

THE QUEST FOR BALANCE: ATTITUDES OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK
INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT ABROAD TO THE ADRIATIC PROBLEM
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the activities of Czechoslovak independence movement leaders during the First World War, especially their involvement in the Adriatic Question. Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik, representatives of the Czechoslovak National Council in exile, pursued a single goal during the war: an independent state. This study analyzes their skilful negotiations in the Adriatic region, where Italian and South Slavic territorial ambitions collided. Personal correspondence and diaries of the main protagonist of the Czechoslovak National Committee reveal the thinking behind their negotiations with the Italian representatives and the protagonists of Yugoslav Committee. These documents shed light on Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik's behind-the-scenes discussions, their opinions on other politicians and their different attitudes to them.

Keywords: Czechoslovak independence movement, First World War, Adriatic Question, Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Milan Rastislav Štefánik

LA RICERCA DELL'EQUILIBRIO: L'ATTEGGIAMENTO DEL MOVIMENTO CECOSLOVACCO ALL'ESTERO IN MERITO ALLA QUESTIONE ADRIATICA DURANTE LA PRIMA GUERRA MONDIALE

SINTESI

L'articolo analizza le attività dei capi del movimento indipendentista cecoslovacco durante la prima guerra mondiale, soprattutto in merito alla questione adriatica. Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš e Milan Rastislav Štefánik, ovvero i rappresentanti del Consiglio nazionale cecoslovacco in esilio avevano negli anni del primo conflitto mondiale in mente un solo scopo: uno stato indipendente. Questo studio analizza i loro negoziati che includevano la regione adriatica, uno spazio dove le ambizioni territoriali italiane e jugoslave entravano in conflitto. La corrispondenza e i diari dei maggiori protagonisti del Comitato nazionale cecoslovacco rivelano il modo di pensare dietro i negoziati che intercorsero con i rappresentanti italiani e di quelli del comitato jugoslavo. Questi documenti rivelano in una nuova luce le opinioni e le discussioni dietro le quinte che intercorsero tra vari politici da una parte e tra Masaryk, Beneš e Štefánik dall'altra.

Parole chiave: movimento cecoslovacco per l'indipendenza, prima guerra mondiale, questione adriatica, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Milan Rastislav Štefánik

In his memoirs on the First World War¹ Edvard Beneš mentioned that controversy between Italians and South Slavs was difficult for Entente and the object of daily polemics in journalistic and political circles, and he tried to avoid these controversies (Beneš, 1927b, 87). Together with Tomáš G. Masaryk and Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Beneš was a representative of the Czechoslovak foreign independence movement, and from 1916 secretary of the Czechoslovak National Council (ČSNR) in exile.² The three Czechoslovak politicians followed a kind of Realpolitik in their dealings with the Italians and the South Slavs, always maintaining focus on their primary goal: the realization of Czechoslovak demands for an independent state at the expected Peace Conference. At the beginning of the First World War none of the Entente Powers – except Russia³ – sought the destruction of Austria-Hungary, nor could any of them envision it. These states generally considered the Habsburg Monarchy a necessary barrier to German and Russian expansionism. Slavic political emigrants from Austria-Hungary were among the first to push for the creation of their own nation-states, but the various Slavic nations' public demands for emancipation concealed

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2 Founded in February 1916, the Czechoslovak National Committee was the supreme body of the Czechoslovak foreign independence movement, the leaders were finally Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik.

3 Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Dmitrievich Sazonov proposed the disintegration of Austria-Hungary already in 1914 (Valiani, 1966, 178).

contradictory motivations and goals. The different movements found it difficult to reconcile their various views and form unified front. One of the sources of tensions was Adriatic area. Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik had to negotiate carefully during the war and after 1918 with their Entente allies, the Italians and the South Slavs, whose territorial ambitions in the Adriatic region collided. Their correspondence (Hájková, Šedivý, 2004; Hájková *et al.*, 2004), and especially Beneš' diaries (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013) record also the progress of these negotiations. These documents shed light on Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik's behind-the-scenes discussions, their opinions on other politicians, and their attitudes toward them.

At the war's outbreak, Czech relations with the Southern Slavs and the Italians differed considerably. Czech and South Slavic political activists had been in close contact before the war. Many South Slavs studied at Prague University and some had been Masaryk's students. Masaryk had also maintained contact with Serbian politicians, including Prime Minister Nikola Pašić. In summer 1914, a wave of pro-Slavic sympathy swept through much of Czech society. Some Czech soldiers leaving for the Russian front singing *Hej Slované* with the modified lyrics "The Russian is with us, and he who is against us will be swept away by the French," and Czechs abroad – in the USA, France, and England – organized large-scale pro-Serbian demonstrations (Hájková, 2011, 31–33; Pichlík, 1962, 64, 89). Czech relations with Italy, on the other hand, were not close despite the resonance of Italian *Risorgimento*, the popularity of the ancient Italian monuments, and the presence of Italian workers in the construction of railway tunnels in Bohemia. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Czech soldiers in the Habsburg army had fought against the Italians, who were perceived as a traditional enemy of the monarchy. The Italians were, however, an enemy whose military reputation left a lot to be desired (Šedivý, 2008, 338; Helan, 2012, 242).

At the war's outbreak, in the context of Italian neutrality and the cordial pre-war relationships with South Slav politicians, journalist and academics, members of the Czech independence movement abroad focused primarily on the Slavs. Masaryk spoke about a possible future Czech territorial connection with the Adriatic and, in spring 1915, in his secret memorandum *Independent Bohemia* he suggested a land corridor between the future new states: Bohemia and the South Slavic state of "Serbo-Croatia" which he considered necessary from an economic, as well as a military perspective. He claimed – and it is likely he was exaggerating – that his idea had the support of the majority of Czech and South Slavic politicians (Seton-Watson, 1943, 35ff; Masaryk, 2005a, 68). He also underlined the unique relationship between Czech and South Slavs in his foreword for the publication *L'Unité Yougoslave. Manifeste de la Jeunesse Serbe, Croate et Slovène réunie*. (Masaryk, 2005a, 91–93). Thanks to Masaryk's special relationship with Serbian politicians, he and Beneš were issued Serbian passports after going into exile, and they used them during much of the war. The top priority of the Czechoslovak wartime propaganda was to "liberate the subjugated Slavic nations from the Habsburg yoke." In November 1915, Czechs and Slovaks living abroad presented for the first time their program for an independent Czechoslovak state in their *Declaration of the Czech Foreign Committee*. The document expressed support for "the Serbian, Russian, and Polish brothers," faith in the "final victory of the Slavs and the Allies," and the conviction that "the victory of the Slavs and Allies will be to the benefit of all Europe and mankind" (Masaryk, 2005b, 137).

At the beginning of their exile, the leaders of the Czechoslovak and South Slavic program for independence met in Italy. Masaryk traveled to Rome in December 1915, and the Croatian politicians Franjo Supilo and Ante Trumbić emigrated to Italy. Masaryk quickly contacted them and other South Slavic representatives, and simultaneously tried to ensure that the Czechs and South Slavic politicians in the Habsburg Monarchy, as well as in exile, would be mutually informed about their activities and plans (Valiani, 1966, 203, 209; Beneš, 1927a, 60). The Czechoslovak National Committee negotiated with the Yugoslav Committee, which pushed for an independent state of Serbs, Slovenes, and Croats, as well as Serbian representatives, who adopted ideas about a Greater Serbia and its domination in the future state. Even before the war's outbreak, Supilo, a Dalmatian politician and journalist, strove for a Croatian-Italian rapprochement, which he was convinced could provide a barrier against Pan-Germanism (Valiani, 1966, 27–29). A barrier to Pan-Germanism also resonated in Masaryk's wartime speeches. He underlined that Germany is aggressive power which wants to expand not only to the east, but also to the west. Pangermanistic aspiration could be, according him, prevented just by defeat of Germany and by creation of the system of the small Mid-European national states as barrier. Complementary Masaryk's argument was that Austria-Hungary lost any positive idea and its dismembering would lead to the defeat of Germany.

Trumbić and Supilo were the main Dalmatian proponents of the Yugoslav state concept⁴ and it soon became apparent that their ideas would collide with Italian territorial demands in the Adriatic. Italian diplomacy, led by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino, viewed the expansion of Serbia, with the support of Russia, as a dangerous encroachment of Russian influence. The Serbs were interested in eastern Adriatic territory, but the Italians gained this region as the result of the secret Treaty of London signed spring 1915, which had brought Italy into the war. Dalmatia, however, was inhabited primarily by Slavs, and was not part of Italy's demands until 1914 (Vivarelli, 1964, 364–365). The South Slavic demands were also ambitious. When it formulated territorial demands for the future South Slavic state in May 1915, the Yugoslav Committee demanded all of Dalmatia and Istria, Fiume, Pola and Trieste, Gorizia and Carnia, and half of Carinthia and Styria. At the first Serbo-Slovenian congress, held in Trieste in April 1915, delegates approved a program of Yugoslav unification under the aegis of Serbia, and called for extrication of Slavs from "Italian slavery" at all costs (Gottlieb, 1957, 349). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the war the South Slavic efforts had little impact on the Entente states, which primarily sought Italian participation in the war on their side.

Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sonnino opposed the destruction of Austria-Hungary, and therefore the creation of successor states, until nearly the end of war. He felt that Austria-Hungary's destruction could bring Italy some unsavory neighbors: Russia on the

4 In a conversation with Carlo Galli, Trumbić proclaimed that he was a Croat, who thinks and speaks Italian, but wants to remain a Croat and make Italian the second language of his nation (Valiani, 1966, 174). Similarly to Supilo in the memorandum that he wrote (in Italian) in early 1915 for the British Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Grey, he writes that among the South Slavs, Italian has been used as a cultural language (Valiani, 1966, 179).

Adriatic and Germany on the Brenner Pass (Cornwall, 2000, 113). He sought a diminution of Austria-Hungary and the Italian territorial gains based on the London Treaty. Italian politics changed fundamentally at the last year of war when Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando accepted the idea of break-up of the Habsburg Monarchy. In Italy, however, there were movements that had supported the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and the creation of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and other successor states since 1915 and 1916. They were represented, for example, by the socialists' politicians Gaetano Salvemini or Leonida Bissolati. Leaders of the Czechoslovak National Committee tried to win these politicians over to their idea of an independent Czechoslovak state. At the same time they had to cope with South Slavic-Italian tension. Despite all the declared sympathies with the Slavs, it was Italy that played a fundamental role in the political thinking of the members of the Czechoslovak National Committee. Italy's importance increased when it entered the war in May 1915 on the side of the Entente powers. Moreover, there were Czech and Slovak prisoners of war in Italy and their possible involvement in the war on the side of the Entente improved the position of the Czechoslovak foreign movement as a useful ally. Beneš, Masaryk, and Štefánik tried to negotiate pragmatically with both sides – the South Slavs and the Italians – thinking that they could become mediators, which several Italian and French politicians counted on.

In his first memorandum, Masaryk expressed support for the South Slavs and criticized Italian territorial claims, although he simultaneously strove for balance between Slavs and Italians. In spring 1915, Masaryk wrote about these issues in a secret memorandum to the British Foreign Office titled *Independent Bohemia*. He considered the Italian claims to the Adriatic to be exaggerated, but tried to unite Italian and South Slavic interests: “Does Italy, who has a very long coast of her own and [a] number of islands [...], need the long coast of Dalmatia as well, if she gets Trieste, Pola, and Valona? [...] The way to Baghdad goes from Berlin not only through Constantinople, but through Trieste and Venice. Italy is the natural ally of the Southern and Northern Slavs against the Drang nach Osten” (Seton-Watson, 1943, 131; Masaryk, 2005a, 69). Masaryk used similar arguments in subsequent memoranda – to unite the South Slavs under Serbian political leadership, Austria-Hungary would have to be destroyed. The solution he envisioned for Italy and its justifiable national aspirations was to become “the neighbor of Greater Serbia and would complete the anti-German barrier formed by Poland, Bohemia and Greater Serbia” (Seton-Watson, 1943, 195; Masaryk, 2005b, 174).

The architect of the Czechoslovak-Italian negotiations was Milan Rastislav Štefánik. In spring 1916 the French government commissioned him to recruit Czech and Slovak prisoners of war as potential volunteers for the Allied army. He first traveled to Italy in March 1916. The goal of his “Slavic mission” was to mitigate Italian-Serbian tension over the Dalmatian question and negotiate a reduction of Italy's claims on the Adriatic coast (Biagini, 2010, 46). Before his departure to Rome, he and Beneš met several times with Trumbić and Hinko Hinković. They persuaded the South Slavs to adopt more circumspect tactics regarding the Italians and to be in compliance with them. Štefánik was a skilful negotiator who impressed Vesnić. Representatives of the Czechoslovak National Committee urged Trumbić and Hinković to reach an agreement with Italy at all costs.

Štefánik convinced them that “it was necessary to be reconciled in order to achieve unification” and that it was necessary to break up Austria-Hungary and unite the South Slavs. ČSNR representatives never forgot to push through their own demand for an independent state. Beneš got the impression that the South Slavs “emotionally agreed with” the proposal. These negotiations reveal how complicated the situation was, because “emotion and agreement” could have been easily replaced with anger and South Slavic resistance to the Czech proposals (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 89).

At the same time, Štefánik proposed rather ambitious territorial plans for a future Czechoslovak state. In a June 25, 1916 report for the French General Headquarters, he proposed the creation of a “Czech Kingdom”, including Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and the land corridor south of Vienna connecting the Czech kingdom with Serbia. He claimed that Russia would not have influence over the Czech Kingdom. The goal of this arrangement was to isolate Hungary from German influence (Guelton, 2008, 55–56; Brancaccio, 1926, 32–33). ČSNR members were wary of the South Slavs’ uncoordinated approach towards Austria and thought that their anti-Italian aversion could lead them to a pro-Austrian position. On September 2, 1916, Beneš pessimistically informed Štefánik about his negotiations with the representatives of the Yugoslav Committee in London: “*I have seen all sorts of things in the back hallways of the South Slavs. It is a disaster.*” He was convinced that Italy would get Dalmatia and Istria and would absolutely not consent to the unification of the South Slavs. According to Beneš, an independent Croatia would be created. He concluded: “*So the South Slavs will be divided into 3 or 4 parts. It would be dangerous for us if what is left, i.e. of Croatia, wanted to return to Austria-Hungary. I think that the position is utterly lost in this sense. They will not be united*” (Hájková, 2004, 589).

Beneš also wrote to Štefánik that Colonel Nicola Brancaccio, the Italian military envoy in Paris, had told him that Italy opposed maintaining Hungary’s territorial integrity and agreed with the Slovaks’ forming a common state with the Czechs. When asked what future he saw for the South Slavs, Brancaccio responded: “*We will take the Slovenes, Trieste must have a Hinterland – you must take part of your Austrian Germans – or Slovenes*” (Hájková, 2004, 590). It is possible that Brancaccio, who sought an independent Croatian state, meant Slovaks instead of Slovenes. He unrealistically recommended to Beneš that a Czechoslovak Army not be set up in France, but that the Czechs should send their own army to the Balkans and occupy the Czech lands (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 119).

If Beneš’ recollections are accurate, Brancaccio merely stated his own personal opinion. In 1915, Minister Sonnino considered the possibility of a separate peace with Hungary and even one year later his position was not in harmony with Brancaccio’s statement to Beneš. Brancaccio himself noted on August 26, 1916, that he had a long talk with Beneš, who was worried about the South Slavs’ reaction to Italy’s occupation of Gorizia and also thought that a militarily successful Italy would not need the Czechs any longer and would not be interested in cooperation. Beneš told Brancaccio that ČSNR’s policy was, and would remain, oriented towards Italy. He informed him about his negotiations with Masaryk in London, where they had agreed that after the war Czechoslovakia and Italy should have a common border and thus entry should be granted to Trieste (Brancaccio, 1926, 32–33).

The conversation participants had ambitious ideas about how to establish the future borders of virtual states. Czechoslovakia could border Serbia or Yugoslavia, as well as Italy. By analyzing Beneš' correspondence with Masaryk, it is easy to conclude that it is as if their relations with Italy and the South Slavs were permanently vacillating and it was hard to reach a consensus. In August 1916, Beneš wrote to Masaryk that "*in Italy they are mad because we are supposedly going against them with the South Slavs etc.*" (Hájková, Šedivý, 2004, 145). Italy's doubt appears to be justified, as evinced by Masaryk's September 1916 letter to Beneš, which also reflected his pragmatic attitude and awareness of the difficulty of the situation. He noted that the Czechs were little-known foreigners, thus it was difficult to criticize France and Italy. He doubted that protests would help, because: "*We would tarnish ourselves and enrage the Italian nationalists, and then they would push the government towards more radical demands.*" Masaryk was convinced that it would be better to calmly argue against Italy and the Allies. He spoke with Supilo and his opponents in the Yugoslav Committee as well. He repeated to them that, whatever the circumstances, they had to work to unify Serbia and Croatia, even if a piece of Dalmatia would be lost. Masaryk pointed out that unified Serbs and Croats would be stronger against the Italians and was convinced that Supilo's tactic was only making Austria-Hungary stronger. He wrote also to Beneš that he "*advised Supilo to realize that the conflict was actually detrimental to the South Slavs*" (Hájková, Šedivý, 2004, 156).

The propaganda of the Slavs' demands printed on the pages of the bi-monthly journal published by ČSNR in Paris *La Nation Tchèque* and Beneš' frequent meetings with the South Slavs Bogumil Vošnjak, Trumbić, and Niko Župančić were balanced by the efforts to maintain good relations with Italy. Beneš followed clear goals, being informed by all sides, and trying to get along with everyone. He also assured everyone that cooperation and special relations were important to him. At the same time, his main goal was an independent Czechoslovak state. For Beneš, negotiations and balancing between the Italians and South Slavs constituted a school of diplomacy. After spring 1916 the argument over the South Slavic question intensified. The Serbian effort to create a "Greater Serbia" clearly collided with Italian politicians' interests and the promises the Allies had given them in the so-called London Treaty. Italian politicians feared the strengthening of the Slavic influence in the Adriatic and refused the Yugoslav state's program. This approach influenced the position on the national-liberation ambitions of the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg Monarchy. In terms of an alliance with Italy, neither Beneš nor Štefánik wanted the propagation of the greater Serbian program to be too connected to the Czechoslovak resistance, and they were therefore trying to calm the tensions (Dejmek, 2006, 14; Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 100). With their negative attitude to Italy, the South Slavs were counterproductive to Czechoslovak ambitions and so, for example, when Štefánik was negotiating in Italy, Beneš asked the Yugoslav Committee chairman Trumbić to tone down his anti-Italian proclamations (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 108).

At the same time, an argument arose between Beneš and Ernst Denis, the historian and editor-in-chief of *La Nation Tchèque*, about the propagandist-ideological slant of the paper. The dispute was about the South Slavic question. In April 1916 Beneš negotiated with the Yugoslav Committee about cooperating in *La Nation Tchèque*, which he wanted

to open up primarily to Slavic issues (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 96). Denis openly spoke in favor of Yugoslavia, sympathized with Serbian efforts to unify the South Slavs and openly promoted the idea of a “Greater Serbia.” Beneš and Štefánik, who were negotiating with Italy the possible establishment of Czechoslovak legions, were much more cautious in their positions on the South Slavs (Borrely, 1972, 230). On the other hand, they could not support Italy exclusively, since the South Slavic propaganda was very successful in France. They trod carefully, and Beneš tried to explain to Denis that “real” politics took place primarily “behind the scenes” (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 101). Following their argument, Denis eventually resigned from his position in *La Nation Tchèque*, and was replaced by Beneš.

One of ČSNR’s main goals was the formation of Czechoslovak military regiments. On January 10, 1917, Beneš went to Italy to raise support for this idea in governmental circles. Although he failed, he set up good relations for future negotiations. Beneš’ diaries show the wide network of contacts he had established in Rome among Italian, South Slavic, French, and Russian politicians, diplomats, and journalists. On January 17 he had a long discussion with the Russian Ambassador, Michail Nicolaevitch Giers, who advised him that it was useless to antagonize the “*Italians, who nevertheless have childish politics, who are wrong, because the course of history is unstoppable*” (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 130). Beneš sent Masaryk the minutes of his conversation, in which he mentioned Giers’ opinion of the South Slavs: “*The South Slavs made a series of tactical mistakes; they do not have enough sense to negotiate carefully and tactfully.*”⁵ Beneš also negotiated with another critic of the South Slavs, the French Ambassador in Rome, Camille Barrère, who recommended to Beneš that he should contact other people, including the General Secretary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Giacomo De Martino. This meeting demonstrates how Beneš tried to capture the interest of influential “bureaucrats.” He laid out their common economic and political interests and introduced the Czech question as an international problem. Moreover, he always knew what the other side wanted to hear. With De Martino, Beneš spoke about relations with the South Slavs. De Martino supported Beneš’ position and emphasized that the Czechs should convince the South Slavs of the necessity for territorial compromise. Beneš replied that he was already working on this. It is also possible that he expressed his agreement when De Martino stated that there were Italians in Dalmatian cities, that the official census⁶ had been falsified and that the Adriatic was Italian (Hájková, Kalivodová, 2013, 133–134).

In spring 1917, Edvard Beneš published a book titled *La Boemia contro Austria-Ungheria*. The introduction was written by Andrea Torre, former Rome Correspondent of the *Corriere della Serra* and was actually a translation of his French work *Detruisez l’Autriche-Hongrie*. It was one of his many propagandistic texts describing the situation of the Czechs and Slovaks in the Habsburg Monarchy (Cronia, 1936, 133). The Rome office of the Czechoslovak National Committee used this publication for presenting the

5 AÚTGM-EB IV/1, R 367B, 1, zahraniční odboj Paříž (mss).

6 The censuses in Austria between 1880 and 1910 enquired also nationality of each individual. See also Zeman, 1990, 31.

aims of the Czechoslovak independence movement. The director of the office, Karel Veselý, sent Benes' book to many Italian politicians and journalists and enclosed a questionnaire. He asked them whether there were substantial historical and political reasons for the Czechs and Slovaks to create a united Czechoslovak state. He wanted also to know what advantages the creation of a "bigger" Bohemia in Central Europe would bring to Europe as a whole. It is not clear how many people received this letter. The office got 37 positive responses, including from Giovanni Antonio Colonna Di Cesarò, Benito Mussolini and Pietro Nenni. The most common argument for the creation of the Czechoslovak state, besides moral reasons, was the creation of an anti-German barrier. Ernesto Nathan, former mayor of Rome saw in Czechoslovakia a barrier not only against German, but also against Russian and Polish expansion (Kybal, 1925, 133).

In 1917, the Italians began to realize the possibility of using the national aspirations of the Habsburg Monarchy nations for independence. Brancaccio also noted the change. As a military intelligence officer, he tried to use several ČSNR members as intermediaries or collaborators in the Italian-South Slav dispute. In May 1917 he noted: "*Štefánik returned from Russia, where he did a lot for his country [...] I convinced him to go to Italy and speak with Sonnino. It is necessary to go against the hostile Yugoslav propaganda, which has become too dangerous.*" Through Brancaccio, Italian diplomacy was informed of Štefánik's negotiations with Hinković on a potential South Slavic agreement with Italy. Brancaccio offered Štefánik "*to completely, discreetly take charge,*" and to act as an unofficial mediator between the Czechs, the Italians, and the South Slavs. Czech politics and aspirations increased in value and were now understood as one of the options in the struggle against Austria-Hungary.

On May 5, 1917, Brancaccio noted in his diary that the significance of the Czech movement was growing ever stronger and it was a pity that Italy had not followed it with greater interest. He saw many similarities between the Czechoslovak movement and the beginnings of the *Risorgimento*. According to him, the Czech leaders had, just like the great Italian patriots, a great moral nobility. He underlined: "*At this moment, encouraging the Czech question means having an extra element to defeat Austria. [...] What a powerful weapon we could wield if we wanted! [...] It seems that Italy does not believe in the strength that the Czech movement represents; I think we are making a great mistake.*" Brancaccio also understood the economic importance of the Czech lands, and the possibility that they could be a source of raw materials for Italy in the future, if Italy didn't want "*to stop being a German vassal and became a vassal of the French.*" He knew that the Czechs would need the port of Trieste and pointed out: "*The Czechs need their own port and a state that won't threaten them with political submission. Unfortunately, the Czech national movement hasn't yet found much support in Italy, only politeness, platonic support, and much mistrust*" (Brancaccio, 1926, 111).

The year 1917 ushered in radical changes in wartime developments, which significantly influenced Czech-Italian-South Slav relations. The Russian Revolutions, the Corfu Declaration, the publication of some details of the Treaty of London, the success of the Czechoslovak legionnaires at the battle of Zborov, and the defeat of Italian forces near Caporetto changed the Italian perspective on the necessity of deploying forces against Austria-Hunga-

ry. This was the context in which the ČSNR representatives, primarily Beneš and Štefánik, led the negotiations about the forming of Czechoslovak regiments in Italy. Beneš first explained to Brancaccio that Italy was not popular in the Czech lands, and there had been mistrust in the prisoner of war camps, which worked in favor of Yugoslav propaganda. He also argued that the Czechoslovak army in Italy would counterbalance the Russian and French influence, and remarked that “Czechs must follow instructions to be completely neutral in the debates between the South Slavs and Italians” (Brancaccio, 1926, 121–126). Štefánik adopted an original style of negotiation. He constantly told Brancaccio “*je vous aime bien,*” he criticized France and even offered Brancaccio the post of General of the future Czechoslovak regiments. Brancaccio did not fully understand the negotiation style of “not saying things directly,” and he privately called it “Slavic.” He also did not know to what extent Štefánik was truly honest, so he concluded that “when the Czechs really get their independence, they will then turn their back on all” (Brancaccio, 1926, 203–204). The changed attitudes towards Czechs could be seen on the pages of the liberal *Corriere della Sera*, the most influential newspapers in Italy. From December 1917, it supported the establishment of Czechoslovak legions and regularly informed readers about Czechoslovak National Committee activities (Helan, 2006, 123–124). A similar view was adopted by Mussolini’s *Il Popolo*, whereas the socialist *Avanti!* did not agree with dismembering Austria-Hungary. In autumn 1917, *Avanti!* described the situation in the Habsburg Monarchy as complicated due to increasing Czech and Slovak radicalism.⁷

In the last year of the war, the “small, oppressed” nations became an important part of the propagandist and espionage games of the Great Powers. Thus, the support of activities leading to the disintegration of Austria-Hungary gained momentum in Italy at the beginning of 1918. Despite Sonnino’s objections, Prime Minister Orlando, the highest Italian military circles, and many Italian nationalists became engaged in these activities. Nevertheless, the Italians remained concerned about the strong Slavic influence on the Adriatic, and until autumn 1918 they effectively refused the program of the creation of a South Slavic state (Jelavich, 1983, 142; Seton-Watson H., Seton-Watson C., 1981, 251ff). Beneš negotiated with the Italians and South Slavs as well, and during a series of meetings in Paris he tried to get the Italians to agree to a common action against Austria-Hungary.

In the meantime, during spring 1918, significant demonstrations took place in Austria-Hungary itself. In April, representatives of Czech political parties proclaimed their nation’s right to self-determination. The South Slav representatives, Anton Korošec, Ante Pavelić, Stjepan Radić, and others, arrived from Zagreb and Ljubljana to witness this declaration. Proclamations of Czechoslovak independence and Yugoslav unity were heard during Mayday celebrations. In Prague between 16 and 18 May, 1918, commemorations of the founding of the National Theatre took place and were attended by Slovaks, Slovenes, Serbs, Croats, Poles, Romanians, and Italians in the spirit of the common efforts towards national recognition.⁸ The demonstrations of unity of the oppressed people

7 *Avanti*, 2. 10. 1917: Un blocco slavo-socialista, 2.

8 Enrico Conci represented Tridentine catholics at the meeting. Some information, not all, points to the presence of Alcide De Gasperi. In Prague, Conci pleaded for the unity of Italian catholics in Austria with Czechs and the

of Austria-Hungary were reflected in the April Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Rome. *Corriere della Sera* informed readers in detail every day about the negotiations. It also reflected the speech of Edvard Beneš, and its enthusiastic “Viva la Boemia” applause.⁹ For the first time representatives from the oppressed nationalities and the Allies had come together to proclaim publicly the need to form a united front to dissolve Habsburg Monarchy and build new states on its ruins. Apart from the unanimous approval of these joint resolutions, which included the Italo-Yugoslav clauses, individual delegates publicly explain their national causes. (Cornwall, 2000, 196, Klabjan, 2007, 84–85, 88).

With regard to the nearly simultaneous conflict between Austro-Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ottokar von Czernin and French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and the new German military offensive, the congress in Rome in April 1918 occurred at an opportune time for the Slavic nations. Sonnino, however, continued to hinder England and France’s efforts to recognize Polish, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav independence. At the same time, he was able to differentiate between Czechs and South Slavs. Sonnino tolerated Czech demands, but did not want to create a precedent with the South Slavs. He worried that a newly created Yugoslavia would become Italy’s enemy, orienting itself once again toward Austria or Germany.

An improvement in the situation of the Czechoslovak troops in Italy and the consolidation of the political position of the Czechoslovak foreign independence movement finally came about in 1918. The result of Štefánik’s negotiations with Prime Minister Orlando on the incorporation of Czech and Slovak prisoners of war into the recently constituted Czechoslovak Army in France ended in a compromise – the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy would be under Italian command, albeit formally integrated into the French section of the Italian front (Čaplovič, 2010, 145–146, doc. no. 118). The recognition of the Czechoslovak legions took place within the context of the deliberations of the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Rome, where on April 21, Prime Minister Orlando and ČSNR representative Štefánik signed the definitive text of the convention on the Czechoslovak Army in Italy (Klimek, 1994, 91–99).

The difficult relations in the Adriatic and the agile Czechoslovak approach came to light in autumn 1918, when the meeting of Mid-European Union held in Philadelphia. The first session was accompanied by Italian protests against the participation of the Croatian politician Hinković and by the dissemination of pamphlets promoting Italian demands for Fiume.¹⁰ The records of meetings and memoirs of sociologist Herbert A. Miller, the Congress’ main organizer, demonstrate what ideas the participants brought to the negotiations, how they had to amend these ideas, and how they clung to them. The negotiations revealed, however, how difficult it was to reach agreement on the question of the borders and the principles on which the new states would be founded. The representatives appreciated Wilson’s approach to national self-determination, but they distanced themselves from it in practice.

end of their alignment with the Habsburgs (Valiani, 1966, 404–405, 445; Paulová, 1968, 455ff.).

9 *Corriere della Sera*, 11. 4. 1918: Il programma dei czeco-slovacchi, 4.

10 TUL-CTC, Herbert Adolphus Milller papers, Miller’s memoirs, Chapter IV, AR 93–6, 8/20/80, Folder Fb.

Echoes of past negotiations on the Adriatic question can be heard in the participants' declarations. The representative of the Italian Irredentists, Giovanni Almagia, was convinced that the Italian Irredentists had no problem of nationality, because they already considered themselves a part of Italy and accepted its laws and constitution. Hinković was unwilling to accept any federalization; he preferred the concept of the independent states. He was convinced that Italy "*wishes only to invade our country and rob our country, and it has always been so; this situation between the Yugoslavs and the Italians was very aggressive. We know this; the Yugoslavs had to suffer.*" Hinković supplied many statistical figures to explain that Istria was populated primarily by Slavs, and proclaimed Trieste part of the territory of Yugoslavia. Almagia simply answered that "*to say Trieste is a Yugoslav city is a mistake,*" and a while later emotionally added: "*Trieste was Italian when it was founded; it has always been Italian and always will be Italian. Italy will sacrifice herself for Trieste.*"¹¹

Masaryk managed to calm tensions between Hinković and Almagia only partially, because Yugoslav Committee members temporarily resigned their membership in the Central European Union in protest. Masaryk believed that discussions and common actions against Germany were essential. However, he was worried about disagreements at the coming peace conference: "*We are all united against Germany, but are not united among ourselves. That means that after the peace conference we shall make war against each other and among ourselves. We must get together now.*"¹² The "Declaration of the Common Aims" of the Central European nations that their representatives finally signed had eventually no political impact.

In his October 31 letter to Beneš, Masaryk gave his firm opinion on the solution to the Adriatic conundrum. He wrote that he wanted to be "*consistently loyal and favorable towards the Italians*" and abide by the London Treaty. He believed that Trieste and Istria should be part of Italy, and he considered that as a necessary sacrifice. He also appreciated the Serbian fighting spirit, while Croats and Slovenes were, according to him, about to "*disappear into a vague 'Yugoslavia'*" (Hájková, Šedivý, 2004, 295). Masaryk also took a more critical position toward the South Slavs than the Italians in other letters: "*Small South Slavs. It was a mistake that they didn't cooperate with Italy from the very beginning.*" Masaryk considered Hinković "a politically small man," King Alexander just "a zero," and Vesnić a man lacking perspective. Pašić alone would not be enough. Masaryk also criticized the Serbs for being politically short-sighted, but added that Serbs are actually politically strong and able to make agreement with Italians. In a wider context, he concluded: "*The Slovenes, however, will never understand that, in the end, the destruction of Austria and the defeat of Germany mean far much more for us Slavs than does the Slavification of Gorizia etc. The towns are Italian.*" (Hájková, Šedivý, 2004, 304).

11 TUL-CTC, Herbert Adolphus Milller papers, Minutes of the Democratic Mid-European Union, 24. 10. 1918, AR 93–6, Folder E.

12 TUL-CTC, Herbert Adolphus Milller papers, Miller's memoirs, Chapter VII, AR 93–6, 8/20/80, Folder Fb; Herbert Adolphus Milller papers, Minutes of the Democratic Mid-European Union, 26. 10. 1918, AR 93–6, Folder E.

When the President of the nascent Czechoslovak state provided an overview of his previous activities to the Council of Ministers in Prague in December 1918, he also analyzed South Slavic and Italian wartime politics. His words document the Czechoslovak National Council's approach as it developed during the war: "*The Italian government treated us most politely. [...] Therefore we cannot be doing some student politics with the South Slavs; when I negotiated with the Italians, the word 'Yugoslavs' was never mentioned and it will never be [...] Since it is in our vital interest to have an army, it is necessary to have the best relations possible with Italy. Nevertheless, I am not approving hereby anything against the South Slavs. But it would be insane to have an anti-Italian policy*" (Masaryk, 2003, 47). The Adriatic question and cautious negotiations with all interested parties were only a segment of the war activities of members of the Czechoslovak National Committee. Discussions that Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefánik led demonstrated their abilities to negotiate with various, often opposing partners. They also show the pragmatism of their actions determined by their final goal: dismembering Austria-Hungary and creating a new independent Czechoslovak state.

ISKANJE RAVNOVESJA: ODNOS ČEŠKOSLOVAŠKEGA GIBANJA ZA NEODVISNOST V TUJINI DO JADRANSKEGA PROBLEMA MED PRVO SVETOVNO VOJNO

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POVZETEK

Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš in Milan Rastislav Štefánik, predstavniki češko-slovaškega gibanja za neodvisnost v tujini in od leta 1916 predstavniki Češkoslovaškega narodnega sveta (ČSNR) v izgnanstvu, so si med vojno prizadevali za en sam cilj: neodvisno državo Češkoslovaško. Študija opisuje njihova spretna pogajanja v Jadranski regiji, v kateri so prihajala navzkriž italijanska in južnoslovanska ozemeljska stremeljenja. Korespondenca med Masarykom, Benešem in Štefánikom ter zlasti Beneševi dnevniki

popisujejo napredek v teh pogajanjih. Ti dokumenti osvetljujejo zakulisne razprave med Masarykom, Benešem in Štefánikom, njihova mnenja o drugih politikih ter njihove različne odnose do teh politikov.

Ob izbruhu vojne se je češka drža do južnih Slovanov in Italijanov precej razlikovala. Leta 1914 je češko družbo zajel val simpatij do Slovanov. Zahvaljujoč Masarykovemu posebnemu odnosu s srbskimi politiki sta oba z Benešem po odhodu v izgnanstvo dobila srbska potna lista. Partnerji v pogajanjih Češkoslovaškega narodnega odbora so bili Jugoslovanski odbor, ki si je prizadeval za neodvisno državo Srbov, Slovencev in Hrvatov, in srbski predstavniki, katerih zamisli o veliki Srbiji in njeni prevladi v prihodnji državi so bile za Jugoslovanski odbor nesprejemljive. Voditelji Češkoslovaškega narodnega odbora so poskušali te politike pridobiti za svojo zamisel o neodvisni češkoslovaški državi, hkrati pa so se morali ukvarjati z južnoslovansko-italijanskimi trenji. Kljub vsem izjavam o simpatijah s Slovani pa je temeljno vlogo v političnem razmišljanju članov Češkoslovaškega narodnega odbora odigrala Italija. Njen pomen se je še okrepil, ko je maja 1915 vstopila v vojno na strani sil antante. Poleg tega so bili v Italiji češki in slovaški vojni ujetniki, njihovo morebitno sodelovanje v vojni na strani antante pa je izboljšalo položaj češkoslovaškega gibanja na tujem kot koristnega zaveznika. Beneš, Masaryk in Štefánik so se poskušali pragmatično pogajati z obema stranema – z južnimi Slovani in z Italijani –, ker so mislili, da bi lahko postali mediatorji, na kar je računalo tudi več italijanskih in francoskih politikov.

Propagando o slovanskih zahtevah, ki je izhajala na straneh *La Nation* Tehèque, in Beneševe pogoste sestanke z južnimi Slovani Vošnjakom, Trumbićem in Župančićem so uravnovešala prizadevanja za ohranjanje dobrih odnosov z Italijo. Beneš je sledil jasnim ciljem, ker je dobival informacije od vseh strani in se je poskušal z vsemi dobro razumeti. Eden od glavnih ciljev ČSNR je bila vzpostavitev češkoslovaških vojaških polkov. Ti so veljali za enega od propagandističnih stebrov, ki bi lahko pomagali prepričati zaveznike o pripravljenosti Čehov in Slovakov na boj proti Avstro-Ogrski. Leta 1917 je v vojnih okoliščinah prišlo do korenitih sprememb, ki so pomembno vplivale na češko-italijansko-južnoslovanske odnose. Ruska revolucija, Krfska deklaracija, objava podrobnosti o Londonskem sporazumu, »zmaga« českoslovaških legionarjev v bitki pri Zborovu v Ukrajini, ki jo je češkoslovaška propaganda sijajno izkoristila, in poraz italijanskih sil pri Caporetu so spremenili italijanske poglede na nujnost mobilizacije sil proti Avstro-Ogrski. Priznanje češkoslovaških polkov je potekalo v kontekstu posvetovanja Kongresa zatiranih narodov v Rimu, kjer sta ministrski predsednik Orlando in predstavnik ČSNR Štefánik 21. aprila podpisala dokončno besedilo konvencije o češkoslovaški vojski v Italiji.

Težavni odnosi v Jadranski regiji in prožen češkoslovaški pristop so prišli na svetlo jeseni 1918 na kongresu zveze *Mid-European Union* v Philadelphii. Toda pogajanja so razkrila, kako težko je bilo doseči dogovor o vprašanju meja in načel, na katerih naj bi bile utemeljene nove države.

Ključne besede: češkoslovaško gibanje za neodvisnost, prva svetovna vojna, jadransko vprašanje, Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, Milan Rastislav Štefánik

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