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**Antonella Fiorio***

*University of Bari "Aldo Moro"*
*Bari, Italy*

# Carlo Sforza and the Attempt to Define a New Italian Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, and the Danube Region, 1920–1921

**Abstract:** At the end of World War I, Italy sought to expand its influence in Central and Eastern Europe. To achieve this, it was crucial to establish good relations with the Balkan region, resolve the Adriatic issue peacefully, and assert its presence in the Mediterranean. This paper broadly analyses this significant period in postwar Italian foreign policy by outlining the strategies implemented by Italian Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza from 1920 to 1921 in the Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Danube regions. Sforza attempted to mediate and intervene in many significant issues of the international debate, including Albanian independence, support for Mustafa Kemal's Turkish nationalist movement, relations with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SCS), and support for the Little Entente. The détente in Adriatic relations, produced by the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo with the Kingdom of SCS and the beginning of dialogue with the Czechoslovak Republic and the Kingdom of Romania, formed the basis for true politics of power in Eastern Europe, particularly among the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Analysing historiography, diplomatic documents, and archival records, the paper examines Carlo Sforza's diplomatic moves in regions that would return to the focus of Italian diplomatic interests in the coming years, entangling with the directives of Fascist imperialism.

**Keywords:** Carlo Sforza, Italian foreign policy, interwar period, Danube-Balkan area, Southeast Europe, Adriatic, Mediterranean, Treaty of Rapallo, Little Entente.

## 1. *Mediterranean and Lower Adriatic: Albania's Independence and the Turkish Nationalist Movement*

When the war ended, Giovanni Giolitti returned as the leading figure in the Italian government on 15 June 1920. In the challenging endeavor of pursuing a genuine climate of international peace, he selected Carlo Sforza, a career diplomat, former High Commissioner in Constantinople during the premiership of Vittorio Emanuele Orlando and Undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the government led by Francesco Saverio Nitti, to assist him.[1]

* 94.antonella.fiorio@gmail.com

[1] About Carlo Sforza, see C. Sforza, *Diario prefascista*, ed. M. Toscano (*Nuova Antologia*, 1967–1968); C. Sforza, *Un anno di politica estera: discorsi*, ed. A. Giannini (Rome:

The decision to appoint Carlo Sforza as Foreign Minister was strategic, both in terms of internal and foreign policy: Giolitti had been a neutralist in the war, while Sforza had been an interventionist, so the latter's appointment was meant to mitigate the anti-Giolittian sentiments expressed by various political groups. Furthermore, Sforza was held in high esteem, for the same reason, by both France and Great Britain. Piero Quaroni wrote in this regard: "Few Italian personalities have had the name and dazzle of Carlo Sforza abroad".[2] During his tenure as Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Sforza had had the opportunity to show his diplomatic skills and build a network of contacts both within the Ministry and in diplomatic relations, especially in French circles. Strongly critical of the foreign policy conducted by the revisionist and pro-German Nitti government, Sforza understood the need to establish a preferential relationship with France as the basis for a real Italian role in Central and Eastern Europe. The appointment of Salvatore Contarini as Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 1920 also contributed to strengthening his position in the eyes of the French.

Sforza's foreign policy project had a clear European dimension, namely "to seize the opportunity, created by the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and the decline of Russia, to insert itself into the process of reorganising the Danube-Balkan world and to establish, in mutual support against the inevitable future German pressure, the new international strength of Italy".[3] As a liberal-

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Libreria di Scienze e Lettere, 1921); C. Sforza, *Pensiero e azione di una politica estera italiana*, ed. A. Cappa (Bari: Laterza, 1924); C. Sforza, *Diplomatic Europe since the Treaty of Versailles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928); C. Sforza, *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi* (Rome: Mondadori, 1945); C. Sforza, *Jugoslavia, storia e ricordi* (Milan: Donatello De Luigi, 1948); C. Sforza, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Collana dell'Archivio Storico del Senato della Repubblica, nuova serie 14 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); L. Zeno, *Carlo Sforza. Ritratto di un grande diplomatico* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1999); B. Bagnato, "Carlo Sforza. Passione e realismo di un diplomatico". In *La politica estera dei toscani. Ministri degli Esteri nel Novecento*, ed. P. L. Ballini (Florence: Polistampa, 2012), 69–85; G. Giordano, *Carlo Sforza: la diplomazia 1896–1921* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1987); A. Brogi, "Il trattato di Rapallo del 1920 e la politica danubiano-balcanica di Carlo Sforza", *Storia delle relazioni internazionali* 5, no. 1 (1989), 4–46; B. Bracco, *Carlo Sforza e la questione adriatica: Politica estera e opinione pubblica nell'ultimo governo Giolitti* (Milan: Unicopli, 1998); C. Vallauri, "Il ritorno al potere di Giolitti nel 1920", *Storia e politica* 4 (1962) and 2 (1963); F. Rudi, "La missione diplomatica di Carlo Sforza a Corfù (1916–1918)", *Rivista di studi politici internazionali* 91, no. 2 (2024), 171–233; L. Micheletta, *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra*, vol. 1 (Rome: Jouvence, 1999), 191–373; and L. Monzali, *Italiani di Dalmazia 1914–1924* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007), 191–326.

[2] P. Quaroni, *Il mondo di un ambasciatore* (Milan: Ferro, 1965), 298.

[3] M.G. Melchionni, "La politica estera di Carlo Sforza nel 1920–21", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 36, no. 4 (1969), 537–570.

democratic nationalist and *connoisseur* of the Habsburg lands, the Balkans and the Mediterranean, Sforza advocated for the establishment of nation-states in these regions.

Giolitti showed that he shared Sforza's political project, confirming his assent in the speech he delivered before the Chamber of Deputies during the inauguration of his new government.[4]

There were many points of contention left unresolved by the Nitti government, including, as regards relations with Southeast Europe, the structure of Albania, the problems on the Greek-Turkish front and the Adriatic question.

With regard to Albania, the prime minister constantly reiterated the objective of his actions in that country: absolute independence.[5] The situation in which Albania found itself in the summer of 1920 was particularly critical, and Giolitti did not hesitate to define it as "anarchy".[6] Civil and religious conflicts and clashes were the order of the day, and the country was literally prey to neighboring peoples, who undermined it from all fronts to occupy a part of it. The Italian goal was to achieve complete independence from all external actors, leading to the emergence of the Vlora (Vlorë) issue. Vlora was a strategic point: if a power hostile to Italy had occupied it, this would have represented a serious threat. Albania was objectively unable to defend Vlora against any power that had even a modicum of naval strength. Consequently, Italy was unable to immediately vacate Vlora without being certain that it would not be occupied by some other power that could use it to her detriment and that, in all probability, would never leave the city.

Therefore, on 28 June 1920, Giolitti and Sforza decided to send to Albania Carlo Alberto Aliotti, who had already served as the Italian representative

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4 G. Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, 4 vols. (Rome: Tipografia della Camera dei Deputati, 1953–1956), Chamber of Deputies, session of 24 June, 9 and 15 July 1920, cited on 1749–1754.

5 Reference in Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Chamber of Deputies, session of 27 June 1920, 1767–1768. On the relations between Italy, Austria, and Albania before the war, see A. Duce, *L'Albania nei rapporti italo-austriaci 1897–1913* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1983).

6 Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Session of 27 June 1920, Albania, 1767–1768. On Italian–Albanian relations between the First World War and the postwar period, see P. Pastorelli, *L'Albania nella politica estera italiana 1914–1920* (Naples: Jovene, 1970); D. Bakić, "The Italo–Yugoslav Conflict over Albania: A View from Belgrade, 1919–1939", *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 25, no. 4 (2014), 594; A. Basciani, "Struggle for Supremacy in the Adriatic: Italy, the SHS Kingdom, and the Albanian Question", *Qualestoria* 49, no. 1 (2021), 123–137; A. Basciani, "Tra politica culturale e politica di potenza: Alcuni aspetti dei rapporti tra Italia e Albania tra le due guerre mondiali", *Mondo Contemporaneo* 8, no. 2 (2012), 91–114; and O. J. Schmitt, *A Concise History of Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

in Durrës before the Great War, to start negotiations with the Albanian leaders in Vlora who had risen against the Italian occupation forces. A month later, Sforza sent confirmation that he had delivered to the Greek minister in Rome, Lampros Coromilas, a note denouncing the agreement signed on 29 July 1919 by the then Italian Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni and the Greek Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos on the partition of Albanian territory.[7] The negotiations produced a memorandum of understanding signed on 2 August by the Italian minister Gaetano Manzoni and the Prime Minister of the new Albanian government, Sulejman Delvina, consisting of 8 articles, the so-called "Treaty of Tirana",[8] by which Italy would accept Albanian independence and withdraw its troops from Vlora and the rest of Albania. In return, they would recognize Italy's right to militarily occupy the islet of Saseno, located in front of Vlora. The deadline for the complete evacuation of the district of Vlora and the coast was set at thirty days, starting from 3 August.[9]

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[7] The treaty required the Italian government to support, during the peace conference in Paris, the Greek claims over the whole of Thrace, southern Albania (Gjirokastra and Korçë) and Asia Minor (Sandžak of Smyrna and Sarukkan), and ceded to Greece sovereignty over the islands of the Aegean Sea occupied after the Italo-Turkish War of 1911–1912, except Rhodes. For their part, the Greeks pledged to support the Italian requests for a mandate over the State of Albania and the annexation of Vlora and its hinterland, confirming the neutralisation of the Corfu Channel and the coast up to Cape Stilos. Greece would grant Italy a free port in Santi Quaranta and a free zone in Izmir for fifty years. For more details on the agreement, see *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1955–), sixth series, vol. IV, docs. 174, 175, 177 and 179. The text is also reproduced in A. Giannini, *Documenti per la storia della pace orientale (1915–1922)* (Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1933), 17–21. For the additional protocol, see Carlo Sforza's speech to the Chamber of Deputies on 6 August 1920 in *Atti Parlamentari*, Chamber of Deputies, XXV Legislature, 1919–1920, *Discussions*, vol. V, 4985. For further discussion, see Micheletta, *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra* (Rome: Jouvence, 1999), 28–32; and M. G. Melchionni, "Accordi italo-greci a Parigi (1919–1920)", *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 48, no. 3 (1981), 471–473.

[8] Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Roma (ASMAE), *Political Affairs 1919–1930* (AP 19–30), Albania, b. 690, f. "Albania Tirana Protocol", Sforza to Giolitti and Bonomi, Rome, 7 August 1920, annex 1: *Preliminary Protocol*.

[9] ASMAE, (AP 19–30), Albania, b. 690, f. "Albania Tirana Protocol", Sforza to Giolitti and Bonomi, Rome, 7 August 1920, annex 2: Manzoni to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Durrës, 2 August 1920. For military reports on the evacuation operations of the district of Vlora following the implementation of the Protocol, see ASMAE, (AP 19–30), Albania, b. 690, f. "New Structure of Albania. Execution of the Tirana Protocol. Treaties for Vlora". On the appointment and work of the Italian-Albanian Joint Commission provided for in Articles I and V of the Protocol, see ASMAE, (AP 19–30), Albania, b. 691, f. "Tirana Protocol and Work of the Italian and Albanian Delegation".

In a manner analogous to the endeavour to safeguard Albanian autonomy by asserting dominion over Vlora (and subsequently, following the expulsion, only Saseno), Italy aspired to preserve the prerogatives in the Mediterranean it had received by the Treaty of Sèvres and the Tripartite Agreement to uphold the independence of Turkey. Carlo Sforza's pro-Turkish leanings, evident since the period in which peace was being negotiated with the former Ottoman Empire, became manifest during the year when he held the Foreign Ministry. This led to a marked deterioration in relations with Great Britain and, on the other hand, the opening of another line of dialogue with France, which equally showed interest in a rapprochement with Turkey.[10] When the Treaty of Sèvres between the Allies and Sultan Mehmed VI was finally signed, an uncertain period began for Italy. In this case, Italy was aware that it had just one option: only an agreement with the Turks could make effective and concrete the influence that the Tripartite Agreement had granted it in words.[11]

During the Boulogne Conference (21–22 June and 27–28 July 1920), Sforza proposed a negotiation with the nationalist movement of Mustafa Kemal, a proposal that immediately put Italy at odds with Great Britain. The British prime minister, David Lloyd George, had spoken out several times against any kind of deal with Kemal or revision of the peace treaty proposed to Turkey and rejected by Turkish nationalists. This element came on top of another previous reason for disagreement, namely the British failure to sign the Tripartite Agreement by which Italy, Great Britain and France had established their re-

[10] On the foreign policy conducted in the Near East under the Giolitti–Sforza government and on relations with the Allies, in particular with Great Britain, see Micheletta, *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra*, 191–219, 263–287, 289–318, 319–338. For an overview of the "Eastern question", see A. Giannini, *L'ultima fase della questione orientale (1913–1939)* (Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1941). On the relations between Turkey and the Allies in the immediate post-war period, see C. Le Bras, *Entre Constantinople et Ankara: les diplomaties britannique, française et italienne et le défi de la dualité gouvernementale en Turquie (1918–1922). Aspects politiques, juridiques et pratiques*, PhD diss., Université de Nantes, École doctorale no. 604, Sociétés, Temps, Territoires, 25 November 2021. For further discussion, see V. Sommella, *Carlo Galli, la diplomazia italiana e le relazioni fra Italia e Turchia: Dalla crisi dell'Impero ottomano alla nuova Turchia kemalista* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2024); F. Ahmad, *From Empire to Republic: Essays on the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2008); G. Del Zanna, *La fine dell'Impero ottomano* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2012); P. Dumont, *Mustafa Kemal invente la Turquie moderne* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2006); R. Gingeras, *Fall of the Sultanate: The Great War and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and F. L. Grassi, *L'Italia e la questione turca (1919–1923): Opinione pubblica e politica estera* (Turin: Silvio Zamorani Editore, 1996).

[11] ASMAE, *Carte Sforza*, b. 8, Sforza to Giolitti, Rome, 15 May 1920.

spective zones of influence in the former Ottoman territories. During the Spa Conference (5–16 July 1920), the British Secretary of State made it clear that the agreement would not be signed until the Turkish peace treaty was ratified.

Another point of friction, to which, however, Great Britain ended up agreeing because of aligning Italian and French views and actions, was the decision to maintain embassies in Constantinople instead of downgrading the Allied presence in Turkey to the rank of legation, as proposed by Great Britain. Due to the challenging nature of the circumstances, Italy and France did not believe it was appropriate to reduce the level of their presence. Italy sent Camillo Garroni as High Commissioner, who had run the embassy before the Great War and was an opponent of declaring war on Turkey. The idea was to mediate both between the two seats of the Turkish government – Constantinople, the seat of the sultan, and Ankara, the seat of the national movement – and between Ankara and the Allies.[12] In this regard, following the government of Constantinople's proposal to dispatch a Turkish delegation to the Kemalists to persuade them to accept the peace treaty, Sforza capitalized on this opportunity by suggesting that the delegation be accompanied by representatives of the Allied governments. However, he encountered resistance from the British government, which insisted that a mission to Kemal could only be sent after the ratification of the peace treaty. This time, even the French government considered Sforza's proposal inappropriate, so it was not pursued.[13]

The situation was aggravated by the Greek crisis, which led to the fall of Venizelos and concerns about a possible restoration of King Constantine. This development prompted the Allies to adopt a wait-and-see approach. The Allies were to deliberate on the Turkish question once the Greek crisis had been resolved and the Turkish government's mission to Kemal had reached its conclusion. Only then would the Allies formulate a unified intervention strategy.[14]

The escalating crisis in the Near East prompted the Quai d'Orsay to conclude that the time had come to find a solution to the problems in the area through a direct agreement with Ankara and a revision of the Treaty of Sèvres, aligning itself with the positions of the Consulta, which was inclined to offer Turkey a revision of the treaty in exchange for its acceptance of the Tripartite Agreement. One proposal was to negotiate on Smyrna, which the treaty had as-

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[12] *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (DDF), *Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (Paris–Brussels: Imprimerie Nationale, 1997–), 1920, vol. III, doc. 13, Paris to Constantinople, 29 September 1920.

[13] DDF, 1920, vol. III, doc. 72, "Note sur l'envoi d'une mission de conciliation turque chez les nationalistes turcs", Paris, 14 October 1920.

[14] On the Greek political crisis and the Allied hostility to the restoration of King Constantine, see DDF, 1920, vol. III, docs. 225, 263, 279, 309, 333, 357, and 424.

signed to Greece, and transform it into a Greek economic privilege zone under Turkish sovereignty, as provided in the Tripartite Agreement for the Italian and French zones of influence. However, firm British opposition led to the failure of this proposal.[15]

At the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris, between 24 and 29 January 1921, the only thing that was decreed was the need, shared by all three Allies, to revise the Turkish peace treaty, without specifying the changes. At the end of the conference, Sforza spoke about the Near East with both the British and French representatives, finding the latter, of course, much more forthcoming. Talks with Alexandre Millerand and Philippe Berthelot led to the exchange, in February 1921, of a memorandum of understanding containing the points on which both governments agreed, namely the establishment of the Greek-Turkish border along the Enos-Midia line with a special regime for Adrianople, the recognition of Greek privileges over Smyrna, which would come under Turkish sovereignty, the inclusion of the Tripartite Agreement in the new peace treaty, and the hope that the policy of rapprochement would spill onto issues relating to Central European matters.[16] The Italian-British discussions were not as fortunate.

Even during the inter-allied conference in London held from 21 February to 12 March 1921, convened specifically to discuss the Eastern questions, the Treaty of Sèvres and the Greek-Turkish conflict, no solution was found for the Turkish problem. An audience was given to both the Greek delegation and the two Turkish delegations, that of Constantinople and that of Ankara, which came united and with a single programme, based on the integrity of the territories inhabited by the Turks and the full sovereignty of Turkey. Despite efforts to reach a compromise, it soon became apparent to the Allies that nothing could be done to persuade the parties to acquiesce, even marginally.[17]

Rather than a terrain for Greek-Turkish dialogue, Sforza's interest in the conference was orientated towards the search for an agreement with the nationalists. In fact, the London conference ended up determining the position taken by the Allies in the Greco-Turkish conflict, with Great Britain in favour of the Greeks and Italy and France in favour of the Turkish nationalists, encouraging rather than quelling belligerent instincts. In March, both Italy and France concluded agreements with the Foreign Minister of the nationalist government,

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[15] DDF, 1920, vol. III, docs. 237, 239, 245, 281, 304, and 429; ASMAE, *Carte Sforza*, b. 8, f. "Turchia. Telegrammi 1919–1920", Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rome, 16 January 1921.

[16] DDF, 1921, vol. I, doc. 62, "Note du Département", 31 January 1921.

[17] On the Paris and London conferences and the Allied debate on the Near East, see Le Bras, *Entre Constantinople et Ankara*, 329–367; DDF, 1921, vol. I, docs. 36, 88, 128, 141, and 148.

Bekir Sami Bey, the French for the regulation of the military situation in Cilicia, and the Italians to set up economic collaboration in the territories of the Tripartite Agreement.[18] In addition, however, Sforza also undertook with Bekir to support the Turkish requests for a peace treaty with the Allies and to withdraw Italian troops from Asia Minor after the ratification of peace.[19] London's disappointment intensified when, after requesting a copy of the two agreements, both Paris and Rome refused to send it before submitting them to Parliament. When, in April, the complete texts came to the attention of the Foreign Office, it soon became evident that the Italian-Turkish agreement also contained political commitments, which the Consulta tried to diminish in scope. The Italian-Turkish agreement, which was not ratified by the National Assembly in Ankara, increased the existing tensions between Great Britain and Italy.[20]

## 2. *The Solution for the Adriatic: the Treaty of Rapallo*

Sforza discussed the Adriatic question and the government's foreign policy in the East with the former Foreign Minister Sidney Sonnino, as reported in Sonnino's diary.[21] Sonnino strongly criticized the decision to abandon Vlora, calling it a "serious mistake" with "future consequences". Vlora was not enough on its

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[18] For the Franco-Turkish agreement, see DDF, 1921, vol. I, docs. 173, 185, 190, and 197.

[19] For the text of the Sforza–Bekir agreement, see Le Bras, *Entre Constantinople et Ankara*, 787, app. 23.

[20] Le Bras, *Entre Constantinople et Ankara*, 405–407. On the English disappointment with the Franco-Turkish agreement, see DDF, 1921, vol. I, doc. 270, Paris to Constantinople, London and Rome, 4 April 1921. The episode that caused the definitive crisis of Italian-British relations was the conclusion of an agreement with Afghanistan. Between the end of May and the beginning of June 1921, a mission of the Kabul government visited Rome, and Sforza worked on a commercial treaty and the exchange of diplomatic missions between Rome and Kabul. Afghanistan represented for the British government a region of particular and exclusive interest under its control, and this Italian interference sparked a harsh British protest with accusations of intrigues and double-dealing aimed at the conduct of an all-Italian policy in the Near and Middle East. On the Italian-Afghan agreement, see Ehsanullah d'Afganistan, *Aman Ullah il re riformista. Afghanistan 1919–1929*, ed. Marika Guerrini (Milan: Jouvence, 2018), 76–81. For an overall view of Italian-Afghan relations in the interwar period, see L. Monzali, *Un re afghano in esilio a Rome: Amanullah e l'Afghanistan nella politica estera italiana, 1919–1943* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2012).

[21] S. Sonnino, *Diario 1916–1922*, ed. Pietro Pastorelli (Bari: Laterza, 1972), vol. III, 357–363, 23 August 1920.

own for Italian defense in the Adriatic, but it was important. By abandoning Vlora, Italy gave the advantage to the Greeks and Yugoslavs.

Sonnino's motto "neither give nor exceed"[22] led him to judge negatively the "excessively renunciatory policy" of Giolitti and Sforza, which, in his opinion, would not bring any benefit. Peace and friendship with the Yugoslav government would be impossible to achieve because, according to Sonnino, "Yugoslavia is held together thanks only to the open and acute disagreement with Italy".[23]

Sforza showed he agreed with this last point. Thanks to his knowledge of the Habsburg lands and the Balkans (he had served as a diplomat both in the Habsburg Empire and with the Serbian government in exile in Corfu), he understood the divisions in the Kingdom of SCS, especially the Croat-Serb opposition. His strategic objective was to politically exploit these divisions to induce the Belgrade government to see the threat of being surrounded by hostile states and internally weakened by intense national struggles. This would encourage the Belgrade government to improve relations with Rome.[24]

Giolitti believed that it was possible to establish a genuine friendship with the Kingdom of SCS.[25] The Kingdom of SCS was certainly as interested in peace as Italy, and maintaining an open conflict between the two countries would only exacerbate internal and international tensions. However, achieving a thoughtful solution rather than an improvised one required careful reexamination of the circumstances and consent of both parties. After closing the Albanian question with Italy's withdrawal from the occupation zone, the government in Rome intensified contact with the Yugoslavs. At the end of August, Sforza sent Trumbić the new Italian negotiating positions through Vincenzo Galanti, chargé d'affaires in Belgrade. Italy's renunciation of the protectorate over Albania and its willingness to no longer defend the restoration of an independent Montenegro opened the door for Italy to resume dialogue on different terms. Italy agreed not to annex Fiume as long as it remained independent and to leave the hinterland of Zara. Sforza made it clear that this was a significant political

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[22] S. Sonnino, *Diario 1916–1922*, ed. Pietro Pastorelli (Bari: Laterza, 1972), vol. III, 351, 22 October 1919.

[23] S. Sonnino, *Diario 1916–1922*, ed. Pietro Pastorelli (Bari: Laterza, 1972), vol. III, 361–362, 23 August 1920.

[24] On Sforza's support for Croatian and Montenegrin separatism, see F. Caccamo, "Il sostegno italiano all'indipendentismo croato 1918–1920", *Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 6 (2004), 23–56; F. Caccamo, *Il Montenegro negli anni della prima guerra mondiale* (Rome: Aracne, 2008); A. Becherelli, *Il Regno dei Serbi, Croati e Sloveni nell'Europa di Versailles (1918–1921)* (Rome: Aracne, 2017); M. Bucarelli, "Delenda Jugoslavia. D'Annunzio, Sforza e gli intrighi balcanici del '19–'20", *Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 6 (2002), 19–34.

[25] Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari, Session of 9 July*, p. 1755.

concession to the Kingdom of SCS, which meant that Rome did not have to sacrifice the secured military positions along the Alpine border. On the Dalmatian hinterland and on the possession of the islands, Italy declared itself willing to negotiate.[26]

It seemed possible to finally resolve the Balkan dispute with the Kingdom of SCS, laying the ground for friendly relations with countries of the Danube region, like the Czechoslovak Republic. The new Czechoslovak Republic was an important partner in the Danube–Balkan area. Italian diplomacy set up a system of joint pressure, and Prague, London and Paris were supposed to encourage the Yugoslavs to be more moderate and open to dialogue.[27] A few months before the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo, Carlo Sforza urged the Chamber of Deputies to ask for an imminent solution to the Adriatic question, because in a

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[26] On the negotiations about the Adriatic question and Italian-Yugoslav relations in the early post-war period, see E. Aiph, "Per un'analisi del Trattato di Rapallo", *Quaderni. Centro di ricerche storiche – Rovigno* 6 (1982), 273–293; P. Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica (1919–1920)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1959); D. Bakić, "Nikola Pašić and the Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1919–1926", *Balcanica* XLVII (2016); A. Basciani and E. Ivetić, *Italia e Balcani. Storia di una prossimità* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2021); F. Canale Cama, *Quella pace che non si fece. Francesco Saverio Nitti e la pace tra Europa e Mediterraneo (1919–1922)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2020); M. Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale (1866–2006)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007); M. Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e la questione adriatica: 1918–1926. Dibattiti parlamentari e panorama internazionale*, Dibattiti storici in Parlamento (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014); D. Kirchner Reill, *The Fiume Crisis. Life in the Wake of the Habsburg Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); I. J. Lederer, *La Jugoslavia dalla conferenza della pace al Trattato di Rapallo 1919–1920* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1966); L. Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2015); L. Monzali, *Italiani di Dalmazia 1914–1924* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2007); L. Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia. L'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa centrale (1918–1941)* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2010); F. Caccamo, *L'Italia e la Nuova Europa. Il confronto sull'Europa orientale alla Conferenza della pace di Parigi (1919–1920)* (Milan: Luni, 2000); V. G. Pavlović, *Finir la Grande guerre dans les Balkans 1918–1923* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2022); V. G. Pavlović, *De la Serbie vers la Yougoslavie. La France et la Naissance de la Yougoslavie, 1878–1918* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2015); V. G. Pavlović, *Serbia and Italy in the Great War* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2019).

[27] E. Aiph, "Per un'analisi del Trattato di Rapallo", 276. On Italian-Czechoslovak relations, see D. Bolech Cecchi, *Alle origini di un'amicizia. Italia-Cecoslovacchia 1918–1922* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2008); F. Caccamo, "Un'occasione mancata. L'Italia, la Cecoslovacchia e la crisi dell'Europa centrale, 1918–1938", *Nuova Rivista Storica* XCIX (2015); F. Caccamo, "Italia e Cecoslovacchia negli anni Venti", *Nuova Storia Contemporanea* 2 (2000), 59–76; F. Caccamo, "L'Italia nella corrispondenza tra Masaryk e Benes all'indomani della Prima guerra mondiale", *Clio* XXXII, no. 3 (1996), 489–513.

Europe with an uncertain future, it was much wiser not to have obstacles on its eastern side.[28]

The final negotiations on the eastern border were conducted personally by Carlo Sforza, starting on 7 November 1920 at Villa Spinola, between Santa Margherita Ligure and Rapallo, and lasted for six days. In addition to Carlo Sforza, Giovanni Giolitti and Ivanoe Bonomi represented Italy, and Ante Trumbić, Milenko Vesnić, and Kosta Stojanović participated on behalf of the Kingdom of SCS. Woodrow Wilson's departure from the American presidency and, by extension, from post-war European problems and the Anglo-French pressure on the Yugoslavs to accept Carlo Sforza's "reasonable formulas",[29] induced the Kingdom of SCS to give in to the latest arrangement proposed by Italy and to sign the treaty. The achievement of a final agreement represented a source of great satisfaction for the Giolitti-Sforza government, even diplomatically. After long days of talks between the plenipotentiaries, the Treaty of Rapallo was signed on 12 November, by which Dalmatia, the main object of Italian and Yugoslav claims, was finally largely assigned to the Kingdom of SCS, and Italy renounced it in exchange for sovereignty over Zara, Cres, Lošinj, Lastovo, Pelagosa, control of all Venezia Giulia up to Mount Učka and Nevoso with the Free State of Fiume – the latter being a transitional solution, accompanied by an exchange of letters between Sforza and Trumbić promising the Yugoslavs the possession of Porto Baros. Italy recognized a unitary Yugoslav state, ending its support for separatist movements and accepting Montenegro's integration into the Kingdom of SCS. There was no explicit agreement concerning Albania, but Sforza wanted to pursue collaboration with Belgrade.[30]

The result was not a diplomatic success for everyone, most notably for the Italians inhabiting Dalmatia – neither those who remained in Italy nor those who became part of Yugoslavia – nor for D'Annunzio and the more intransigent nationalists and fascists (although Sforza had repeatedly sought Mussolini's col-

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[28] C. Sforza, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Collana dell'Archivio Storico del Senato della Repubblica, nuova serie 14 (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006), 74, Communications of the Government, Chamber of Deputies, 2nd session of 6 August 1920.

[29] C. Sforza, *L'Italia dal 1914 al 1944 quale io la vidi*, 96.

[30] The text of the Rapallo Treaty is published in A. Giannini, *Documenti per la storia dei rapporti fra l'Italia e la Jugoslavia* (Rome: Istituto per l'Europa orientale, 1934), 36. On the Treaty of Rapallo, see L. Riccardi, "Francesco Salata, il trattato di Rapallo e la politica estera italiana verso la Jugoslavia all'inizio degli anni Venti", *Quaderni giuliani di storia* 2 (1994), 75–91; L. Riccardi, "Le trattative italo-jugoslave per il trattato di Rapallo nel diario di Francesco Salata (20 settembre–5 novembre 1920)", *Storia contemporanea* 1 (1996), 129–149; A. Brogi, *Il trattato di Rapallo del 1920*.

laboration to act as a mediator).[31] The Croatian and Slovenian parties of the Kingdom of SCS were similarly disaffected. Both sides accused their respective national governments of yielding too much ground.

For the Italians of Dalmatia, the agreement represented the renunciation of irredentism and the beginning of abandonment under hostile foreign domination, the sacrifice of minorities in favour of a higher raison d'état. For the Croats, it represented "the betrayal of national rights carried out by the Serbian government in favour of Italy",[32] and the minorities sacrificed there were nothing more than the bridgehead for future Italian penetrations and new attempts at imperialism. The problems associated with its practical application, especially in terms of the eviction from the occupied land and the management of minorities, only ended up exacerbating these feelings on both sides. The respective national governments, on the other hand, hailed the Treaty of Rapallo as the end of a territorial dispute that had only increased internal instability and undermined the international diplomatic balance in the previous months. In his speech approving the Treaty before the Chamber of Deputies, Carlo Sforza affirmed, in fact, that the Treaty of Rapallo was the beginning of a "fruitful and glorious life" and the first step toward "serene Italian influence from the Adriatic to the Aegean and the Black Sea".[33]

The advantages of this treaty were obvious. In previous negotiations, reduced territorial concessions were envisaged for Italy; the city of Zara itself, for example, when it was not proposed as a Yugoslav possession, was presented as a free state under the control of the League of Nations.[34] Now, in addition to the annexation of Zara, a vast hinterland was also secured in Trieste thanks to the border in the Julian Alps that united all of Istria with Italy. The independence of Fiume was also a guarantee for protecting its Italianness. Article VII of the Treaty of Rapallo allowed Dalmatians to opt for Italian citizenship while retaining the right to residency in the Kingdom of SCS, without the obligation to transfer their domicile outside the kingdom and retaining the free use of their

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[31] ASMAE, Carte Sforza, b. 7, incoming and outgoing telegrams about Mussolini. See also the article written by Mussolini on the Treaty of Rapallo in the newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, where he offers a positive assessment of the agreement: B. Mussolini, "Ciò che rimane e ciò che verrà", *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 13 November 1920. For an analysis of Mussolini's attitude, see E. Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana 1919–1933* (Padua: Cedam, 1960), 22–27.

[32] Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento*, 196.

[33] Sforza, *Discorsi parlamentari*, 88, "Approval of the Treaty of Rapallo and annexation to the Kingdom of the territories attributed to Italy", Chamber of Deputies, session of 26 November 1920.

[34] Sforza, *Discorsi parlamentari*, 85.

language and religion. Trumbić was originally against explicitly including this clause in the pact unless Italy guaranteed the same conditions for the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in its territories. Compared to the treaties for minorities signed at the peace conference, this was a great concession. In exchange, Italy renounced its right to ask for protection for the Italian Dalmatians who had opted for Yugoslav citizenship.[35]

Even Alberto Bergamini, a critical observer of the politics of Giolitti and Sforza, invited Sonnino to consider the positive results of the Treaty of Rapallo after long, inauspicious negotiations. He called this "incomparably better" than the proposals by Wilson, Tardieu, Tittoni, Scialoja, and Nitti, and said it brought relief and satisfaction that the war had ended.[36]

The vast majority of the country was satisfied with the closure, at least apparent and temporary, of the long-standing question of the eastern border. At the international level, the agreement between the two Adriatic rivals strengthened Italy's presence and influence beyond the Adriatic Sea. This confirmed that the sacrifice of its territorial interests would be compensated in a larger picture.

### 3. *Between the Adriatic and the Danube: Support for the Little Entente*

Sforza's foreign policy, pursued during a favourable international period when the Allies were temporarily out of the spotlight – due to the Anglo-Americans' progressive disinterest in European continental politics and the "Hungarian parenthesis" of French policy[37] – gave Italy an opportunity to emerge as a viable alternative and a point of reference for Danube-Balkan relations.

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[35] Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento*, 175.

[36] S. Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, ed. Pietro Pastorelli (Bari: Laterza, 1975), 716–720, d. 519, Bergamini to Sonnino, Rome, 15 November 1920, citation on p. 717. Sonnino's diary also contains comments on the Treaty of Rapallo, in particular on pp. 365–367, on 17 November and 29 December.

[37] G. H. Soutou, "L'insoluble problème hongrois, ou les limites de la puissance française en 1920", communication to appear in the proceedings of the international conference *Des mémoires réconciliées: le Traité de Trianon 90 ans après*, held in Paris, 3 May 2010; G. H. Soutou, "Le deuil de la puissance (1914–1958)". In *Histoire de la diplomatie française*, ed. J.-C. Allain, F. Autrand, L. Bély et al. (Paris: Perrin, 2005), 743–860; G. H. Soutou, "L'ordre européen de Versailles à Locarno", in *1918–1925: Comment faire la paix ?*, ed. C. Carlier and G. H. Soutou, Proceedings of the international conference held in Vincennes, 26–27 November 1999 (Paris: Economica, 2001), 301–331; G. H. Soutou, "L'impérialisme du pauvre: la politique économique du gouvernement français en Europe centrale et orientale de 1918 à 1929. Essai d'interprétation", *Relations internationales* 7 (1976), 219–239. On Italian-French rivalry in Eastern Europe, see E. Serra and J. B. Duroselle, *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939* (Milan: Istituto per gli studi di politica

In June 1920, Czechoslovak protests against Polish terrorism in the Teschen area were accompanied by a sense of discontent with the French presence, which influenced the country's policies. French tutelage became a topic of concern for public opinion and politicians, especially those seeking closer ties with Germany. Italy could benefit from this situation by opposing French imperialism. Communist propaganda also accused Czechoslovak foreign policy of being influenced by France, which was hostile to the Soviets.

In the foreign policy that Eduard Beneš was conducting for Czechoslovakia, i.e., the construction of an anti-Hungarian defence network, the pro-Magyar tendencies of French foreign policy were looked upon with apprehension and created fertile ground for Italy, which could take advantage of it, to find its own space of influence not only in Czechoslovakia but in all the disoriented states that had arisen from the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary or had been enlarged as a result of it. The mounting reports that the Czechoslovak newspapers were alarmed about the secret manoeuvres of France in Hungary, even in support of the House of Habsburg,[38] created in political circles the suspicion that there was a kernel of truth, despite the French public denials and official declarations of support and loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic and of defense of the Treaty of Trianon and its prompt ratification by Hungary.[39]

For Czechoslovak foreign policy, it was important to have good relations with the Western powers and to monitor Germany's internal and foreign policy and Russia's rebirth for the sake of the European balance of power. For these reasons, Czechoslovakia aimed to restore relations with Poland, understanding and friendship with the Kingdom of SCS and Romania, and good neighbourliness with Austria and, as far as possible, Hungary. Therefore, Minister Beneš's trips to Belgrade and Bucharest at the end of August 1920 had a clear political purpose. The aim was to obtain collective declarations of neutrality in the Rus-

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internazionale, 1981); F. Le Moal, *La France et l'Italie dans les Balkans, 1914–1919. Le contentieux adriatique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006); A. S. Nardelli-Malgrand, *La rivalité franco-italienne en Europe balkanique et danubienne, de la Conférence de la Paix (1919) au Pacte à Quatre (1933): intérêts nationaux et représentations du système européen*, PhD diss., Université de Paris, 2011; F. Dessberg, "Coopération et luttes d'influence entre la France et l'Italie en Europe centrale au lendemain de la Première Guerre mondiale". In *1919–1920. I trattati di pace e l'Europa*, ed. P. L. Ballini and A. Varsori (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 2020), 269–287; V. G. Pavlović, "Le conflit franco-italien dans les Balkans 1915–1935. Le rôle de la Yougoslavie", *Balcanica* XXXVII (2006), 163–201.

[38] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 933, Bordonaro to Sforza, Prague, 6 November 1920.

[39] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 933, Bordonaro to Sforza, Prague, 19 October 1920.

sian-Polish conflict[40] and political and military understanding against Hungary. While this aim was achieved in Belgrade and the political and military agreements were signed, Bucharest's response was more reserved.[41]

This marked the beginning of the so-called "Little Entente", which was formally established by Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS with the signing of an official exchange of notes on a military and defensive alliance in Belgrade on 14 August 1920. This alliance was the first step in creating a structure that ideally included the Kingdom of Romania.[42] On the occasion of the ratification of the peace treaties with Hungary, the Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Beneš sent the Romanian government the text of the Czechoslovakian-Yugoslav defensive alliance, inviting Take Ionescu to formally join this system of alliances. However, he received no more than a verbal confirmation of shared intentions.[43]

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[40] *Außenpolitische Dokumente der Republik Österreich (1918–1938)* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1996) (ADÖ), dd. 3/461–461a, contains the Austrian proposal for neutrality, which also involved Germany, Italy, the Kingdom of SCS and the Czechoslovak Republic.

[41] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 934, Torretta to Sforza, Vienna, 3 September 1920.

[42] Text of the "Little Entente" Treaty in *The New York Times Current History*, January 1921, p. 73. The text in Italian is published in G. Barié, G. De Leonardis, L. De Robertis and M. Rossi, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali. Testi e documenti (1815–2003)* (Bologna: Monduzzi, 2004), 233. The term "Little Entente" was adopted from a contemptuous reference in the Hungarian newspaper *Pesti Hírlap*, 21 February 1920: P. Wandycz, "The Little Entente: Sixty Years Later", *Slavonic and East European Review* 59, no. 4 (1981), 548–564. On the Little Entente, see *The Little Entente: Nations of the New Alliance*, *The New York Times Current History*, October 1920, 79–81; S. Huddleston, "The Little Entente and Central Europe", *The Contemporary Review*, (July 1920), 620–627; M. Toscano, "Le origini della Piccola Intesa". In M. Toscano, *Pagine di storia diplomatica contemporanea* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1953), 4; N. Iordache, *La Petite Entente et l'Europe* (Geneva: Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales, 1977); R. Machray, *The Little Entente* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970); ASMAE, Czechoslovakia b. 934, Galanti to Sforza, Belgrade, 16 and 17 August 1920; *Papers and Documents Relating to the Foreign Relations of Hungary* (Budapest: Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1939–1946) (FRH), vol. I, d. 602, Count Teleki to Mr Praznovszky, Budapest, 23 August 1920; *Documents diplomatiques relatifs aux conventions d'alliance conclues par la République tchécoslovaque avec le royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes et le royaume de Roumanie. Décembre 1919–août 1921* (Prague: Ministère des Affaires étrangères, 1923). The Little Entente in French diplomatic documents: DDF, 1920, II, dd. 17–18–102–204–268–355–384–392–463–476; DDF, 1920, III, dd. 36–44–200–433; DDF, 1921, I, dd. 26–83–105–107–437–454–465.

[43] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 933, Tosti di Valminuta to Sforza, Bucharest, 28 August 1920. On Romania in the Little Entente, see Măturii. *Desăvîrşirea unităţii naţional-statale a poporului român. Recunoaşterea ei internaţională 1918. Documente interne*

Ionescu's willingness to conclude a formal agreement was not shared by King Ferdinand of Romania and General Alexandru Averescu. In their opinion, Romania and Czechoslovakia had a definite interest in maintaining cordial and intimate relations, they had many common interests and therefore the exchange of ideas was useful, but it was quite another thing to conclude an agreement or an alliance in Europe's precarious climate, in which it was impossible to make predictions about events and political groupings even in the near future. The Romanian general then reported to Beneš that Romania would not conclude agreements with the Kingdom of SCS until the latter's dispute with Italy was resolved, and Beneš was satisfied with this answer. The King of Romania declared that he cared more about Italy's friendship than that of the Kingdom of SCS, so it was desirable to brighten the Italian-Yugoslav horizon.[44]

While the Treaty of Rapallo taking its shape, Carlo Sforza reported sincere sympathy for Italy from the representatives of Romania and Czechoslovakia, which was good news for his Adriatic policy.[45] In a telegram dated 20 November 1920, the Minister Plenipotentiary in Prague, Antonio Chiaromonte Bordonaro, reported to Sforza the satisfaction expressed in a conversation between Beneš and Take Ionescu for the Italian government's understanding of the reasons for the creation of the Little Entente.[46] This would fuel Hungary's and France's suspicions of Italy's involvement in creating an anti-Hungarian front, which was created precisely when France sought closer relations with Hungary, thus acting against France.[47]

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*și externe* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986) (Mărturii 1918), vol. VI, February 1920 – December 1920, dd. 871–902–903–904–905–913–914.

[44] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 934, Martin Franklin to Sforza, Bucharest, 9 September 1920; ASMAE, AP 19–30, Romania b. 1504, Martin Franklin to Foreign Ministry, Bucharest, 9 September 1920.

[45] Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (ACS), Carte Sforza, b. 1, f. 1, telegram leaving for Prague, Sforza to Bordonaro, 31 July 1920; ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 934, departing telegram, Sforza to the Italian Legation in Belgrade and Prague, 15 August 1920; Tosti di Valminuta to Sforza, Bucharest, 25 August 1920; ASMAE, AP 19–30, Romania b. 1504, Martin Franklin to Foreign Ministry, Bucharest, 13 May, 27 July and 7 August 1920. From a conversation with his Romanian colleague, Imperiali reported Romania's feeling of intimacy and cordiality towards Italy: *Ibid*., Imperiali to Foreign Ministry, London, 15 July 1920. Finally, in Romanian circles, the conclusion of the Treaty of Rapallo was hailed as a great Italian diplomatic success: *Ibid*., Martin Franklin to Foreign Ministry, Bucharest, 18 November 1920.

[46] ACS, Carte Sforza, b. 1, f. 1, telegram arriving from Prague, Bordonaro to Sforza, 20 November 1920.

[47] *Documents diplomatiques français sur l'histoire du Bassin des Carpates (1918–1932)* (Budapest: Institut des sciences historiques de l'Académie hongroise des sciences, 1993)

Austria was also repeatedly invited to formally join the Little Entente, which it refused, while maintaining solidarity with it. The hypothesis of a joint military intervention against Hungary, which Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of SCS and Romania said they would be willing to undertake in case of danger, made the Austrian government particularly hesitant. Additionally, the pan-Slavist policies pursued by the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav governments did not align with Austria's own interests.[48] This also led to the exclusion of the formation of the corridor, a potential juncture between the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav forces, which Italy feared. The Austrian Chancellor Karl Renner explicitly assured Italy of this.[49] However, Austria used the Little Entente as a veiled threat against Hungary. Renner believed Hungary should decide what kind of relations it wanted with Vienna: continue hostilities over western Hungary or seek détente and a common solution, for which Austria believed Italy could mediate.[50] It was important for Hungary to maintain the advantages of a neutral, friendly Austria and avoid surrounding herself with enemies.

The Little Entente was thus born from the developments of the troubled summer of 1920, when the Soviet-Polish war and the French manoeuvres in Hungary anticipated a scenario of threatening isolation for the Czechoslovak

(CARPATES), vol. III, d. 67, Fouchet to Millerand, Budapest, 27 August 1920; here is reported a comment by the Hungarian Foreign Minister, Kanya, who accused Italy of being "the instigator of Chancellor Renner's trip to Prague and that of Mr Beneš to Belgrade and Bucharest to make the encirclement of Hungary definite", p. 82. See also d. 72, Fouchet to Millerand, Budapest, 29 August 1920, p. 87.

[48] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 934, Torretta to Sforza, Vienna, 3 September 1920.

[49] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia b. 934, Torretta to Sforza, Vienna, 14 August 1920.

[50] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 934, Torretta to Sforza, Vienna, s.d. (but certainly before the first ten days of September 1920 because in the subsequent telegram from Budapest dated 13 September 1920 Cerruti in conversation with Teleki reports Renner's arguments contained in Torretta's telegram); ACS, Carte Sforza, b. 1, f. 1, Cerruti to Sforza, Budapest, 13 September 1920; FRH, vol. I, d. 166, Dr. Gratz to Count Somssich, Vienna, 5 March 1920; d. 649, Notes of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count Teleki, of his conversations with the High Commissioner of Italy in Budapest, Mr. Cerruti, Budapest, 12 September 1920, p. 628. This note reports Cerruti's response to the Hungarian requests for clarification about Italy's involvement in the formation of the Little Entente. The Hungarian government believed that Italy had helped the achievement of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement; Cerruti, authorized by Sforza, had sent a denial to this Hungarian declaration, adding, however, that he was aware of it and had explained the points of which the agreement was composed, in particular those relating to the Hungarian ratification of the Treaty of Trianon and the prohibition of a Habsburg restoration on the Hungarian throne.

Republic, from which the alliance with the Kingdom of SCS and Romania represented a potential escape route.

Although Hungary was mentioned in the first article of the treaty, the political leaders of the Little Entente provided a different explanation of the purpose and nature of the alliance. After his trip to Belgrade and Bucharest, Beneš issued the following statement:

> This Entente is aimed not merely against all attempts at reaction which might menace the new States; it is not simply a defensive alliance assuring integrity and independence to the three States concerned, but it is, above all, a positive agreement to facilitate a return to normal economic conditions, to regularise the exchanges between these countries, which have been so severely tried by the war, and to establish a new order of things in accordance with the new political constitution in Central Europe.[51]

Beneš wanted to reduce the "negative" aspects of the agreement on the international level, meaning the containment of Hungary, and to highlight the ideological underpinnings of the new alliance system and its economic mission. He said the Little Entente was important for fostering economic ties between Prague, Belgrade, and Bucharest. This was the first step toward post-war European reconstruction. However, the three states' cooperation was based on a single common denominator: the fear of Hungarian revisionism and the Habsburg restoration. Czechoslovakia did not address Romania's and the Kingdom of SCS's other problems, such as the Russian and Italian issues. In a precarious geopolitical climate, the Little Entente provided security against other inimical political and economic groupings, as well as the primary bulwark against the Hungarian threat.

Secretary General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Maurice Paléologue judged the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav agreement to be of little importance:

> Paléologue, however, does not attach much importance to this in view of the fact that the Serbs are immobilised, being economically dependent on France and threatened on three sides by the Bulgarians, Albanians and Italians. He denied that Rumania could have acceded to this agreement, since that would be contrary to her policy inaugurated toward Hungary. According to him, Beneš received a non-committal reply in Bucharest to the effect that the project is interesting but would be of real value only if Bulgaria, Greece and Poland would also join.[52]

The change in French government leadership would soon change the policy towards the Little Entente. With Paléologue's resignation and Philippe

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[51] "The Little Entente: Nations of the New Alliance", *The New York Times Current History*, October 1920, p. 80.

[52] FRH, vol. I, d. 618, p. 606, Mr. Praznovszky to Count Teleki, Paris, 28 August 1920.

Berthelot's return to the Quai d'Orsay, Paris began to reorient its policy and eventually gave Beneš's initiative a belated blessing.

As previously mentioned, Italy could benefit from the months of French estrangement, particularly following the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo. After the Italian-Yugoslav agreement was achieved, Italy's relations with the Danube-Balkan countries improved significantly. Italy's main concern in that area was the potential consolidation of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav alliance against Italy. With the ongoing dispute with the Kingdom of SCS over possession of Dalmatia and the delineation of the eastern border, Italy feared that the Czechoslovak Republic could intervene militarily to defend South Slav interests if a peaceful resolution could not be reached. On several occasions, Italian diplomatic staff stationed beyond the Adriatic were instructed to ascertain the intentions behind emerging agreements.[53] During his stay in Portorož, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister Vlastimil Tuszar in conversation with the Trieste financier, his friend, Camillo Castiglioni – appointed by Sforza to start surveys among the Czechoslovaks to understand the level of solidarity with the Yugoslavs – gave his word of honor that Czechoslovakia was working with Yugoslavia and Romania only to reach a defensive treaty against Hungary and the agreement would guarantee the territorial integrity of the three countries solely and exclusively with regard to Hungary. If, for example, Slovakia had risen up, there would have been no *casus belli*, but if Hungary had helped the Slovaks, then the Kingdom of SCS and Romania would have been bound to intervene to help the Czechs. Under no circumstances, therefore, would Czechoslovakia intervene to help the Kingdom of SCS in the event of a conflict with Italy.[54] The détente produced by the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo – which followed the other two important acts for the area, namely the denunciation of the Tittoni-Venizelos agreements in July 1920 and the end of the Italian occupation of Vlora in August 1920 – eliminated the possibility of an alliance against Italy between Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS, marking a milestone in Carlo Sforza's political career. In the eyes of outside commentators, he seemed to have finally taken control of Danube-Balkan Europe, after a year of contention with France.[55] Although they

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[53] ACS, Carte Sforza, b. 1, f. 1, Sforza, 31 July 1920; ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 933, Bordonaro to Sforza, Prague, 2 September 1920; ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 934, Castiglioni to Sforza, Trieste, 28 July 1920; Tosti di Valminuta to Sforza, Bucharest, 25 August 1920; Martin Franklin to Sforza, Bucharest, 9 September 1920.

[54] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 934, Castiglioni to Sforza, Trieste, 28 July 1920.

[55] Comment of the Austrian representative in Prague: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Archiv der Republik, Neues Politisches Archiv (1919–1938), Wien (OeSTA, ADR,

were linked by agreements that declared their shared intent and coordinated international action, the profound differences between Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS could hardly transform the agreement into a real friendship. This sentiment was expressed by Tuszar in his conversation with Sforza before the official announcement of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav alliance. He stated that the relations between the two countries were more apparent than real and that there was a clear interest in maintaining economic and cultural relations. However, he made it clear that Czechoslovakia had no intention of following the Kingdom of SCS and supporting it in its ventures, with an obvious reference to the possibility of conflict with Italy.[56] The two newly formed post-Versailles countries were united by their opposition to any form of reconstitution of the former Danube Monarchy, especially the return of any member of the House of Habsburg to the throne of Hungary. This opposition pushed Romania to move closer to the alliance.

Italy showed the two allies from the Little Entente that it could be a concrete point of reference in their anti-Hungarian policy and the only real guardian of the interests and fears of Eastern European countries against the possibility of a Habsburg dynasty member being restored to the Hungarian throne. This was another point in favour of Carlo Sforza's policy. Concurrently with the Treaty of Rapallo, he signed the Anti-Habsburg Convention with the Yugoslav government. With the first three articles of the convention, "in order to ensure the benefits of the peace obtained at the price of so many sacrifices with the victory over the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy", the two governments committed themselves to 1) ensuring the strict observance of the peace treaties signed at Saint-Germain and Trianon, 2) taking, by common agreement, the political measures necessary to prevent the restoration of the House of Habsburg to the thrones of Austria and Hungary, and 3) supporting each other by providing the most appropriate diplomatic support for this purpose. They also agreed to monitor any activity directed against their mutual security from both Austrian and Hungarian territories and to keep in close contact by exchanging information. The Italian Government declared its satisfaction with the agreement between

NPA), Karton 48, *Originalberichte der österreichischen Gesandtschaften und Konsularämter 1918 bis 1938*, Prague, 13 January 1921. See also F. Fejtö, "La Petite Entente, la France et Beneš", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 29 (1991), 11–15.

[56] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 934, Sforza to the Italian Legation in Belgrade and Prague, Rome, 15 August 1920. The differences between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and the apparent friendship were also reported by the Austrian representative in Prague in conversation with Czech journalists: OeSTA, ADR, NPA, K. 48, *Originalberichte der österreichischen Gesandtschaften und Konsularämter 1918 bis 1938*, Prague, 15 February 1921. On Beneš's trip to Rome, see also *Ibid*., 13 and 26 January 1921.

the Kingdom of SCS and the Czechoslovak Government. It also made sure that the Anti-Habsburg Convention was brought to the Czechs' attention. The two governments would consult each other before putting new agreements into effect.[57] Thus, Italy was involved "without binding it, in the complex of present and future agreements between the new nationalities".[58] After receiving confidential notice of the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo,[59] Beneš was invited to visit Rome, and the trip was scheduled for the end of January 1921. Postponed for 1 February, his four-day stay was mainly used to discuss commercial issues, which would shortly lead to the signing of a commercial treaty in March,[60] but the meeting also had a clear political aspect. With the Sforza-Beneš exchange of notes on 8 February 1921, the commitments contained in the Anti-Habsburg Convention, to which Czechoslovakia now expressly adhered, were reaffirmed. Foreign policy positions and interests and the application of peace treaties were discussed, without reaching a political agreement in accordance with Beneš's preference.[61] A conference of the successor states of Austria-Hungary was convened in Rome on 7 April 1921 mainly to address economic issues.

The anti-Habsburg convention was also the instrument with which Sforza tried to set up a dialogue and find common ground with Poland. After the Peace of Riga (18 March 1921), which had ended the Russian-Polish conflict in which Italy had maintained a neutral position,[62] Sforza tried to include Poland in his policy toward the Little Entente, but Poland was unresponsive, considering Italy to be much more sympathetic to Czechoslovakia. Poland also

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[57] The text of the Convention is published in Barié, De Leonardis, De Robertis, Rossi, *Storia delle relazioni internazionali. Testi e documenti (1815–2003)*, 229. For his analysis see M. G. Melchionni, *La convenzione antiasburgica del 12 novembre 1920* (Milan: Giuffrè, 1972).

[58] Melchionni, *La politica estera di Carlo Sforza*, 559.

[59] ASMAE, AP 19–30, Czechoslovakia, b. 933, Bordonaro to Sforza, Prague, 16 November 1920; C. Sforza, *Discorsi parlamentari*, 93.

[60] The trade agreement between Italy and Czechoslovakia was signed in Rome on 23 March 1921. See D. Bolech, *Alle origini di un'inimicizia*, 121–122.

[61] D. Bolech Cecchi, *Alle origini di un'inimicizia*, 119; CARPATES, vol. III, d. 198, Count Sforza, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy, to M. Benes, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia, Rome, 8 February 1921.

[62] On the Russian-Polish conflict: F. Anghel, "The Premises of the Romanian-Polish Alliance on the Backdrop of the Military Conflict between Poland, Ukraine and Soviet Russia (1919–1921)", *Annales de l'Université "Valahia" Târgoviște, Section d'Archéologie et d'Histoire*, X, 2 (2008); J. Borzęcki, *The Soviet-Polish Peace of 1921 and the Creation of Interwar Europe* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2008); N. Davies, *White Eagle and Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–1920 and "the Miracle on the Vistula"* (London: Pimlico, 2003).

believed that a Habsburg restoration limited to Hungary would not be threatening. A new attempt was made when the Polish-German dispute over Upper Silesia resurfaced, which created friction with Rome over the Italian support shown to German demands, especially after the favorable outcome of the plebiscite held on 20 March 1921.[63] The Polish insurrections in Upper Silesia led Sforza to again propose an agreement concerning fending off the Habsburgs: Italy would support Poland in the question of eastern Galicia if Poland joined the anti-Habsburg agreement. This time, also thanks to the diplomatic efforts of the Polish minister plenipotentiary in Rome, Konstantin Skirmunt, the Polish side showed itself willing to accept the proposal, but the fall of the Giolitti-Sforza government and the disinterest of the subsequent government led by Ivanoe Bonomi with Pietro Tomasi della Torretta as minister for foreign affairs, little inclined to conclude political collaboration agreements with Poland, blocked the signing of the prepared treaty.[64]

The two attempts to restore the former king and emperor Charles of Habsburg to the Hungarian throne in April and October 1921 were a test of the political climate in the aftermath of the Treaty of Rapallo. The joint action carried out by the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Romanian, Italian, French and British governments to oppose the restoration and, in particular, the Italian commitment to remove the royal family from Switzerland, where it was in exile, earned Carlo Sforza comments of satisfaction and congratulations from the governments of the Little Entente. They hoped that their collaboration would continue in the future and that the agreements reached would provide a solid foundation for overcoming trivial details and considering the most important common interests.[65]

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[63] On the question of Upper Silesia: W. Grosch, *Deutsche und polnische Propaganda während der Volksabstimmung in Oberschlesien 1919–1921* (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa, 2003); T. K. Wilson, "The Polish-German Ethnic Dispute in Upper Silesia, 1918–1922: A Reply to Tooley", *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, XXXII (2005), 1–26; T. H. Tooley, "German Political Violence and the Border Plebiscite in Upper Silesia, 1919–1921", *Central European History*, XXI (1988), 56–98; T. H. Tooley, *National Identity and Weimar Germany: Upper Silesia and the Eastern Border, 1918–1922* (Lincoln–London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

[64] On Italian-Polish relations: L. Monzali, *Francesco Tommasini e la rinascita della Polonia indipendente* (Rome: Accademia Polacca delle Scienze, 2018).

[65] ASMAE, Carte Sforza, b. 7, Sforza to the Italian Legation in Belgrade, Rome, 13 April 1921; *Ibid.*, 13 May 1921. On Charles's attempts at restoration: A. Gottsmann, *Karl I. (IV), der Erste Weltkrieg und das Ende der Donaumonarchie* (Vienna: Publikationen des Historischen Instituts beim Österreichischen Kulturforum in Rom, Abhandlungen 14, 2007); E. Kovács, *Politische Dokumente zu Kaiser und König Karl I. (IV.) aus internationalen Archiven* (Cologne–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Cie, 2004); *Docu-*

The trivial details (or "small stitching", to render the phrase verbatim) to which Sforza refers in the telegram are certainly to be understood as the problems relating to the application of the Treaty of Rapallo, which were still very much felt in Dalmatia.

Sforza's Adriatic policy was harshly criticised by the Dalmatian nationalists for being too pro-Yugoslav. This criticism was exploited by the right-wing government and the fascists to argue against the policies of Giolitti and Sforza. Also criticised by socialist and Catholic circles for its anti-German and pro-French positions, Carlo Sforza's foreign policy became increasingly unpopular with the Italian public and political parties. After a long parliamentary speech in defence of his work in the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, Sforza had to note the lack of confidence expressed in him by the Chamber of Deputies, and this prompted Giolitti to offer the resignation of his government on 27 June 1921.[66]

Sforza's pro-Yugoslav policy suffered a setback under the subsequent Italian government, led by Ivanoe Bonomi with Pietro Tomasi della Torretta at the Foreign Ministry (July 1921–February 1922), who questioned the validity of the Sforza-Trumbić letters on Porto Baros, straining relations with the Kingdom of SCS and Czechoslovakia. Carlo Schanzer, the foreign minister of the last liberal government led by Luigi Facta (February–October 1922), resumed talks with the Kingdom of SCS, leading to the Santa Margherita agreements, which were ratified by the fascist government of Benito Mussolini. Mussolini's early foreign policy reflected continuity with previous liberal governments, inheriting from Carlo Sforza the strategic safeguarding of Albanian independence, maintaining a Mediterranean presence, and fostering friendship with the Kingdom of SCS. However, starting from the late 1920s, Mussolini adopted an increasingly imperialist stance, mirroring the fascistisation of his internal policy, and Sforza moved progressively away from diplomatic circles.[67]

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*ments diplomatiques concernant les tentatives de restauration des Habsbourg sur le trône de Hongrie, août 1919 – novembre 1921*, République tchécoslovaque, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Prague, 1922.

[66] Giolitti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Chamber of Deputies, "Resignation of the Last Giolitti Ministry", Session of 27 June 1921, p. 1875.

[67] On fascist foreign policy: G. Rumi, *Alle origini della politica estera fascista 1918–1923* (Bari: Laterza, 1968); G. Carocci, *La politica estera dell'Italia fascista 1925–1928* (Bari: Laterza, 1969); E. Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922–1939* (Milan: La Nuova Italia, 2000); G. Salvemini, *Mussolini diplomatico (1922–1932)* (Bari: Laterza, 1952); E. Di Nolfo, *Mussolini e la politica estera italiana (1919–1933)* (Padua: Cedam, 1960); A. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton: University Press, 1970); R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Vol. I: Gli anni del consenso, 1929–1936* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974); R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. Vol. II: Lo Stato totalitario 1936–1940* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981); H. J. Burgwyn, *Il revisionismo fascista. La sfida di Mussolini alle grandi po-*

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