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Milan Ristović*

University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy,
Department of History
Belgrade, Serbia

The March on Rome and its Consequences. Views of Yugoslav Contemporaries

Abstract: This paper looks at the Yugoslav public's reactions to the rise of fascism and Mussolini's coming to power in Italy. The main source for the analysis of this change at the top of power structure have been texts published in the contemporary Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian daily press, periodicals and publications. Among their authors were active diplomats of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, influential political figures of diverse political leanings. Observation of the rise of fascism, its violent "methodology" of disposing of its political rivals, the misplaced response of the traditional centres of power and the ceding of ground to the fascists caused concern on the east side of the Adriatic over further radicalization of Italian nationalism and irredentist claims in spite of the obligations assumed under the treaties concluded by the two governments.

Keywords: Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Italy, Dalmatia, irredentism, fascism, Fiume/Rijeka question, nationalism

The presence and importance of Italian affairs in the political, public and cultural discourse of the Yugoslav state at the very beginning of its existence emerged as significant even to those environments which, on account of their historical, geographical and political distinctiveness, had not seen relations with the Kingdom of Italy as a priority before the unification of 1918. This was the case with the public in the part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) which had formed part of the Kingdom of Serbia until 1918. The experience of Serbian politicians with the Italian allies since 1915 included a traumatic encounter with their political and territorial claims during the First World War, during the diplomatic struggle of the Yugoslav delegation at the Peace Conference and in the first post-war years.[1] Disputes and unresol-

* milan.ristovic1953@gmail.com

[1] This problem has been much discussed by historians on both sides of the Adriatic, to mention but a few relevant titles: A. Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira u Parizu 1919–1920* (Belgrade: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika SR Srbije, 1969); D. Šepić, *Italija, saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje, 1914–1918* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1970); B. Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918–1941. Diplomatsko-historijski pregled* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975), 9–11, 22–30, 38–43; D. R. Živojinović, *America, Italy and the Birth of Yugoslavia (1917–1919)* (Boulder: East European

ved issues (Istria, Zadar/Zara, Rijeka/Fiume, Adriatic islands etc.) became the central foreign-policy problem for the Yugoslav government, with a considerable impact on intra-political relations between the Yugoslav political and national centres. Besides, they required that the public be acquainted better and in more detail with Italy's complicated post-war political and social situation. An important role in this was played by the press, especially the most influential dailies (*Politika*, *Vreme*, *Pravda*)[2] and magazines (*Nova Evropa*, *Srpski književni glasnik*, *Jugoslavenska njiva*, *Misao*), among the contributors of which were representatives of Yugoslav diplomacy and politics. Analyses of the consequences and nature of the fascist coup, including considerations of their effects on Yugoslav-Italian relations, were largely the product of a thorough familiarity with Italian circumstances, often with a more careful and more in-depth approach than the one that should have been offered by official foreign policy. Some of the authors (Živojin Balugdžić, Jovan Jovanović-Pižon, Ivo Andrić) were active or former diplomats and their texts can therefore only in part be seen as "expressing a personal view". Their observations about the rise of fascism in Italy served as a basis for writing this paper. The fact that most of the Yugoslav diplomatic material from the period under study is lost makes their importance for understanding the Yugoslav views on the new regime even greater.

Nationalism, "a powerful factor in moments of general agitation"

In the period immediately preceding the "March on Rome", the Yugoslav and especially Serbian public was focused on an important commemoration, the tenth anniversary of the Serbian victory at the Battle of Kumanovo in the First Balkan War. Apart from the developments in Italy, public attention was also focused on the political crisis in Greece, caused by her defeat in the war with Turkey,[3] and on improving relations with Bulgaria.[4] Albanian bands kept on making raids across the Yugoslav border; in Hungary, after the quelling of the commune in

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Quarterly, 1972; D. R. Živojinović, *La Dalmazia o morte: italijanska okupacija jugoslovenskih zemalja 1918–1923* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2012); M. Cattazuzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale 1866–2006* (Bolgona: Il Mulino, 2007), 128–167.

[2] We shall limit ourselves to only a few most influential dailies and periodicals published in Belgrade and Zagreb.

[3] R. Klog, *Istorija Grčke novog doba* (Belgrade: CLIO, 2000), 101, 102.

[4] The signing of the treaty with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in March 1923, among other things, cost the Bulgarian prime minister, Stamboliiski, his life as early as June that year. He was killed in a military coup with the support of the IMRO. In September there was a communists uprising which was also brutally quelled. See D. Popov et al., *Istorija Bugarske*, ed. S. Pirivatrić (Belgrade: CLIO, 2008), 315, 317; A. Pitassio, *Storia della Bulgaria contemporanea* (Passignano: Aguaplano, 2012), 30–32.

Budapest and the Entente's intervention, Admiral Miklosz Horty consolidated his power, with attempts at "partial restoration" of the Habsburgs. These three neighbouring states, plus Austria, became a zone of Italian political interest and of creating a revisionist "bloc" aimed at obliterating the results of the Paris peace treaties. An important factor in the destabilization of the Kingdom of SCS was Italy's sponsorship, especially after Mussolini's rise to power, of separatist political and military organizations (Kosovo Committee; J. Franks's followers in Croatia; IMRO; supporters of the Petrović dynasty in Montenegro).[5] To top it all, an "internal political front" was opened (the Law on the Protection of the State; the raising of the "Croatian question"; a rift in Serbian political parties; difficulties involved in the country's economic unification etc.).

During the First World War Benito Mussolini advocated the full implementation of the terms of the London Treaty of April 1915. He stated his views on the issue in 1915, in the article "Italia, Serbia e Dalmazia" published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 6 April 1915.[6] In the summer of 1917, in the same daily, he attacked the Corfu Declaration and the Serbian government, denying the Slavic character and existence of the South-Slavic population in Istria, Gorizia and the environs of Trieste.[7] He demanded, "for reasons of strategic security", that some territories – the Dalmatian islands and the Dalmatian coast down to the Neretva river – be secured for Italy "once and for all". After the Italian disaster at Caporetto in October 1917, he became somewhat more moderate as regards the Adriatic question, advocating, in 1918, contacts with the South Slavs in Austria-Hungary. Serbia again was an allied country which took upon itself the responsibility to unify the South Slavs.[8] In 1918–20, relations between Italy and the Kingdom of SCS were marked by discontents, anxieties and doubts about the possibility of normalization as a result of the Italian occupation of a part of the eastern Adriatic coast, the capture of Rijeka by D'Annunzio's stormers, border disputes, the oppression of the local minorities. The signing of the Rapallo Treaty in November 1920 did not bring the expected improvement, and the

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5 On the ties of D'Annunzio and Sforza with the anti-Yugoslav emigration in 1919–1920, see M. Bucarelli, "'Delenda Jugoslavia'. D'Annunzio, Sforza e gli 'intrighi balcanici' del '19–'20", *Nuova storia contemporanea* 6 (2002), 19–34. For the later period and the support of Mussolini's regime to these movements, see S. Troebst, *Mussolini, Makedonien und die Mächte 1922–1930. Die "Innere Makedonische Revolutionäre Organisation" in der Südosteuropapolitik des faschistischen Italien* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 1987).

6 B. Mussolini, "Italia, Serbia e Dalmazia", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 6 Apr. 1915. See also in M. Bucarelli, "Mussolini, la questione Adriatica e il fallimento dell'interventismo democratico", *Nouva rivista storica* XCV/1 (2011), 1–5.

7 Bucarelli, "Mussolini, la questione Adriatico", 18, 19.

8 E. Milak, *Italija i Jugoslavija 1931–1937* (Belgrade: ISI, 1987), 19–21; Bucarelli, "Mussolini, la questione Adriatico", 25, 26.

document was harshly criticized as capitulatory by the Yugoslav public. In Italy, in much the same way, the leader of the fascist movement decried the agreement as the "capitulation of the Italian government", a "short-lived and ephemeral" document, announcing its "revision".[9]

Until 1922 the new ideological and political phenomenon, fascism, was referred to iin Serbian and other Yugoslav newspapers and periodicals, sporadically at first and then ever more frequently, as the most radical actor of Italian irredentist anti-Yugoslav politics on the rise.[10] Its followers drew attention to themselves by violent, destructive actions against the Slovenian and Croatian institutions and their members in Istria, Zadar, Rijeka, Trieste. They quickly took the place hitherto reserved for the traditional nationalists and pushed their "forerunner", D'Annunzio, out of the way. The press covered the fascists' ever more conspicuous attendance at the rallies of the nationalists and irredentists, their brutal showdown with the left and rapid taking of the political space.

In January 1922, in an issue of the periodical *Misao* (Thought), the first president of the Serbian Social Democratic Party, journalist and writer Dragiša Lapčević, sees Italian Balkan policy as the consequence of a failed colonial adventure. He argues that the "world war" was a godsend to Italy and that she, "under the pressure of economic difficulties, claims territories in the Balkans so that she may send there some of her demographic 'surplus' in a 'parasitic role'. What lies behind is her intention to close the Adriatic Sea to all competitors and gain a 'de facto monopoly' of it". Italy "is in a hurry to destroy the illusion of the state of Fiume… and to annex it; so she does not honour the agreement concluded in Rapallo, so the fascist rage is crushing up our national element in the seized regions… organizing incidents… She is the biggest threat to the peace in the European south-east today."[11]

In mid-May, Živojin Balugdžić, a diplomat of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of SCS/Yugoslavia, and an influential foreign affairs analyst,[12]

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[9] For Mussolini's criticisms of the Rapallo Treaty at the regional assembly of fascists for Venice held in Trieste on 6 February 1921, see Milak, *Italija i Jugoslavija*, 24. The negotiations at Santa Margherita conducted from March to October 1922 were concluded by the signing of the conventions, among the results of which, after their ratification by the Italian Senate on 21 February 1923, was the withdrawal of Italian troops from the rest of the occupied Yugoslav territory in Dalmatia, see Živojinović, *Dalmazia o morte*, 421–423.

[10] On the irredenta, see Živojinović, *Dalmazia o morte*, 273–309. Before the opening of the conference in Paris in January 1919, Mussolini, following the example of D'Annunzio and the editor of *Corriere della sera*, L. Albertini, published an epistle to the Dalmatians in *Il Popolo d'Italia*, ibid., 312, 365.

[11] D. Lapčević, "Italija na Balkanu", *Misao* IV/2 (Belgrade), 16 Jan. 1922, 134–136.

[12] Ž. Balugdžić, "Politika Italije pre i posle rata", *Srpski književni glasnik* (*SKG*) n.s., VI/2 (Belgrade), 16 May 1922, 109–118. Živojin Balugdžić (1868–1941) pursued law studies in Belgrade and Geneva. From 1903, he served as secretary to king Peter Karadjordjević, head of the press

writes in the *Srpski književni glasnik* (Serbian Literary Herald) that Italian nationalism is a "modern… movement… grafted onto the vague aspirations of older generations" who saw in irredentism "an 'emotion' rather than a task that ought to be fulfilled". Rijeka, which has become the focus of irredentist politics after the war, "had no role whatsoever in the nationalist developments before 1914". In the psychosis of overheated nationalism, "it is this vagueness of feelings… emotions that in a social and political setting such as Italian necessarily becomes a powerful factor in moments of general agitation".[13] In Balugdžić's perception of Italian collective political psychology an important role is played by the "emotionality of the masses", in which "all practical programmes of political groups dissolved quickly" before Italy's entry into the war. Italy is "still under the pressure of the emotional restlessness which, three years ago, propelled a strange mixture of elements called fascism to the surface". It has managed to re-melt and absorb all earlier nationalist and irredentist elements. It has not been content to conquer home turf. Mussolini has been working "energetically… on making fascism a factor which would steer the government's foreign policy".[14] Balugdžić links the growing influence of fascism and related groups to the weakening of the Socialist Party. Thus, "there is no seriously organized group left to oppose fascism." The socialists have been willing to support any government which would "declare war on the fascists", whereas the *Popolari* have been reluctant for fear that "the removal of fascism might strengthen the socialist current too much". After Giovanni Giolitti and Carlo Sforza stepped down, their successors have proved unable to resist the pressures of fascism. Thus Italy has found herself in a "*cercle vicieux*, because the internal economic difficulties make fascism stronger, while preventing Italy from devoting herself to internal consolidation through getting her foreign affairs in order". He believed that such a situation was untenable in the long run and expected a resolution.[15]

Commenting on Balugdžić's views on 16 August 1922, an anonymous author lays some of the responsibility for the poor relations between the two countries on Yugoslavia, and finds justification for the emergence of fascism.

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bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia, consul, legation minister. He was retired in 1935. In 1926 he served as Yugoslav minister in Rome, but was recalled in 1927 because of his conflict with Mussolini. He later was appointed minister of the Kingdom of SCS in Berlin. An interesting and detailed, though occasionally acerbic, portrait of his was penned by Miloš Crnjanski, who, at the beginning of Balugdžić's long service in Berlin, was a correspondent of the press bureau; see M. Crnjanski, *Embahade* I-III (Belgrade: Nolit, 1984), 7–162. Balugdžić was also one of the main foreign affairs analysts for Belgrade's daily *Politika*, publishing his texts under the pseudonym "XYZ".

[13] Balugdžić, "Politika Italije", 115.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 118.

The Italian internal crisis is "essentially an economic problem… to a very small extent a consequence of *the romantic period* [original emphasis]… as Mr Balugdžić conveys… the words of the leader of Italian fascism". "Nationalism and fascism in Italy… [is] 'romantic' only secondarily… it saved that country, injured by war, from a revolution; in foreign policy, it quite logically corresponded to the pre-war imperialist territorial understanding of diplomacy of the Great Powers in Europe." The London Treaty "was completely in the spirit of the well-known Russian, English and French ambitions". "Keeping an eye on our aspirations", Italy "could not renounce it completely" because of, among other things, her "diplomats and politicians… that they could become convinced so soon of the good intentions and statesmanship abilities of Austria-Hungary's successors".[16] The anonymous author's proposal was to "neutralize" Italian imperialism by accepting the Italian demographic "surplus" and settling them "in the interior of our large but underpopulated country"! The author's conclusion was that "fascism and nationalism in Italy are 'a necessary evil' which will be channelled into action in favour of the true interests of the Italian people, essentially one of the most peaceable nations, and therefore, if there is a will on both sides to cooperate in the interest of the progress of both countries, the protection of our population under the Italians will be secured"! [17]

In an October issue of *Nova Evropa* (New Europe), released before the March on Rome, the Croatian and Yugoslav politician Josip Smodlaka expresses his doubts about Sforza and Giolitti's assurances of Italy's readiness to settle the dispute with the Kingdom of SCS by agreement since she has already secured Trieste, Pula/Pola and Gorizia for herself, and the status of a free city for Rijeka.[18] There is in the Kingdom of SCS "no imperialist party comparable to the Italian nationalists who, spurning the will of the people whose fate is in question, demand, contrary to every national and democratic principle, the annexation of the South-Slavic coast of the Adriatic, the Greek islands of the Archipelago [the Dodecanese], Asia Minor etc."[19] He condemns the brutal treatment of the Sou-

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[16] ***, "Italija i mi", *SKG*, n.s., VI/2, 16 May 1922, 603–608. That Mussolini's coming to power was "Italy's salvation" from "Bolshevik revolution" was also the view held by West-European governments immediately after the March on Rome; E. Gentile, "The March on Rome: How Antifascists Understood the Origins of Totalitarianism (and Coined the Word)". In *Gaetano Salvemini Colloquium/Harvard University*, eds. Renato Camurri & Charles Maier (Rome: Viella, 2013), 28, quotes from Salvemini's letter from Paris of 11 November 1922: "Everybody is on cloud nine because they all believe fascism … defeated bolshevism."

[17] ***, "Italija i mi", 608.

[18] J. Smodlaka, "Talijansko-južnoslovenski sporazum", *Nova Evropa* (*NE*) I/3, 14 Oct. 1922, 99–110.

[19] According to Smodlaka, ibid., 99, it is "not an accident" that after the publication of Wilson's message to the Italian people "Messrs Sonnino, Barzilai, Luzzati, Nathan and Meyer, the five great

th-Slavic population and their institutions in the areas incorporated into Italy in 1918–19. In his view, the Italian "old-style" politicians are looking in a wrong direction, watching "the world through the old eyes" (again) and seeking, for the fulfilment of their maximalist demands, an alliance with "Germany against the Slavic world". He argues, in a passage written in an anti-Semitic tone, that some of the blame for that policy lies with "Italian-Jewish imperialists", those of them who have "close family, business and mental ties with Hungarian and German-Austrian Jews". Italy is behind the Albanian bands' cross-border raids under the command of Italian officers, behind the supporters of the ex-king of Montenegro, Nicholas, behind the actions of "Bulgarian komitadji", the "Hungarian red army", behind the stirring of Muslims in Old Serbia to rebellion, Italy supports "Radić's fickle republicans in Croatia".[20] Yugoslavia and Italy have a common and by far the most dangerous enemy: Germany, "from which Austria is only temporarily separated". Germany, once recovered, will once again begin her drive to the East and South-East, the "three main directions of her expansion" being Trieste, Thessaloniki and Constantinople.[21]

Fascism as a "state of collective exaltation"

In early September 1922, Miodrag Ristić, quite an expert on Italian circumstances, was sent to Italy by the most influential liberally-oriented Belgrade daily, *Politika*, as its special correspondent, and began to publish his "Letters from Italy".[22] His first report deals in detail with the Italian economy, demography, dire consequences of war, and economic and social crisis. He remarks that the Italian people "has never before – since the very beginnings of the Risorgimento until today – been as national… as dynamic as it is now, since the end of the war onwards…" Whereas the older generation feared that the tremendous war effort might lead to national disintegration, it is younger generations, "those who will try one day, probably, to misuse this action of theirs… who have won a victory over the older generations".[23]

In Trieste, he observes the atmosphere of "neglect, lethargy, something dead", a city which, once annexed to Italy, has seen an economic decline and lost

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Jews and even greater Slavophobes, not to mention Sem Benelli and other second-rate greats, found themselves at the head of the nationalist protests and furious anti-Slav movement in Italy".

[20] Ibid., 101, 102. On the contacts of Carlo Sforza, foreign minister of the Kingdom of Italy (1920–21) and D'Annunzio with separatists from the Kingdom of SCS, see Bucarelli, "'Delenda Jugoslavia'", 19–34.

[21] Ibid.

[22] During the First World War Miodrag Ristić found refuge in Italy, where he met Mussolini in the spring of 1918; M. Ristić, "Beneto [!] Musolini", *Politika*, 4 Nov. 1922.

[23] M. Ristić, "Šta sam video u Italiji. Pismo Politici", *Politika*, 6 Sept. 1922.

its former role. Apart from young people "entertaining themselves patriotically" and a flagging commercial activity, "one cannot help noticing the building of the 'National Hall' burnt down… with only its walls still standing" – the former seat of "all Slovenian associations in Trieste, a savings bank, a theatre, a hotel, and the offices of a few Slovenian trading societies".[24] On the Lido of Venice he watches the wasteful luxurious life of the aristocracy and the "nobility by money".[25] In Bologna he sees gangs of youths armed with sticks; in the shop windows of "haberdashery stores you can see such sticks displayed most prominently… I knew that those lads with sticks were fascists who carried them as visible weapons by day because, if need be, they had other weapons, smaller and not made of wood".[26]

One of the first who offered more exhaustive information about the genesis, ideology and "methodology of violence" of the fascists was Vojislav Gerasimović in an article ("Italian fascists") which the *Politika* borrowed from the *SKG* and published on 16 September 1922.[27] Gerasimović provides a brief history of Mussolini's movement, which was created after two and a half years of a vehement campaign in *Il Popolo d'Italia* "against Bolshevik phenomena", when he founded cells of the "Italian Fasces of Combat". During a few months of a "bloody civil guerrilla" war, by the end of 1921 and beginning of 1922, the fascists thwarted the Italian communists' "sporadic attempts" to carry out an overthrow. In the next parliamentary election they won 34 of 533 seats, but have soon become the most active and most dangerous opponent of every government.[28] Their political weight is such that "no government in Rome can survive without making some concessions to the fascists". The explanation for that is the "abnormal" post-war situation in Italy and the political dynamism of the leader of the fascist movement, "a Caesarist personality par excellence… the epitome of a man of idea and strength", with a great demagogic talent. In a situation such as Italian, he has been able to "sway all sorts of disaffected people, now inflaming, now taming their rampant energies… this best organizer and most eloquent tribune of Italy". Some of the responsibility for the extent and rapidity of fascist expansion lies with the Giolitti government, which thought the fascists could be of use in putting a stop to the bolshevization of Italy.[29] "An excellent political psychologist", Mussolini calls himself a "revolutionary,

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[24] M. Ristić, "Šta sam video u Italiji", *Politika*, 17 Sept. 1922.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] V. Gerasimović, "Talijanski fašisti", *Politika*, 16 Sept. 1922. *Politika* borrowed excerpts from his article originally published under the same title in *SKG* VII/1, Sept.–Dec. 1922, 146–149.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

but like Mazzini; a republican, but only in his aspirations; a trade unionist; but first and foremost, an Italian".[30] Fascist ideologues and propagandists emphasize that their nationalism is different from that of the conservatives; that they speak about the struggle against those who got rich during the war; that they are for the abolition of large landed estates and a gradual liberation of the peasantry, for free trade. But they cleverly mask their "imperialism, tougher even than that of the nationalists, under the guise of a panegyric to the spreading of Roman culture, and the necessary placement of Italian emigrants, workers and peasants who ought to be protected and employed in the areas taken from the 'deceived Italy' by 'greedy' allies and 'wild' neighbours". With the help of the state and financed by "terrified industrialists", "willing or coerced", they have been influential in swaying a part of the working class by promises, while stirring their disappointment at the inactivity of the socialists. The success of the fascist political minority comes from their ability "to take advantage of the situation because of the insufficient activity of the other parties. An organized minority impose their will on the anaemic majority". Fascist foreign policy is based on the assertion that Italy "has so far been humiliated and insulted everywhere. Nice, Tunisia, the former German colonies, Dalmatia and Rijeka – she lays claim to all of that and should get that as soon as possible – fascism argues". The plan is to be carried out through Italy's internal strengthening and an adventurous, revisionist foreign policy. Gerasimović's cautiously concludes that such politics may have "some success" among the "sensitive and ill-informed Italians because of the overblown ambitions of a people whose unification was achieved relatively easily and because of a huge lack of knowledge about the neighbouring peoples".[31]

Shortly before the fascists took power, Miodrag Ristić revisited the question of the "moral state of Italian society". Particularly influential in causing a collective psychological, social and political trauma has been the experience of the First World War, which the Italian socialists have failed to understand. Ristić believes that they "mostly ruined socialism as a party – if not as an idea – and provided one of the crucial conditions for the dizzying success of fascism". Fascism "became aware, more than nationalism itself, of that victory… it exploited it to its own advantage the most and in the most expedient way", it became "its apologist… giving rise to this current social… state of *collective exaltation*". What "outsiders and friends of the Italian people" will think about that collective exaltation is another matter, "but Italian society itself, its bourgeois part in particular, feel themselves to be in a new moral state which largely makes them self-satis-

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

fied".[32] In such an "exalted society", fascism, violent in itself, "and extremely, both in procedure and in conception", has imposed itself; only the Italian countryside and the "unswerving communist ranks" have remained out of its reach. The rest of Italian society "either… fully accept the ferocities of fascism or at least endure them without protest". Entire middle and higher strata of the urban population, who in 1919 and 1920, in spite of Bolshevist phenomena, remained unswayed by nationalism, the "absolute precursor of fascism… and countless individuals" are now extreme nationalists and fully under the sway of fascism, spiritually and materially". Hard-working urban families, peaceful only yesterday, "sensible until two years ago, now delightedly accept fascism as a personal, social and national blessing, and praise its procedures, perfectly violent". Fascism "has enchanted" the young post-war generations, "has given them, at least they believe it has, both the greatest self-confidence and the greatest strength"; they join its punitive expeditions, which take place "on a daily basis". "In this state of collective exaltation are older people, too, and not only men but also women, from the bourgeois and civil service strata. "Almost the entire people" make up the audience at their public rituals, which they perform on a daily basis, and there, side by side with fascists, one can see soldiers and officers of the Italian armed forces; so it appears that, with few exceptions, the military, too, "by its moral state, belongs to fascism". Ristić points out "that the army is conspicuously passive even in front of the most violent and most brutal acts of fascists". His assessment, which soon proved to be accurate – and fatal to the further course of events in Italy, was: "The Italian army cannot turn its arms against fascists. It could fire even at Garibaldi; it could make it seem that it fired at D'Annunzio; it cannot fire at fascism: no one can make it do that."[33]

In his report of 11 October Ristić finds that "the whole of Italian society is in the sign of fascism". Fascists state openly "that the 'liberal state' must make way for the 'fascist state'".[34] The new Italian reality, created by the storm of fascism and the weakness of the Italian liberal governments, unable and unwilling to combat it but also with no prospect of collaborating with it, is "a fact of the first order". Fascism has acquired an "untouchable" and "sacrosanct position" by doing such things and in such a way that "in domestic and foreign policy relations… no government aware of its great responsibilities for its country can collaborate with it". "Even if such a government, willing to cooperate, happens to be found, it will fail. Both numerically and in its violence… it [fascism] is such today that no government can be its collaborator… [a government] must either

[32] M. Ristić, "Šta sam video u Italiji. Moralno stanje italijanskog društva" III, *Politika*, 10 Oct. 1922.

[33] Ibid.

[34] M. Ristić, "Šta sam video u Rimu", *Politika*, 11 Oct. 1922.

be with it through and through or at least put up with it." Mussolini has realized what it is that can attract the largest part of bourgeois society: "the paroxysm not of pain, but the paroxysm of exaltation", which no other "social force" has been able or has known how to offer. Socialism, especially in its communist version, has frightened the bourgeoisie, especially its middle strata; democracy of all leanings has been "morally and intellectually" incapable of offering anything of the kind. Fascism has offered the Italian bourgeoisie an assurance that it is the movement which will, using violence amply and gladly, restore the nation's lost self-confidence and "justice, in and out of the country". Ristić notices the process of creating a fascist "martyrology" through emphasizing its sacrifices in its brutal confrontation with communists: "Fascism… celebrates the sacrifices it made. It states openly its readiness to make further sacrifices." Having disposed of the communists, it turned on "traditional socialism, which is fully national, and then started the struggle against democracy… After that, it has had to end here, where, at the very beginning, it did not at all intend to end… an assault on the state itself". The state "privileged all those 'bad plants' fascism fought before it has turned on the state itself".[35] Fascists have also been dissatisfied with "giving in" to the allies or with the way in which the Germans in Trentino and the Yugoslavs in Istria are treated ("too tolerantly").

It is too late now, Ristić concludes, for a liberal state to be able to do anything to contain fascism, the evil spirit, the "paroxysm of exaltation", which mostly the government itself released from the bottle of discontent in order to govern more easily. It made that mistake prompted by high circles of industry and capital, frightened by communism. The moments of "collective self-deception on the one hand, and the insufficient intelligence of the bourgeois intelligentsia on the other, have led to fascism being seen as the greatest blessing".[36] He asks if it is possible at all for the Italian nation, "so cruelly, tragically steeped in fascism", to neutralize or contain the influence of the fascists by co-opting them into the government. He is not optimistic. Ten days before the dilemma about the relationship between the fascists and the liberal state was resolved the way it was, Ristić thought "with fear" that the negative aspects of fascism would prevail in that struggle. So, "it appears that fascism has to unleash all of its own tragic destructiveness on what it claims to love the most passionately!" – the Italian state.[37]

A report from Trieste *Politika* published on 22 September warns to the fact that at a rally in Udine Mussolini stated in front of 25,000 fascists that "there is no complete unification of Italy… unless Rijeka, Dalmatia and other lands are

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

returned to us". He threatened that the fascists would make Rome "their own city… clean, disinfected of all corrupt and dirty elements". Peace agreements are not good for Italy; "Italy is lucky to have not only the national but also a fascist army…, and the Italian ministers should not forget that". The fascist "renewal of Italy" leaves aside the question of monarchy: monarchy "can gain nothing at all by being against what nowadays is called fascist revolution".[38] On 7 October the *Politika* brings the statement of the Italian foreign minister Carlo Schanzer about the difficult position of Luigi Facta's government, announcing that it will be forced to resign by the end of the month. According to Schanzer, the fascists "are the true masters in Italy today" although they are a minority in both houses of parliament. The government cannot issue any domestic policy regulation without their consent, and their growing influence in the area of foreign policy makes it impossible for the government to run it autonomously. Relinquishing power to the fascists is the "only way to avoid a bloody civil war in Italy".[39] This piece of information was promptly denied by the prime minister, Luigi Facta: the government "will remain in office" and "continue to discharge its duty to the end", and it will ensure peace in the country "at all costs".[40] Mussolini replies from Milan the same day that the government will "soon" be ousted and the unnatural duality of there being two states abolished: "One is liberal, the other is fascist. The former has to make way for the latter. If parliament is not dissolved and an election called, the fascists will do it themselves."[41]

After 28 October 1922: From now on the Italian government is fascism only

On the last day of October Miodrag Ristić, in conclusion of his report about the new, fascist government, points out the importance for the Kingdom of SCS of this change in its neighbourhood. "Three days ago fascism… imposed itself from the outside… on the Italian government; from now on the Italian government is fascism only." Under the new circumstances, with a fascist-led government, "concerted efforts should be made nonetheless… to establish contact, normal relations with our Fatherland". Also, "our government has the duty to do all that depends on it to avoid the possibility of the current Italian crisis… affecting our Fatherland harshly, and very roughly. If we sincerely wish to have good relations even with fascist Italy, we must not, even for a moment, let her cause us not just

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38 "Ka diktaturi fašizma", *Politika*, 22 Sept. 1922.

39 "Fakta se povlači. Fašisti na vladi", *Politika*, 7 Oct. 1922.

40 "Fakta ne ustupa mesto", *Politika*, 9 Oct. 1922.

41 "Musolini obara vladu", *Politika*, 9 Oct. 1922.

great but any trouble."[42] The news of fascists rampaging in Trieste, Rijeka and Sušak, published in the same issue of the *Politika*, was yet another reason for concern. The incursion of a fascist band into Sušak and their attempt to seize a vehicle and attack the Continental Hotel led to a clash with "our nationalists". Yugoslav border authorities arrested a few fascists who tried to cross into Yugoslavia at Martinšnica; refugees from Rijeka brought the news about the socialist clubs having been set on fire and the threats that Sušak would be attacked.[43] Information came from Split that in the night between 8 and 9 October an armed group of Italian fascists crossed into the Yugoslav part of the "third zone" (the demarcation zone) towards Zadar in order to prevent its evacuation at all costs. Added to this news was a report on the demolition and setting on fire of the Slovenian Consumers Cooperative in Renče. Mussolini's statements that he "will pursue a policy of friendship and faithfully honour the agreements" are not convincing as the fascists attack the border in Istria and threaten Dalmatia – this is the conclusion of the report on the situation on the Yugoslav Adriatic coast where the news of Mussolini's coming to power have caused very painful feelings, "even some sort of panic".[44]

Shortly after Mussolini's takeover, the distinguished politician, ex-minister, diplomat and public figure Jovan Jovanović Pižon published in the *SKG*, under the pseudonym "Inostrani" (Foreign correspondent) his view of the new situation in Italy.[45] He enumerates all the promises Mussolini made as regards respecting constitutional order, depoliticizing the armed forces, pacifying fascist violent "activism", but also the measures for "strengthening the state" with the support of the fascist movement, the state that he, in his very first address at parliament, renamed the "fascist state", announcing that he wants "full power, just as he takes on full responsibility". What the Yugoslav public was interested in was the part of his speech about foreign policy in which he emphasized that there were before the Italian legislature two agreements with Yugoslavia: the Rapallo Treaty and the Santa Margherita Conventions; that he found European policy "as regards renewal" bad and that direct trade relations were better than endless "chewing over at conferences". That Italy's motto would be "those who want something from Italy must give something in return", that a strong Italian government and the same kind of politics did not mean "the policy of imperialism but of national interest". He found the relations with Yugoslavia and Greece to be "correct". In a statement he gave after the speech, Mussolini said that Yugoslav politics should shift its interest to Thessaloniki. Jovanović concludes pessi-

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42 M. Ristić, "Ukrštenih mačeva", *Politika*, 31 Oct. 1922.

43 "Fašiste na vlasti", *Politika*, 4 Nov. 1922.

44 "Fašisti na delu", *Politika*, 10 Oct. 1922.

45 Inostrani [Jovan Jovanović Pižon], "Nova vlada u Italiji", *SKG*, n.s. VII/1, 547–549.

mistically that such a "recommendation" is not in contradiction with Mussolini's views and that "real difficulties" will arise after the ratification of the agreement with the Kingdom of SCS.[46]

The *Politika* editorial of 1 November 1922 harshly criticized the government for "indecisiveness and ignorance" in its political and diplomatic approach to the dispute with Italy. These were characteristics of all governments "from… Mr Stojan Protić's to the cabinet of Mr [Milenko] Vesnić". The result was the "worst outcome" for the Kingdom of SCS: the Rapallo Treaty. Neither its form nor its content are something "its creators, those two dead men, can be proud of: Vesnić who died and Trumbić who buried himself politically."[47] Not even such an agreement was Italy willing to honour; so new negotiations were launched at Santa Margherita, where the Yugoslav delegation went with the intention to get rid of the Italian military presence in a part of its state territory (evacuation of the "third zone" in Dalmatia) and gain concessions from Italy. The conventions providing for the implementation of the Rapallo Treaty were still unratified when the fascist government took office. This change in Rome gave rise to doubts about the prospect of their ever being ratified. Some of the responsibility for the fact that the agreement was not ratified six months after it had been signed by the Italian government lay with Pašić and Pribićević because of their hesitancy, indecisiveness, lack of knowledge of the Italian situation, and politically tactless actions. In the meantime, the fascists gained ground and became more influential in Italian politics. "The fascist danger was seen by all as the only serious danger; only not by our responsible factors. They assumed that Italy was a well-ordered country and that the cabinet they were negotiating with was a long-lived one." Some of the blame was also laid on the Yugoslav diplomatic mission in Rome whose reports, propping up such an assumption, added to the somnolence of its government. "So, as in the case of working out the Rapallo agreement, one went from one situation into another with indecision and ignorance, ending up in the most difficult situation – the cabinet of Mr Mussolini."

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[46] Ibid., 549.

[47] "Neodlučnost i neznanje", *Politika*, 1 Nov. 1922. A few months earlier J. Jovanović-Pižon ("Inostrani"), "Politički pregled. Spoljna politika - Oko Rapalskog ugovora", *SKG*, n.s., VI/1, May 1922, 65–68, harshly criticized the Treaty of Rapallo signed on 12 November 1920 by: "…Dr M. R. Vesnić, Dr A. Trumbić and Kosta Stojanović in the name of our state, and Giolitti, Sforza and Bonomi in the name of Italy, [which] is not only a bad but also a badly stylized international agreement. Its terms are so unclear that they can be interpreted in all manner of ways, especially when interpreted by such lawyers as Italians." Jovanović writes that the Italian side negates the status of the port of Baroš, although it is referred to in Sforza's letter to Trumbić which "is an integral part of the whole agreement… Italy will lose before every international court should she choose to defend her claims in that way. Both this excuse and the one concerning the influence of the fascists on decision making are bad signs and proofs of Italy's insincerity and unchanged ambition to make us dependent on her in the Adriatic…"

If the conventions happen to be "dishonoured because of the fascist takeover, that sort of politics will also be responsible for the failure. Needless to say, of course, the main culprit for the whole failure is on the other side of the Adriatic, in Rome."[48]

The *Politika* editorial of 18 November 1922 criticized the head of the Yugoslav Legation in Rome, Vojislav Antonijević. In response to the questions posed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the fascist overthrow came assurances, based on the information supplied by the minister, that the "fascists are no threat whatsoever and the possibility of their coming to power should be ruled out… that the Italian parliamentary groups will, by co-opting them into the government… appease and put them out of action completely". Antonijević assured his government that Facta would remain in office and that the king had refused his resignation, even though the opposite had already been publicized and known – *urbi et orbi*. At the moment when Mussolini had been given a mandate by the king and formed his cabinet, of which all Italian newspapers wrote at length. Antonijević cabled that the fascist attempt to come to power had failed because the king resisted them and instructed Facta to remain at the head of the government! When the Yugoslav foreign ministry's attention was called to what was going on and the fact that all news agencies' reports contradicted the minister's reports, the ministry expressed doubts about the trustworthiness of the agencies![49] This editorial ended with the conclusion that "it is an irony… and, to the European observers of the political circus, the greatest surprise, that our government offered the hungry Italian wolf a meek little lamb in the figure of our minister in Rome, Mr Voj. Antonijević." He would be more suitable as "head of a consulate… We even believe that Mr Antonijević would, as consul in Corfu, in his capacity as keeper of the military and refugee cemetery, send very good reports to our government on the state of the graves of our martyrs".[50]

Yet, obliviousness to the true nature of the fascist takeover was not a "privilege" of the Yugoslav minister: the US ambassador to Italy, Richard Child, for example, wrote on 31 October, after the fascists' triumphant parade: "It's been a fine revolution of young people here. There is no danger. A lot of enthusiasm and colours. We all liked it."[51] A few days later he reported to Washington that "never has there been a revolution carried out more quickly and more successfully". E. Gentile quotes the leading figures of the Italian left, whose comments on the fas-

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48 *Politika*, 2 Nov. 1922.

49 "Naš poslanik u Rimu", *Politika*, 18 Nov. 1922.

50 Ibid.

51 Gentile, "The March on Rome", 28.

cist march to power were sarcastic and belittling ("opera buffa", "una carnevalata", "una parentesi studentesca").[52]

Milan Durman, a Marxist intellectual, criticized the influence of fascist "methodology" on some right-wing organizations in Yugoslavia ("which, it is true, have different names but all share the same rationale and a markedly class character"); they were used for suppressing workers' organizations, as in the case of the "Popular Guard" during the strike of miners in Tuzla. Much the same situation was seen after an attempt on the life of Regent Alexander and the assassination of interior minister Drašković by members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, but in that case it was the authorities that used force. Even so, Durman concluded optimistically that "until the working class rises again… there will be nothing else to do but that which we have in Italy, i.e., the struggle of progress against reactionaries… All regimes and all guards and defences have been unable to stop the course of history, which inevitably brings down those who oppose it, even with Mussolinis temporarily in power".[53] In the same issue of *Nova Evropa*, Bozidar Adžija, another far-left intellectual, saw irredentism as the source of fascism, which then developed with the help of Italian governments. The movement was led by the member of parliament Mussolini "in the spirit of extreme chauvinistic nationalism and imperialism" with the special task of stripping the Slavic areas occupied by Italy (Istria, Gorizia, part of Dalmatia, Primorje) of their Slavic character and "presenting these parts as purely Italian to Europe". "Thanks to the incapability and senility of our foreign policy", their method worked "much to the advantage of Italian diplomacy and greatly contributed to the purely our parts being taken from us." In the earliest days of the fascist movement, prime minister Giolitti used fascists to quell workers' strikes; fascists also promptly joined in terrorizing the Yugoslav minority. Adžija found that the authorities had never made "a sincere attempt to crush or even dissipate the fascist movement", but rather it was tolerated and backed by every government. A weak attempt was made by Facta's first government, which cost it dearly. His second cabinet also capitulated to the fascists by dissolving parliament and calling an election: fascism threatened with armed conflicts and a raid on Rome, which they indeed made in late October 1922. "Fascism endangers not only the consolidation of the Italian economic and political situation but it is the greatest threat to general world peace today. This requires an urgent uniting against fas-

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[52] Including the leaders of the Socialist and Communist parties; Gentile draws on Pietro Nenni, who remembered that shortly before the fascist "bloodless coup" the key figures of the left had gone to Moscow to attend a Comintern congress, convinced that nothing major was going to happen in Italy. "Trivialization" of the March on Rome went on for months after the formation of Mussolini's government in anticipation of its crumbling and fall. According to Gentile, the fascist overthrow was termed "March on Rome" by Italian antifascists. Gentile, ibid., 32–35.

[53] M. Durman, "Radnička klasa i fašizam", *NE* VI/9, 21 Nov. 1922, 270–272.

cism, both in Italy and at home." The emergence of fascists is an encouragement to the other enemies of the Yugoslav state in its neighbourhood. Budapest "… hails fascist Italy as its best ally"; so, "a period of great trial for our state sets in, which will require a very clever peace-making foreign policy, based on the principles of democracy and most far-reaching public control. The downfall of our own reactionary forces and the challenging of every foreign policy pursued 'in camera caritatis' would be the best response to fascist challenges, those already posed and those yet to come."[54]

Ivo Andrić on Italian fascism

The writer and diplomat Ivo Andrić, the only Yugoslav Nobel laureate for literature (1961), had an opportunity at the very beginning of his career in the diplomatic service of the Kingdom SCS – serving in the Vatican (1920) and Trieste (1922–23) – to follow the rise of fascism on the chaotic political scene of Italy.[55] In the first half of the 1920s he published five texts on fascism, based, as he remarked in a footnote to the "Fascist revolution", on his "personal observations" and the literature on fascism coming both from those who belonged or were close to the movement and from the opposition.[56] Since none of his official reports prior to the mid-1930s has survived, these contributions he made are the only available source for the views that he, as a diplomat and a contemporary, held on the rise of fascism and its consequences.[57] In 1923 he wrote two texts on

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[54] B. Adžija, "Fašizam u Italiji", *NE* VI/9, 21 Nov. 1922, 278–280. In early July 1922, in an analysis of Italian post-war politics, he was of the view that its attitude towards the Yugoslav state "cannot be called friendly even with the best will in the world". The Italian bourgeoisie "neither wanted nor anticipated the disintegration of the Habsburg monarchy". With the creation of Yugoslavia, "those hopes of the Italian imperialists were shattered, and their dream about total rule over the Adriatic Sea remained on the paper of the London Treaty… the imperialists in Italy, in their angry powerlessness, cannot forgive us that". See B. Adžija, "Današnja Italija", *NE* XII/9, 21 Sept. 1922.

[55] On Andrić as a diplomat, see R. Popović, *Životopis Ive Andrića (1892–1975)* (Belgrade: Zadužbina Ive Andrića, 1980); M. Milošević, *Ivo Andrić, Diplomatski spisi* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1992); Ž. B. Juričić, *Ivo Andrić u Berlinu, 1939–1941* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1989); D. Glišić, *Ivo Andrić, Kraljevina Jugoslavija i Treći rajh 1939–1941*, vol. I (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2012).

[56] Andrić states that, when writing his article "Fašistička revolucija", *Jugoslavenska njiva* VII, I/8, 1923 (Zagreb), "apart from his personal observations", he drew on the publication *Fascism* that an anonymous Italian author published in Milan in 1922 under the pseudonym "Member of Parliament". He describes the Italian author as "very well-versed" in the phenomenon of fascism. See I. Andrić, *Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 198. All his texts on fascism in Italy used in this study are published in his collected works, *Sabrana djela*, vol. 12: *Istorija i legenda – Eseji, ogledi i članci* I (Sarajevo 1981). Page numbers in the footnotes below refer to the pagination of this volume and edition of his *Sabrana djela*.

[57] Milošević, *Ivo Andrić*, 11–14. Andrić's first contribution on Italy was of a literary nature, a review of D'Annunzio's book *Nocturno*: I. Andrić, "Jedna ratna knjiga Gabriele Danuncija", *Misao*

fascism: "Fascist revolution" and "Benito Mussolini".[58] Andrić did not lose interest in the developments in Italy when he left the country to take another post; having taken his doctoral degree in Graz, he was transferred to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade, where he continued writing about Italy.[59]

Andrić's first text on fascism draws attention to the fact that there is, outside Italy, "especially among the general public, a widespread and simplified understanding of fascism", its driving forces and goals. To some, it is a "cruel reaction and blind terror of paid gangs in the service of capitalism and militarism"; to others, it is a "magnificent revolt of national consciousness and enlightened classes against the mindless red terror of the seduced masses and Moscow agitators". In his view, fascism is "a bit of both, but it is also the product of many and diverse influences which… completely elude the stereotypes and slogans of the broad masses, who are prone to generalizations."[60] He does not call the "revolutionary nature" of fascism into question, but emphasizes that its origins can be traced back to 1914, the period of fierce strife between Italian interventionists and supporters of neutrality. The hard core of the interventionist current was composed of persons who either belonged to or abandoned the socialist movement (Mussolini, Bissolati); they saw war as a "revolutionary phenomenon", as an opportunity for the liberation and emancipation of the proletariat. Unlike Bissolati, who remained moderate and peaceable after the war, Mussolini, together with D'Annunzio, rejected the peace as unjust and unacceptable to Italian interests. Such circumstances brought "revolutionary interventionism" and the "intransigent nationalism" of the conservative elite closer together, and they proceeded united until they "got lost in one another completely".[61] *Fascio Italiano di combattimento* was created in the spring of 1919 amidst the post-war confusion, disappointments, economic and political crisis, sudden rise of the socialists in the elections that followed one after another, accompanied by a rift in the Socialist Party over tactics and goals, increasingly brutal confrontations between political opponents. The change set in when the *fascii*, composed of the "uncared-for minority of interventionists, veterans, university students, former army officers, idealists and pugnacious types, ardent patriots and foggy-headed

X/6 (1922), 1793–1706 (*Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 260).

58 Andrić, "Fašistička revolucija", *Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 198–207; I. Andrić, "Benito Musolini", *Jugoslavenska njiva* VII/12, 1923 (*Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 209–221).

59 I. Andrić, "Slučaj Mateoti", *Jugoslavenska njiva* VIII, II/4, 1924 (*Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 219–224); I. Andrić, "Stanje u Italiji", *Jugoslavenska njiva* IX, I/2, 1925; I. Andrić, "Kriza fašizma-Kriza Italije", *Jugoslavenska njiva* IX, I/3, 1925 (*Sabrana djela*, *Eseji* I, 225–230); I. Andrić, "Stanje u Italiji", *Jugoslavenska njiva* IX, II/2, 1925. He published these texts under the pseudonym "Res".

60 Andrić, "Fašistička revolucija", 198.

61 Ibid., 199.

revolutionaries", sensed that, in the northern agrarian areas, "revolutionary fervour" was fading away and the reaction of proprietors, big and small, the employers, was growing stronger. The latter began to help, in every possible way, the fascists in their actions against the socialists, "for reasons less than ideal". The passive attitude of the authorities towards the fascists was increasingly turning into benevolence. The peasantry, "the least aware of all, turned their support to the fascists as quickly and fanatically as they had to socialism two years earlier". The most important economic factor, the big industry of the north, recognized and accepted fascism as an "instrument for getting rid of the communist nightmare", and spared no effort to support it. Taken together, Andrić concludes, these factors led to fascism spreading "like wildfire".[62] Fascists used the "methodology" of overt violence, punitive expeditions, to remove their opponents: "clashes, murders, and all manner of violence became an everyday occurrence. Well-to-do classes assisted, the press covered up, and the authorities pretended to be deaf and blind." While the "socialists were holding long discussions and referendums for or against the 'use of force', a resolute and ruthless minority was spilling living blood and implacable kerosene." This fascist tactic, with assured "unaccountability and impunity for any form of violence, and the cult of the cudgel (the sung-about *manganello*) and the Browning", attracted "romantic youths and criminals alike".[63]

In Rome in 1921, during the (third) congress of fascists, Andrić watched their threatening street choreography, processions and marching. In black shirts "with skulls, ruffled hair and a military step, they passed through the quiet streets of Rome… With the exception of a few enthusiastic, bearded professors, proprietors' sons and spectacled students, all those were brutal, unintelligent faces of fierce small-town types. Bare-headed, pale and blue with cold, in a state of furious ecstasy, they carried their little flags and their characteristic slogans ('Me ne frego!' – I don't care!; 'Disperata' – Desperate) and waved their knotty cudgels or simple pieces of crude iron and lead, obviously consecrated by the tradition of many brawls… That was a dark, cruel province which came to Rome, thirsty for fighting and power; that was the flip side of communism which failed… an invasion of the dregs of society and upstarts.[64]

In his forceful "vivisection" of what he saw in Rome, Andrić paints a portrait of the leader of the fascist movement and his cult in the making, "which has been little spoken about before. In a long dark brown coat, with a broad yellow face and burning eyes, he walked briskly, catching everyone's eye. There was something cruel and friarly about him. That was Benito Mussolini". He was for the

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62 Ibid., 203.

63 Ibid., 204.

64 Ibid.

first time titled as *Duce* at the congress. Only a year later, "that dark, wildly frothing torrent carried him up and made him master of Italy and its fate". He is a "cruel sentimentalist" from Romagna, "not over-burdened with much knowledge or scruples, a good reader of the masses". "He has been likened to Napoleon and he does not seem to find it displeasing." "Understandably, one can hardly say something good [about him]… the man brought by strong upheavals to the surface from the darkness of lower strata and already wrapped in legend and the smoke of a hysterical cult… he imposed his will and his name on the bloody and murky movement called fascism although he could not give it a broad and concrete programme…"[65] While rising to power, he showed mercilessness at first to workers' organizations, by burning down their centres, "which he had used to build himself", and then started an attack on all institutions of bourgeois society. His goal was to replace the liberal state with the fascist one. He founded a fascist militia accountable to him only, installed his men into all positions of some import in the state, paid court to the Vatican. Yet, at the very beginning of his rule, Andrić concludes, it was impossible to recognize the real goal of his dictatorship, whether it was a "distinctive renewal or chaos"; whether Mussolini, with almost all instruments of power in his hands, "would enrich the life of the peninsula with new values or be gone together with his décor of black shirts and bloodied cudgels, and the troupe of his naive or guileful admirers, to make way for new people and new fights?"[66]

Somewhat later, Andrić published a biography of Mussolini, drawing on three biographies by Italian authors released in late 1922, which were "intended either as propaganda for the masses or as glorification of leaders and dictators". He was doubtful about their trustworthiness, but emphasized that he would try nonetheless to draw, from "countless commonplaces, stylistic overstatements and patriotic exaggerations", the picture "of an interesting dictator as it emerges from his speeches and actions before he came to power".[67] He called attention to Mussolini's ability to manipulate the masses and brutality in crushing the socialist movement. Although Andrić drew on the Italian authors who did not conceal their sympathies towards Mussolini, he diplomatically avoided pronouncing his opinion until the very end of his text. To the ruling elite, which had made fortune during the war, frightened and annoyed by post-war instability, Mussolini offered the "prospect of and then secured undisturbed ownership of property", promised peace and order in the country and the restoration of its prestige outside

[65] Ibid., 205.

[66] Ibid., 207.

[67] I. Andrić, "Benito Musolini", 209, 210. Andrić lists these three biographies: E. Settimelli, *Benito Mussolini* (Piacenza 1922); A. Rosatro, *Mussolini* (Milan: Ed. Modernissima, 1922); and O. Danese, *Mussolini* (Mantova: Edit. Paladino, 1922).

the country. To the military officers and war veterans, he promised acknowledgment for their war service; to the young generation, "infected with the post-war psychosis of sports and adventure", he secured an "unpunished flight of passions, boisterous ceremonial, black shirts and cheap glory". Those who did not take a "stance" on his politics or rejected it were left "cold-bloodedly to the 'action' of his *squadristi*, i.e., cudgels, castor oil, fire, exile, and all manner of abuses". Mussolini brought the state to its knees by his "bloodless and quite theatrical" march on Rome, "seized power from the good-hearted Facta, and then, just like that, in a black shirt and still panting from marching, he appeared before the king and received (in fact, took) rule over Italy".[68]

Andrić returned to Italian themes at the moment Mussolini's regime was in the worst crisis since the takeover, caused by the brutal murder of one of his fiercest critics and opponents, Giacomo Matteotti, a socialist member of parliament. The interval between the March on Rome and Matteotti's murder provided sufficient evidence for the true nature of Mussolini's regime. In the text prompted by that crime – which brought Mussolini to the edge of the political abyss, but he managed to pull back from it – Andrić is a harsh and uncompromising critic.[69] Matteotti's murder was a crime "at once outrageous and horrible, common and ordinary"; that, in a country that calls itself the "mother of law", in Rome, in broad daylight, the president of a party gets abducted, taken out of the city, murdered in the bestial manner and his body mutilated. But, however horrible it may seem, in Italy, where the fascist reign of terror becomes increasingly barefaced, such acts are "a common… and everyday occurrence… that a dozen young men in black shirts intercept a member of parliament… and beat him to death." This is what happened to the socialist members of parliament De Vagno and Piccinini; the liberal leader G. Amendola was beaten. A similar fate befell even a fascist member of parliament, professor Misuri, who had criticized the "methods" of some of his party's leaders in parliament. The situation in the interior of the country, far from spotlights, was even worse; there, murders and terror became the "essence of fascism, a permanent and efficient method".[70]

Andrić calls attention to the emerging fascist elite who imposed themselves on the old aristocratic and bourgeois elites by their provincial, brutal, upstart pushiness. Violence took root among the young storm troopers of the fascist movement in particular. It led to a distinctive psychology encouraged by absolute impunity for crime: "the bloody eagerness began to be rewarded". With Mussolini, there arrived in the capital "an entire swarm… of Bar candidates or, often, just second lieutenants by occupation, who had contributed to the fascist cause",

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[68] Andrić, "Benito Musolini", 220, 221.

[69] Andrić, "Slučaj Mateoti", 219–224; Andrić, "Kriza fašizma-Kriza Italije", 225–230.

[70] Andrić, "Slučaj Mateoti", 219.

and took the most important posts in the state administration, in ministries. Having received the highest honours, titles (in some cases, "Mussolini himself arranged for their marrying aristocratic ladies"), they became the backbone of the new, fascist elite. They were accompanied by an army of "satellites, their partisans and poor relatives from the provinces. Many a low-ranking local official or secretary of the local organization of the Fascist Party, in Cosenza or somewhere in Abruzzi, now was chief of an entire department, put on a monocle and began to feel and demonstrate what power meant." They all belonged to the wartime generation, growing up under the sign and cult of force and violence. Instead of starting to abide by the law and order – which they called for when they rose to power – they created "an unfortunate and, above all, repulsive mixture of revolutionary means and legal measures", as suited the current moment's interests and party leaders. Where that proved to be impossible, they resorted to the fascist measures from the period prior to their rise to power: beating, furniture demolition, setting newspaper offices on fire. As a result, "the loudest and the most ruthless, irresponsible elements with criminal instincts and no ideology whatsoever, became the most influential". The opposition press openly and aptly named that phenomenon: "banda di Viminale (Viminale – Interior Ministry)" or the "fascist Cheka".[71]

In the shadow of Mussolini's unchallengeable figure, "there began, in the name of Fascism – the saviour, a headless hunt for money and honours, abuse of position, blackmailing of industrials, a disgusting cancan of upstarts and vagabonds". With no intention of responding to the protests, interpellations and debates by what was left of the liberal and socialist opposition, the regime, through its interior ministry, orchestrated beating attacks on them instead: "the bloody fascist cudgel was moved from their party premises to state offices and responsible ministries". Political bullying was unstoppable; "a few desperados heaped violence upon violence. Until, in their fury, they began to think that the squares of Rome are the same thing as the narrow streets of their hometowns where people beat one another without court or witnesses, that the whole of Italy was a fascist domain and that Europe had no conscience at all." The murder of the socialist parliamentarian Matteotti was the bloody crown of such beliefs and actions, leading to the crisis of the fascist regime ("fascist Caporetto"), prompting all of Mussolini's conscious, hitherto reticent opponents, "from communists to clericalists", to raise their voice in unison and leave parliament in protest. This last open protest put Mussolini into such a situation that he "began to take a defensive attitude for the first time… comparing his party to a besieged fortress which is to be defended to the last breath", launching a new "phrase about one needing to 'live dangerously' (vivere pericolosamente)". Andrić finds that Mus-

[71] Ibid., 221.

solini, with this phrase, which strikes a chord, and quite poorly, somewhere between a hackneyed D'Annunzio and a tired Marinetti, finally bowed to the radical right wing of his party and fully identified himself with those provincial blackshirts who, a few days after Matteotti's murder, had marched the streets of Rome, singing: "Noi siamo fiorentini; Portiamo il coltello in boca; Guai a chi ci tocca!"[72] He accurately describes Mussolini's behaviour as skilful manoeuvring but he also demonstrates "how far he and his party are from the normalization of the situation and constructive work he spoke of so much only yesterday."[73]

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In the months preceding the March on Rome, the Yugoslav daily press and periodicals paid considerable attention to the entry of the fascists onto the political scene of Italy, their rapid conquest of the political space and brutal elimination of political opponents, the too permissive attitude of the liberal governments fearful of a strong left, but most of all to the fascists' newly-won position of leadership at the head of the radical nationalist and irredentist right in the conflict with the Kingdom of SCS. Most of the authors of these texts were distinguished figures of the Yugoslav political and intellectual scene, diplomats and writers. Their writing about the rise of Mussolini and his followers to power, the political and ideological programme of fascism, but also about fascism as "collective self-deception" of Italian society, was a clear warning as to its possible consequences for the relations between Italy and the young Yugoslav state. As one of the authors remarked, the emergence of this new radical political and ideological phenomenon was a sign of new and much more dangerous times, and posed "the greatest threat to general world peace". The texts about the political developments in Italy also show good understanding of the state of a society in a deep post-war crisis, which those who carried the greatest responsibility for it, resorting to wrong instruments, failed to resolve: the highest levels of the Italian state, the leading liberal politicians, the political parties, the economic elite – by "making a pact with the devil" against the left. Having entered Rome, the fascists soon charged a high price – the appropriation of all instruments of power. Based on all that has been presented here, the Serbian and other Yugoslav "observers" may be said to have had much fewer illusions than some other European contemporaries about the true nature of Mussolini's successful political manoeuvre made in late October 1922 and about what it might bring in the future. Part of the same set of issues was also the harsh criticisms levelled at Yugoslavia's official Italian policy, whose mistakes and bad solutions were being pointed out with little ambiguity.

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[72] "We come from Florence; we carry a knife between our teeth; woe betide anyone who touches us!"

[73] Andrić, "Slučaj Mateoti", 224.

The importance of relations with Italy required staying abreast of all further developments in the neighbourhood, on the west side of the Adriatic, as evidenced by the large number of articles in the Yugoslav daily press and periodicals.[74]

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