunzio was settled with the attack of General Caviglia. At the turn of 1921, the press published accounts of the last moments of Il Vate in Rijeka. His actions were, in fact, successive acts of desperation. He first ordered his allies to scatter cards with the words “D'Annunzio greets his executioners” among the soldiers of the Italian army,⁹⁸ then gave the order to burn the forests near Rijeka and blow up a store of gunpowder.⁹⁹ He constantly called on his followers to continue fighting. Vesnić's government offered military

⁹¹ “D'Annunzio nacyonalistycznym Leninem”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 30 December 1920, no. 356, p. 1.

⁹² “Koniec dyktatury d'Annunzia”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 30 December 1920, no. 356, p. 6.

⁹³ “Demonstracja intelektualistów włoskich na rzecz D'Annunzia”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 30 December 1920, no. 356, p. 6.

⁹⁴ “Блокада Ријеке”, *Политика*, 25 December 1920, no. 4554, p. 2–3.

⁹⁵ “Гарибалди и Д'Анунцио and Д'Анунцио и Радић”, *Политика*, 26 December 1920, no. 4555, p. 2.

⁹⁶ “Un sanglant combat aux portes de Fiume”, *L'Écho de Paris*, 27 December 1920, no. 13281, p. 3.

⁹⁷ “D'Annunzio serait mort?”, *L'Écho de Paris*, 28 December 1920, no. 13282, p. 1.

⁹⁸ “D'Annunzio zamordowany?”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 31 December 1920, no. 357, p. 6.

⁹⁹ “Rijeka w łunie pożarów i dymów”, *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 1 January 1921, no. 1, p. 7.

support to General Caviglia, who regularly fought D'Annunzio's most persistent volunteers.¹⁰⁰

The turn of events forced the Italians to take a more decisive action in Rijeka – efforts had to be made not to increase the scale of devastation in the city. For this reason, Giolitti's government promised amnesty to all of D'Annunzio's volunteers, provided that they laid down their weapons immediately.¹⁰¹ Volunteers gave in, and Il Vate issued a proclamation stating that Italy was not worth dying for. After the incident, the press commented that "D'Annunzio's operetta has come to an end".¹⁰² The formal surrender of Rijeka took place on 31 December 1920.¹⁰³

Rijeka's status in the early years after D'Annunzio's surrender

After these events, demonstrations were held in Rome, Trieste and Venice in support of D'Annunzio. In the Italian capital they even tried to attack the house of Prime Minister Giolitti, but Il Vate's followers were fought off by the police. The turn of events showed that D'Annunzio obtained broad support in Italy.¹⁰⁴ As a result of these demonstrations, the fallen dictator of Rijeka was able to safely return to Italy, although the press reported that the government excluded this possibility; however, Prime Minister Giolitti soon resigned his office.¹⁰⁵

According to the estimates of the paper *Idea Nazionale*, four hundred people died in clashes with D'Annunzio's volunteers, and many were wounded.¹⁰⁶ Soon after Il Vate's resignation, authority was briefly taken over by Riccardo Gigante, followed

¹⁰⁰ "Stanowisko Jugosławii spowodowało rząd włoski do stanowczego wystąpienia przeciw D'Annunziowi", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 31 December 1920, no. 357, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ "Ochotnicy D'Annunzia składają broń", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 31 December 1920, no. 357, p. 6.

¹⁰² "Operetka D'Annunzia skończona", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 1 January 1921, no. 1, p. 7.

¹⁰³ In his act of capitulation, D'Annunzio harshly criticised General Caviglia, and at the same time promised that he would leave Rijeka with his military supporters, hand over the war and trade fleets to the government, as well as weapons, ammunition, horses and other military equipment, that his supporters would leave the Adriatic islands, and let military police into Rijeka. D'Annunzio also accepted the provisions of the Rapallo Treaty; "Капитулација Ријеке", *Политика*, 2 January 1921, no. 4562, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ It was decided on account of a number of issues. Before the Rijeka coup, D'Annunzio was a figure recognised not only in Europe, but also worldwide. His works were translated into many languages, and in the Western cultural and intellectual circles the Rijeka coup was often seen as an expression of Il Vate's great patriotism. The international appeal of his work can be attested by the popularity of his 1889 work entitled *The Pleasure (Il Placere)*, which under the name *El Placer* was published in Spanish in 1900 in Mexico and Argentina. In my private resources I have a scan of this publication, available in the library of the University of Nuevo León. Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Dirección General de Bibliotecas, ref. no. A615-p, "El Placer", 1900.

¹⁰⁵ "D'Annunzio żyje!", *Gazeta Poranna*, 1 January 1921, no. 5613, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ "Ochotnicy D'Annunzia składają broń", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 31 December 1920, no. 357, p. 6.

by Antonio Grossich, who on 31 December 1920 became head of the provisional government of the Free City of Fiume. Meanwhile, D'Annunzio returned to his homeland near Pescara, where his political activity became peripheral. In this way, the Italian-Yugoslavian dispute over Rijeka was settled, although in the city nominally free and independent a gradual process of mounting Italian attributes of power began.¹⁰⁷

Rounding off the issue of the Yugoslavian-Italian dispute over Rijeka were the events started in the autumn of 1922, when Benito Mussolini took power in Italy. One of the early consequences of establishing Mussolini's fascist rule was the return to the Rijeka issue as part of the relations with the Kingdom of SHS. In mid-September 1923, the authority over the Free State of Fiume was taken by an Italian general, Gaetano Giardino, who was to prepare the city administration for an Italian takeover. The issue of Rijeka was resumed and regulated under the Roman pact, which included an Italian-Yugoslavian agreement and a pact of friendship and cooperation, signed on 27 January 1924 in the Palazzo Chigi in Rome.¹⁰⁸

The Italian-Yugoslavian agreement on Rijeka revised the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo. It was agreed that the Free State of Fiume ceased to exist and was included into the borders of Italy, and the territory of Sušak was placed under Yugoslavian administration. In addition, the Kingdom of SHS was guaranteed at least fifty-year access to the port of Rijeka, and Yugoslavian national minorities were protected with a special status. The annex to the agreement detailed a procedure for the economic activity of the Kingdom of SHS in Rijeka. The two countries assured each other in the pact about friendship and cooperation, in a rather generic form, that they would not take any hostile actions against each other and establish cooperation in the event of international threats. The pact was given a five-year validity clause. All the documents were signed by the head of government and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Benito Mussolini, and on the Yugoslavian side the then Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Momčilo Ninčić.¹⁰⁹ Bilateral ratification of the documents took place on 5 March 1924.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ D'Annunzio's first work after the end of his rule in Rijeka was the poem entitled *Notturmo* (*Night*), with extensive sections written as early as in 1916. They had therefore no connection with the events described here. In the following years, D'Annunzio published more than a dozen works. In 1922 he survived a failed assassination attempt, and in 1924 he received the title of Prince of Montenevoso from the hands of King Victor Emmanuel III. Il Vate never supported Hitler or the Nazis. He openly objected to bringing Italy closer to the Third Reich in the 1930s. He died on 1 March 1938 in Gardone Riviera in Lombardy. Information based on Regione Abruzzo, <http://www.regione.abruzzo.it>, *Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938): Narratore, drammaturgo e poeta*, (access: 8 September 2016).

¹⁰⁸ “Jugoslovensko-italijanski pakt o prijateljstvu i saradnji od 27. januara 1924 and Jugoslovensko-italijanski sporazum o Rijeci od 27. januara 1924”, in: *Jugoslavija 1918–1988*, pp. 174–176.

¹⁰⁹ Fragments of both documents have been prepared by Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević and published. The full content can be found on <http://www.worldlii.org> (access: 18 October 2016).

¹¹⁰ АЈ, Народна скупштина Краљевине Југославије, ref. no. 72–46–189, “Закон о споразуму у Ријеци закључен између Краљевине СХС и Италије и допуних конвенцијама споразума”, 5 March 1924.

The day after the Roman Pact was concluded, three Italian torpedo boats sailed towards Rijeka. From 28 January 1924, the city was under full control of Italy, while Italian-Yugoslavian resolutions were ratified over a month later. The European press claimed at the time that Italy had annexed Rijeka, although in fact it was a legal capture of the city by way of peace negotiations.¹¹¹ Additionally, Italy and the Kingdom of SHS developed initial plans for a trade agreement.¹¹²

It is worth noting that *Postęp* drew attention to the fact that the unexpected breakthrough in Italian-Yugoslavian relations was largely due to the diplomatic sense of the secretary general of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Salvatore Contarini, the author of most of the provisions in the Roman pact and the architect of the stabilisation in the relations with the Kingdom of SHS.¹¹³ Equally interesting comments were published in *Dziennik Poznański*, which in February 1924 presented the reactions of the Italian press to the agreement. It emphasised that great credit should be given to Mussolini for creating international peace. The signing of the Roman pact was recognised as a guarantee of a long-term peace in the

¹¹¹ "Aneksya Rijeki przez Włochy", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 29 January 1924, no. 29, p. 1.

¹¹² Such an agreement did not take place in the interwar period; "Włosko-jugosłowiańskie układy handlowe", *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny*, 30 January 1924, no. 30, p. 9.

¹¹³ Salvatore Contarini has not been given much space in Polish studies; even on the pages of the cited *Postęp* his name was erroneously printed as Contanini. Meanwhile, the diplomat, born on 6 April 1867 in Rome, played an important role in interwar Italian foreign policy. Two years after graduating from law at the University of Palermo in 1891, he joined the diplomatic service in the government of Antonio Starabba. During his dozen years in the Italian Foreign Ministry he held various positions in Greece, Portugal and in African countries. In 1914 he returned to the country, where he held a high position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He remained critical of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando's government, and openly criticised the activities of his immediate superior in 1914–1919, Baron Sidney Sonnino. In the government of Francesco Nitti, Contarini was appointed undersecretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then secretary general of the Ministry. Under the rule of Giovanni Giolitti he met Count Carlo Sforza. His collaboration with the distinguished diplomat undoubtedly influenced the dynamics of his career and his views on the issues of Italian diplomacy. In any event, Contarini did not follow the advice of Count Sforza, already out of the Ministry, who in 1922 suggested that he should not join Mussolini's government. Count Sforza understood the threats created by fascist politics. However, Contarini was not affiliated with any political party, and so he believed that the upheavals in the turbulent political landscape of Italy would have no effect on his career within the Italian Foreign Ministry. The diplomat soon realised the dangers of Mussolini's expansive foreign policy. He abandoned his position on 6 April 1926. He was also in the Senate, but his activity in the second half of 1920s and in 1930s did not bring exceptional merits, although during World War II he briefly cooperated with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Raffaele Guariglia, in the context of developing a ceasefire concept for Italy. Contarini died in Rome on 17 September 1945. A great advantage of his quiet yet productive work in the Italian Foreign Ministry was the stabilisation of relations with the Kingdom of SHS, and maintaining warm relations with the Soviet Union. H.J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period 1918–1940*, Westport, 1997, p. 21, pp. 25–26; S. Romano, *Le altre facce della storia*, Milano, 2010, p. 97–98; "Pakt rzymski", *Postęp*, 29 January 1924, no. 24, p. 1.

Balkans, as it defused the potential cause of conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia that the unclear status of Rijeka had been.¹¹⁴

The reactions of the Italian press were no less exaggerated than those of Croatian government publications, which stressed the enormous importance of the Roman pact for the Adriatic and the Balkans, and even for the whole of Europe. A Zagreb government letter stated that Italian-Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian-French¹¹⁵ agreements protect post-war peace treaties constituting “the foundation of a new order of things in Europe”.¹¹⁶ It was also stressed how important the final settlement of Rijeka's provisional status was, and “a better quality” in politics between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS was announced.¹¹⁷ These reactions, uncritically quoted in *Dziennik Poznański*, reflected the positions of the governments of Italy and the Kingdom of SHS.

Conclusion

The issue of regulating Rijeka's status after the end of the Great War in 1918 contributed to a crisis in Italian-Yugoslavian relations, and a solution to this problem was debated by the leading powers of the day, i.e. France, the USA and the United Kingdom, which could not reach a coherent concept in this area. The primary obstacle in coming to an agreement were the aspirations of two countries, i.e. Italy and the Kingdom of SHS – which in this case expressed Croatian interests – which attempted to carry out their own, opposing concepts regarding the post-war borders within the Adriatic region. Rijeka was a symbol of these conflicting stances. The Italian side wanted to take over the city, realising its expansive policy of irredentism, which the Yugoslavian side resisted, being the only country in the Adriatic region capable of opposing Italy at that time. We can therefore distinguish three basic aspects of the Italian-Yugoslav crisis in the Rijeka case during and shortly after the end of the Great War:

1. Rijeka was a strategically located city of a great economic potential, driven by its dynamically functioning port, one of the most important ports in Europe. The control over the port of Rijeka could potentially stimulate the domestic economy of both Italy, which had spent large amounts on military operations, as well as the Kingdom of SHS, a young country with an unevolved economy, but also sensitive to military operations (especially in the case of Serbia).

2. Rijeka developed a mosaic of diverse nationalities. The vast majority of the city's population was Italian or of Italian origin, as well as Croatian or of Croatian

¹¹⁴ “Po opublikowaniu traktatów włosko-jugosłowiańskich”, *Dziennik Poznański*, 1 February 1924, no. 27, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ It was the treaty of friendship signed by France and Czechoslovakia on 25 January 1924 in Paris.

¹¹⁶ Po opublikowaniu traktatów, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

origin. Censuses of Rijeka from 1910 and 1918 indicate the numerical superiority of Italians in the city, although this increase in population was to some extent an artificial process, resulting from Italian expansion in the city, as well as the outflow of Croats towards safe regions on Croatian territories. In any case, the presence in Rijeka of large numbers of both Italians and Croats was a pretext for the governments of these countries to take over the city.

3. Owing to its strategic location and economic potential, as well as its ethnic diversity and the unending rivalry between European states for domination over the city, Rijeka was sensitive to attempts at imposing “foreign” administration. Rijeka’s history proves that over centuries the city became accustomed to changes in national affiliation, which in the face of the expansive policies pursued by the countries seeking to take power in Rijeka, such as Italy, meant that the national identity of the city’s inhabitants was partially blurred.

In the context of these aspects of the Italian-Yugoslavian crisis in the case of Rijeka, the coup carried out by Gabriele D’Annunzio in September 1919 was an unexpected event. The Italian poet and participant of the Great War took the city by force, pursuing independent politics, which he justified as “an expression of the Italian people’s will”. D’Annunzio took advantage of Rijeka’s weakness by referring to the national identity of Italians who lived there. His coup was strengthened by a group of his comrades-in-arms from the Great War, as well as the support given to him by Italian troops stationed in Rijeka. Ethnic diversity of the city and historical compliance with the imposition of a “foreign” administration determined the success of D’Annunzio’s coup.

The main reason for the forceful takeover of Rijeka by the Italian poet was the reaction to the peace treaty signed in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in September 1919, in which Italy was not given the port city. Moreover, Italian aspirations regarding Rijeka were rejected by the Allies already during the Great War, when in the secret London pact of 1915 Italy was not given Rijeka either. On this basis, we can conclude that D’Annunzio’s coup was, in a way, a national retaliation against the Entente, as it broke its legal act. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Italian government did not express support for Il Vate’s actions, condemning his coup d’état and calling on his supporters, including soldiers of the Italian army, to withdraw from Rijeka. At that time, an informal group of national support for the annexation of the city, led by D’Annunzio, evolved.

In view of these events, the authorities of the Kingdom of SHS initially tried to link Il Vate with the activities of the Italian government, hoping to take over the city, and to limit the scope of the expansive Italian policy in the Adriatic region. For this reason, the matter of D’Annunzio’s coup in Rijeka quickly became the subject of diplomatic play between the Entente states. The coup in the city could indeed stir antagonisms between Italy and Slavic nations united within the Kingdom of SHS, and consequently also lead to a war spanning the whole continent.

However, the Entente states did not develop a coherent policy of resolving the Rijeka dispute, and the normalisation of Italian-Yugoslavian relations in this area was primarily the result of actions of wise, experienced Italian diplomats such as Count Carlo Sforza, who managed to settle the Rijeka issue through peaceful negotiations with representatives of the Kingdom of SHS. As a result of these negotiations, D'Annunzio was forcefully removed from Rijeka by the Italian army, and his coup was condemned as an attempt to distort the Italian policy in the Adriatic region. In reality, D'Annunzio was a harbinger – a sort of overture – of intensified Italian irredentism in this area. The attempt to dominate the Adriatic region and South Slavic nations by force did begin during the fascist regime in Italy, which disregarded the wisdom of diplomatic circles derived from the political heritage of Count Carlo Sforza.

And so Gabriele D'Annunzio's country and his rule in Rijeka in 1919–1920 emphasised the unique character of the city, which, despite its economic potential, did not show resistance to the forceful imposition of “foreign” administration. Rijeka was diverse, and as a result sensitive to any political movements within it. After all, D'Annunzio ruled the city for a short time, without the support of his native state, and yet he managed to bring about a crisis in Italian-Yugoslavian relations and at the same time expose the divisions in the Entente's camp.

Gabriele D'Annunzio Coup in Rijeka (1919–1920) in the Context of Italian-Yugoslavian Relations

Abstract

The question of domination over the Adriatic Sea was a thorny issue in the interwar relationship between Italy and Yugoslavia. The dispute over the city of Rijeka (Fiume at that time), which after the coup launched by Gabriele D'Annunzio in September 1919 further aggravated the relations of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, involved in the conflict at the same time the Entente states. Rijeka was the city of non-uniform national structure, and an important economic centre, becoming at the same time a symbol of intersecting Italian and Yugoslavian influences on the Adriatic.

The controversy over Rijeka was not a typical one, as it took place in the background of the peace conference in Paris after the end of the Great War. The Entente States, i.e. France, the United States, and Great Britain, had different and conflicting visions of the city's status. This indecision was used by D'Annunzio, who in 1919–1920 strengthened his rule in Rijeka. Initially, the Italian government was ambiguous on the poet's coup, while the diplomacy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes regarded the coup as Italian attack against Rijeka. Thus, the question of normalisation of the city's status became a complex process, requiring the consideration of many aspects within the framework of Italian-Yugoslavian relations. The present article analyses these aspects of the relationship between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the context of D'Annunzio coup mounted in September 1919. Another important value of the text resides in the fact that it is based on archival materials, including archival press reports (mainly from the Polish, Serbian, and French press of that time), which made it possible to present the problem against the rich and broad social and political background of the conflict over Rijeka.

Переворот Габриеле д'Аннунцио в Риеке (1919-1920) в контексте итальяно-югославских отношений

Аннотация

Вопрос господства над Адриатикой был невралгическим пунктом в итальяно-югославских отношениях в межвоенный период. В этом отношении особенно сформировался конфликт о Риеку, который в результате переворота, совершенного Габриеле д'Аннунцио в сентябре 1919 года, усугубил отношения между Италией и КСХС, одновременно втягивая в эту проблему государства Антанты. Риека была городом с неоднородной этнической структурой, а заодно важным центром экономики и символом пересекающихся итальянского и югославского влияний над Адриатикой.

Спор о Риеку был нетипичен. Он проходил на фоне Парижской мирной конференции, созданной после завершения Великой войны. Совещающиеся государства Антанты т.е. Франция, США и Великобритания, высказывали разные и противоречивые концепции статуса города. Этой нерешимостью воспользовался д'Аннунцио, который в 1919–1920 гг. утверждал свою власть в Риеке. Поначалу итальянская сторона неоднозначно высказывалась о перевороте поэта, а дипломатия КСХС утверждала, что имело место итальянское наступление на Риеку. Итак, вопрос нормализации статуса города оказался сложным процессом, требующим учета многих аспектов в рамках итальяно-югославских отношений. Эти аспекты в отношениях Италии с КСХС в контексте переворота, совершенного д'Аннунцио в Риеке в сентябре 1919 года и стали предметом обсуждения в данной статье. Основная историческая ценность текста заключается в архивных материалах, прежде всего, архивных донесениях прессы (главным образом польских, сербских и французских), благодаря которым стало возможным обсуждение, с учетом различных контекстов, прежде всего, общественных и политических, конфликта о Риеку.

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