

THE DAY
WORTH A
CENTURY
1 — XII — 1918

RADOVAN CUKIĆ,
VESELINKA KASTRATOVIĆ RISTIĆ,
MARIJA VASILJEVIĆ

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NARODA
SRBA HRVATA I
SLOVENACA
1918





PHD ZORAN BAJIN

NIKOLA PAŠIĆ
AND ITALY
ON THE EVE
OF THE
ESTABLISH-
MENT OF THE
YUGOSLAV
STATE
(1917–1918)

— MUSEUM
OF YUGOSLAVIA

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II

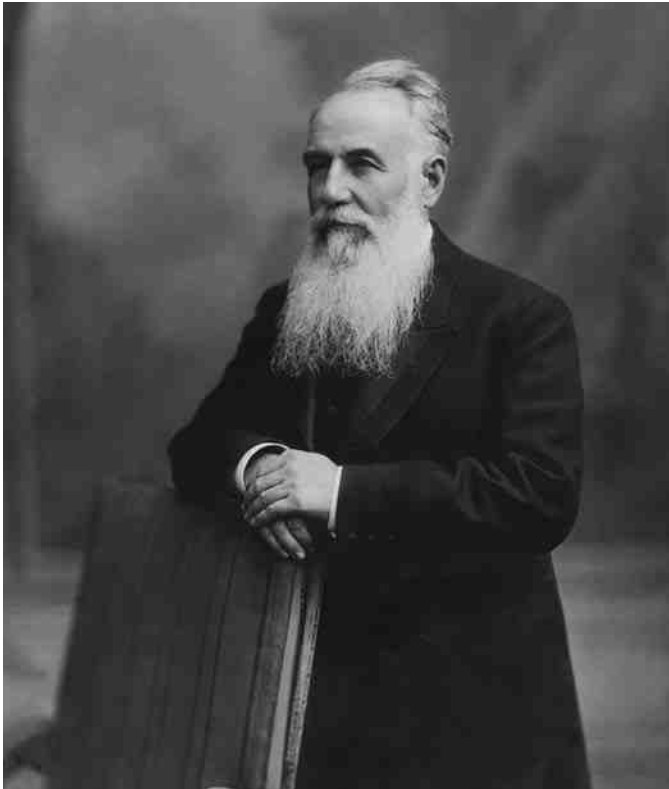


Serbo-Italian relations were complex ever since the beginning of World War I. Italy was a potential ally to Serbia, but the two countries also had a few points of contention – first and foremost Italian pretensions to a large part of the eastern Adriatic coast, which had also been claimed by Serbia in its program of Yugoslav unification formulated in the Niš Declaration of December 1914. In addition, the interests of the two countries were at odds in Albania and Montenegro, whose unification with Serbia Rome opposed. These disputes reached their peak during the signing of the Treaty of London in April 1915; to secure Italy's alliance, France, Russia and Great Britain promised the annexation of Istria and northern Dalmatia to Italy in case of an Allied victory. Although the Treaty of London was a secret pact, the Serbian government and its Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Pašić – who had unsuccessfully tried to garner more consideration for the Yugoslav program via Russia – soon learned the crux of its stipulations. On the other hand, after they learned the code used by Pašić in his correspondence with his diplomats¹, the Italians too were hardly unaware of Serbian secrets. The situation changed after the military breakdown of Serbia in late 1915 and the retreat of the Serbian army to Corfu. Having recuperated on the island, the Serbian army was transferred to the Salonica Front. There Italian and Serbian troops became more direct allies, but this, as well as Italian aid during the rescuing of the Serbian army from Albania (seen as inadequate by the Serbs²) did little to dispel mutual distrust.

In March 1916 Pašić began a tour of European capitals. First he paid a visit to Rome, where he met with Sidney Sonnino, Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs. Sonnino recorded that the conversation focused on general matters and that they principally agreed that Italy and Serbia should come to an agreement

1 — L. Valiani, *The end of Austria-Hungary*, London 1973, 223.

2 — A. Mitrović, *Serbia's Great War 1914–1918*, West Lafayette 2007, 158; D. Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije: Italija, saveznici i jugoslavensko pitanje 1914–1918*, II, Pula–Rijeka 1989, 7–10.



‘with mutual concessions’, but that this would be difficult to achieve due to Serbia’s uncompromising stance. Shortly thereafter, Pašić confided to Ante Trumbić, the chairman of the Yugoslav Committee, that as soon as he tried to delve ‘a little deeper’ into the Adriatic question in Rome, he was told that the matter should wait for the end of the war. To the Allies Pašić professed that he was satisfied with the talks in Rome, but this was in fact not the case.³ He elaborated his view in a telegram to the Serbian envoy in Paris: ‘We can accept Italy’s demand for supremacy in the Adriatic Sea, but we cannot accept [...] any violation of the nationality principle or having Serbia deprived of any lands inhabited by the Serbo-Croat-Slovene people. [...] So far we have had no talks with Italy – although we have voiced such a desire on multiple occasions. However, the other side has always replied that the time was not yet ripe.’⁴

3 — *I documenti diplomatici italiani* (henceforth: DDI), Quinta serie: 1914–1918, Vol. V, Roma 1988, 453, 529, 562, 573–574; VI, 124–125; S. Sonnino, *Diario 1914–1916*, a cura di P. Pastorelli, Bari 1972, 328–329; Đ. Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, Beograd 1984, 167–168, 173–174; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 34–35. On his journey home, Pašić asked for another meeting with Sonnino in Rome to discuss future Serbo-Italian relations. However, no such meeting took place. (DDI, 5, VI, 37; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 281)

4 — Arhiv Srbije, Fond Ministarstva inostranih dela – Političko odeljenje (Archives of Serbia, Fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Political Department, henceforth: AS, MID-PO), 1916, box IX, file VII. N. Pašić to M. Vesnić, 23/10 September (New/Old Style) 1916; Đ. Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslovensko pitanje*, II, Beograd 1985, 148.



Developments in the first months of 1917 – the Russian Revolution and the American entry into the war – brought a major change of circumstances. The new situation meant that the fulfillment of promises made to Italy in the Treaty of London became more uncertain; and Pašić, traditionally a Russophile, had to adapt to the fact that the unity of ‘Serbo-Croats’ and their political unification were becoming increasingly dependent on the will of the Western powers. The Italian envoy in Corfu, Carlo Sforza, noticed Pašić’s concern about the development of the Russian Revolution and his declining authority, which had largely rested on Russian support.⁵ Although all of this made an agreement between Serbia and Italy increasingly likely, their relations were soured in early June when Italy decided to proclaim Albania an independent state under its own protectorate. The Serbian government expressed its protest to the Allies, but Sonnino never replied to its note. After a few days of characteristic silence, Sforza was informed by an embittered Pašić that the Albanian question was crucial for Serbia, because it could potentially end up with only one point of access to the sea that could only be reached through Albanian territory. The Italian tried to placate his Serbian collocutor and interpreted his stance by his hope to have the territory of Albania divided among the neighboring countries. On the other hand, Pašić recorded: ‘The main thing is to prevent Italy from gaining a foothold in the Balkans’⁶.

5 — DDI, 5, VII, 440, 664–665; D. Živojinović, ‘Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija (1917)’, *U potrazi za imperijom – Italija i Balkan početkom XX veka: studije i rasprave*, Beograd 2013, 36.

6 — DDI, 5, VIII, 151, 170, 177, 179, 191–192; S. Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, a cura di P. Pastorelli, Bari 1975, 243–245; AS, MID-PO, 1917, b. II, f. VII. Nikola Pašić’s note 14/1 June, 1917; Živojinović, ‘Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija’, 31–34; D. Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija 1917. godine*, Beograd 1967, 28–29. At the very beginning of 1917 Pašić told the Italian envoy that Albanians needed autonomy ‘under the leadership of other states’ and that Serbia and Italy ought to come to an agreement on the matter. Sforza gave him a vague reply and noted ‘in jest that the liberation of Serbia and the expulsion of Austrians from central and northern Albania were unfortunately much more pressing issues.’ At the

Around that time representatives of the Yugoslav Committee arrived in Corfu; they had been invited to attend the conference by Pašić, who hoped to resolve the matter of the future organization of the Yugoslav state and show the Allies that the people were in favor of its creation. Sforza tried to learn the topics that were being discussed from Pašić, but received an untrue reply.⁷ Since King Nikola of Montenegro claimed that the leaders of the Yugoslav movement were willing to abandon the 'Serbian cause' and come to an agreement with Italy through his own mediation and in return for financial aid, Sonnino asked Sforza to look into this claim. Sforza met with Trumbić but, having realized that unification with Serbia was his main political premise, concluded that any further elaboration of the intrigue launched by the Montenegrin king would be futile. 'Of course, if Serbia was to be defeated or compromised, the "Yugoslavs" would distance themselves from it and espouse another project', he believed.⁸

Count Sforza learned of the proclamation of the Declaration of Corfu only after Pašić had already left the island. The Italian envoy 'excitedly' informed his deputy Ninčić that he was not opposed to the principles formulated in the Declaration, but that the Italian people would be 'offended' by Italy's omission from the preamble, which had praised the Allies. Ninčić promised to try to rectify this, but Pašić telegraphed to let him know that the Declaration could not be changed without the consent of the Yugoslav Committee. When informed of this by Ninčić, Sforza expressed his regret and added that Serbia could only count on Italy in its 'struggle for the destruction of Austria.'⁹

same time he concluded that Pašić had tried to avoid mentioning Montenegro, because he was aware that Serbia and Italy had completely opposite views on the matter. (DDI, 5, VII, 130-131)

7 — Živojinović, 'Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija', 40-41; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 195-196. Commenting on issuing a visa to one of the representatives of the Yugoslav Committee - Franko Potočnjak, allegedly from Belgrade, Sforza warned the Serbs that they were taking on a very serious responsibility to the Allies by presenting enemy nationals as their own subjects. Unconvinced by their explanation that Yugoslavs from Austria-Hungary could receive Serbian passports only after 'months of meticulous scrutiny,' he ironically noted that the recently executed Rade Malobabić had also been seen as a trustworthy irredentist at some point. (DDI, 5, VIII, 501-502) Two years later Potočnjak wrote that it was an old 'Italian maneuver' to create a 'rift' between the 'Serbs on one side and Croats and Slovenes on the other.' (F. Potočnjak, *Iz emigracije*, Zagreb 1919, 82)

8 — DDI, 5, VIII, 55-56, 109-110, 277-278, 350, 385-386; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916-1922*, 246-248, 259; C. Sforza, *Les frères ennemis (L'Europe d'après-guerre)*, Paris 1933, 249; D. Živojinović, *Italija i Crna Gora 1914-1925: studija o izneverenom savezništvu*, Beograd 1998, 235-236; Živojinović, 'Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija', 41-44; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 141-142; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 196. The following year, again in a crucial moment for Italo-Yugoslav relations, King Nikola once again tried to launch an intrigue claiming that Trumbić was on the Austrian payroll, but by that time Italian diplomats had understood who they were dealing with. Having realized that he had not been convincing, the Montenegrin king tried again, this time claiming that the Croats and Serbs in Austria-Hungary wanted the creation of several independent states rather than a unified Yugoslav state, which was advocated only by Trumbić and his 'thirty-ish' followers, all of them sponsored by Pašić. The Italians eventually found out that the wily but no longer resourceful old man was himself trying to establish closer relations with this purported group of mercenaries and hence distanced themselves from him. (DDI, 5, X, 390; XI, 354-355, 367-368; 6, I, 65-66)

9 — AS, MID-PO, 1917, b. II, f. VII. M. Ninčić to N. Pašić, 24/11 July 1917; N. Pašić to M. Ninčić, 26/13 July 1917; M. Ninčić's note, 27/14 July 1917; b. II, f. VIII. M. Ninčić to N. Pašić, 27/14 July 1917; DDI, 5, VIII, 463-464; Živojinović, 'Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija', 44-47; Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija*, 374-375. During a discussion of the Declaration where the atmosphere was 'full of tension', Trumbić claimed that there should be an 'energetic stance' towards Italy and that the Allies should be officially informed about



In the weeks after the Corfu Declaration, Pašić and Sonnino attended the Allied conference in Paris and then a meeting in London where the Prime Minister of Serbia received a louder ovation than the Italian Foreign Minister.¹⁰ In London Pašić was interviewed by the journalist and politician Giuseppe Bevione. When asked how he hoped to reconcile the Corfu Declaration with the Allied promises to Italy, he replied that the new state would include all territories with a compact Slavic population and that Italy could hardly argue that this was not the case in Dalmatia. To the even more provocative question if he was willing to accept a compromise – an alleged counteroffer supported by ‘his English friends’ and Trumbić, who wanted to cede ‘the Bay of Kotor [It. Cattaro] and some islands’ to Italy in return for the promised part of Dalmatia – he firmly replied: ‘No. Kotor is Serbian territory.’ The only compromise acceptable to Pašić was for Italy to gain control of Trieste, Pula [It. Pola] and Valona and thereby secure ‘absolute domination in the Adriatic.’ The Serbian envoy in Rome reported that almost all of the Italian press was ‘bitterly’ writing that Pašić’s statements ‘preclude[d] the possibility of an agreement between Serbia and Italy.’¹¹

Yugoslav territorial aspirations. Pašić replied that the Serbian government could not adopt an ‘intemperate attitude’ as the Italian leadership had done and could not risk a disagreement with the Allies by going ‘beyond certain limits and forms.’ (*Krfska konferencija: beleške sa sednica Vlade Kraljevine Srbije i predstavnika Jugoslovenskog odbora*, Beograd 1924, 152–156; B. Vošnjak, *U borbi za ujedinjenu narodnu državu: utisci i opažanja*, Ljubljana 1928, 260; Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija*, 199–200)

10 — H. W. Steed, *Through thirty years 1892–1922: a personal narrative*, II, London 1924, 166–167.

11 — AS, MID-PO, 1917, b. II, f. VIII. Translation of G. Bevione’s article; b. II, f. VII. M. Ristić to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 22/9 August 1917; N. Stojanović, *Mladost jednog pokoljenja (uspomene 1880–1920) / Dnevnik od godine 1914. do 1918.*, ed. by M. Stanić, Beograd 2015, 318; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 164–165; Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija*, 377–378; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 199; V. Kazimirović, *Nikola Pašić i njegovo doba 1845–1926*, II, Beograd 1990,

This was not a good sign on the eve of imminent talks between Sonnino and Pašić in Rome, which had been suggested by leading British politicians, including Prime Minister Lloyd George.¹² Sforza sent an assessment to Sonnino, stating that the Corfu Declaration was evidence of the Serbian government's reduced strength and that its Prime Minister would prefer a practical deal and 'much more modest solutions, but Serbian ones': 'Pašić was reluctant to accept the formulations of the Corfu Declaration. For the Serbs, the bitterest disappointment at the meetings with the "Yugoslavs" in Corfu was their uncompromising refusal to accept the name of Serbia for the entire planned South Slavic state [...]; and the Serbs were forced to wonder if they had been deluding themselves when [...] they believed that they would [...] quickly transform the new state into "Great Serbia". According to Sforza, Prince Regent Aleksandar was more enthusiastic towards the Yugoslav Committee – due to the 'illusion of a greater Crown' and the fact that his future subjects, unlike the current ones, had no 'tradition' of murdering their rulers.¹³

On 10 September Nikola Pašić proposed an agreement about the Adriatic question to Baron Sonnino, but he replied that the Corfu Declaration had closed off almost all chances for 'fruitful' negotiations: 'The Serbian government wanted to step into the field of absolute principles which allows no compromise'. Pašić's statements to the press were making the matter worse: 'I can't see how all of this could be to the advantage of Serbia's just and reasonable cause, i.e. the restoration of the Kingdom and its strengthening with the acquisition of an adequate access to the sea'. Sonnino's condition for an agreement was acceptance of the Treaty of London, with the possibility of reconsidering some details. Pašić replied that the Corfu Declaration, which had been necessary due to Vienna's attempts to lure Yugoslavs with promises of autonomy, was not an 'insurmountable obstacle' for an agreement and concessions, and that 'with the possession of Trieste, Pola and half of Istria, as well as a few islands and Valona' Italy could secure 'military domination in the Adriatic'. Mentioning the blood that the sons of Italy were shedding for Serbia, Sonnino discarded this proposal as inadequate and described the intention of 'abolishing' independent Montenegro intimated in the Corfu Declaration as a 'serious threat'. The

459. Lazar Marković, who was close to Pašić, reported in his paper about the 'shift' in a large part of the Italian public opinion, which was beginning to support 'the struggle of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes against Austro-Hungarian oppression'. Probably intentionally using vague phrases, he underlined the necessity of replacing 'futile discussions' with an 'Italo-Yugoslav', 'Italo-Serbian' or 'Italo-Slavic' compromise which would spell the 'death sentence to Austria-Hungary'. Soon thereafter, Marković explained to Professor Herron – who claimed to be a 'person of special confidence' to the President of the US and wanted to 'work towards a Serbo-Italian rapprochement' – that Serbia also wanted a rapprochement, but that it could not be based 'on the grounds proposed by Italy': 'When asked if we would be satisfied with the resolution of the Serbian question only, I replied that it was impossible, first due to them being intertwined, and then due to the sameness of Serbs and Croats.' (L. Marković, 'L'Italie et l'unité yugoslave', *La Serbie*, 12 August 1917, 2; 'Les Serbes et le nouveau courant en Italie', *La Serbie*, 26 August 1917, 3; AS, MID-PO, 1917, b. II, f. VIII. S. Grujić to N. Pašić, 25/12 September 1917)

12 – J. Jovanović Pižon, *Dnevnik (1896-1920)*, ed. by R. Ljušić and M. Milošević, Beograd 2015, 321; Valiani, *The end of Austria-Hungary*, 223.

13 – DDI, 5, VIII, 600-601, 659-660; Živojinović, 'Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija', 47. On the other hand, Pašić was not very understanding of Sforza's difficult position between wanting to reach an agreement with Serbia and Sonnino's uncompromising stance. He complained to his envoy in London that the 'Italians were wriggling like devils' and that Sforza kept 'saying one thing and then the other'. (Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 306, 317)

two septuagenarians concluded their conversation on a calmer note after Pašić stated that he firmly believed in an eventual agreement.¹⁴

Upon his return to Corfu, Pašić discussed a potential prisoner exchange between Serbia and Austria-Hungary with Sforza, who warned him that, while he personally understood Serbian motives, other Italians would not be so quick to justify 'an act that would give new strength to Austria'. Soon thereafter, Pašić told the Italian envoy that 'a Croat in Switzerland' had notified the Serbian government of the possibility of a revolt and surrender of the Croatian and Slovene troops engaged in the Italian Front, if an Italo-Serbian agreement was previously reached. Sforza received the claim with caution, believing that it was not false, but that Pašić had exaggerated it to revive talks on the Adriatic question.¹⁵

On the eve of the Battle of Caporetto, Pašić received reports that German troops were being grouped on the Italian Front, but he disbelieved them and recorded that such reports kept 'constantly coming out of Italy when they are asked to do something in the interest of all Allies'. However, when an offensive did indeed take place and the Italian army found itself on the brink of utter disaster he became more concerned for the outcome of the war.¹⁶ Passing through Rome soon after that, Pašić did not want to broach any of the contested topics, but he did ask Sonnino to release Yugoslavs held in Italian captivity so that they could join Serbian volunteer units. He also repeated that the Croats – 'important personages and commanders' – had informed him that the 'Yugoslavs would surrender en masse' to the Italians in the case of an Italo-Serbian agreement.¹⁷

Throughout December Sonnino was repeatedly warned by his ambassadors of President Wilson's sympathies for Yugoslav aspirations and encouraged to seek an agreement with Serbia. In late December Sforza informed him that the American envoy in Corfu was asking if any progress had been made towards an Italo-Serbian agreement. Claiming that Pašić, enthusiastic as he might be, was not politically strong enough to sign a specific compromise treaty with Italy, he suggested a more general agreement. Sonnino allowed him to work with Pašić on an agreement that would, along with the necessity of 'sacrifices and concessions on both sides', acknowledge the 'mixed character

14 — DDI, 5, IX, 20–22; S. Sonnino, *Diario 1916–1922*, a cura di P. Pastorelli, Bari 1972, 190–192; Nikola Pašić – predsjedniku vlade: Pašićeva pisma sa Konferencije mira, [ed. by] M. Milošević, B. Dimitrijević, Zaječar 2005, 28; Živojinović, 'Ratni ciljevi Srbije i Italija', 47–49; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 169–171; M. Bucarelli, 'Allies or rivals? Italy and Serbia during the First World War', *The Serbs and the First World War*, ed. by D. Živojinović, Belgrade 2015, 260–261; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 199–201, 286. Sforza recorded that Sonnino had been pleasantly surprised by Pašić's acceptance of the premise that in the Italo-Yugoslav case the border cannot be seen as purely demographic, but that he was not too happy with the reference to half of Istria and division of Albania. Although the conversation would have hardly borne fruit in any case, concluded Sforza, Pašić was wrong to openly challenge the Treaty of London, behind which Sonnino had dug his heels as in a 'besieged bastion'. (C. Sforza, *Fifty years of war and diplomacy in the Balkans: Pashich and the union of the Yugoslavs*, New York 1940, 127–129)

15 — DDI, 5, IX, 99, 106, 160, 172; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, 310–311; Sforza, *Fifty years*, 112–113.

16 — AS, MID-PO, 1917, b. III, f. I. N. Pašić's notes, 16/3 and 20/7 October 1917; N. Pašić to S. Grujić, 2 November/20 October 1917. Lazar Marković wrote about Serbian solidarity with the imperiled Italian army, and his paper denied reports that the Yugoslavs in Austria-Hungary were rejoicing in Italian defeats. (L. M[arković], 'L'Italie menacée', *La Serbie*, 4 November 1917, 1; 'Les Yougoslaves et les revers italiens', *La Serbie*, 18 November 1917, 3; 'Les revers italiens et les Slaves', *La Serbie*, 25 November 1917, 2)

17 — Janković, *Jugoslovensko pitanje i Krfska deklaracija*, 365–367; B. Hrabak, *Jugosloveni zarobljenici u Italiji i njihovo dobrovoljačko pitanje 1915–1918*, Novi Sad 1980, 102–103.



of the population on the eastern coast of the Adriatic': 'If Pašić refuses this or a similar formula, his refusal would only work to our advantage in the eyes of the US government.'¹⁸

At the very beginning of 1918, Lloyd George's speech on war objectives and Wilson's Fourteen Points were causes of concern to both Pašić and Sforza.¹⁹ Although the threat of Austria-Hungary's survival – taken for granted by Lloyd George and Wilson – demanded a further Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement, Sonnino became more reserved towards an agreement with Serbia.²⁰ Pašić was himself rather vague in his talks with Sforza, but to the latter it nonetheless seemed that he was willing to accept a general agreement. When Sonnino informed him that he was not against an agreement but not at the cost of renouncing Italian territorial demands, Sforza knew that there would be no Italo-Serbian agreement. Oblivious to this, Pašić thought that the participation of the US at the impending peace conference would encourage Italy to reach an agreement with Serbia, but he did acknowledge that the Treaty of London was a strong defense 'against the nationality principle'.²¹

18 — DDI, 5, IX, 459–460, 469–470, 497, 546–547, 558–559; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, 347–348, 355–356; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 207–209; V. Pavlović, *De la Serbie vers la Yougoslavie: la France et la naissance de la Yougoslavie*, Belgrade 2015, 300–302. In a conversation with the British ambassador, Sonnino claimed that, since military defeats had reduced Italy's chances of fulfilling its aspirations on the other side of the Adriatic, the Serbs had become much more affable. (*Jugoslovenski dobrovoljci 1914/1918: zbornik dokumenata*, ed. by N. Popović, Beograd 1980, 341) 19 — *Građa o stvaranju jugoslovenske države (1. I – 20. XII 1918)*, ed. by D. Janković, B. Krizman, Beograd 1964, 32.

20 — DDI, 5, X, 58; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, 255; Valiani, *The end of Austria-Hungary*, 229. Sonnino was certainly influenced by a telegram from the ambassador in Washington, who, after having complained of Serbian demands, was asked by Secretary of State Robert Lansing 'with feigned surprise if they were limited to Bosnia and Herzegovina and access to the sea', and then continued to explain his view of the Corfu Declaration. When he half-jokingly asked if the US would support Serbian demands, Lansing replied: 'Certainly not to that extent.' Over the following months the American position changed to the detriment of Italy, whose ambassador unsuccessfully tried to convince them that the Corfu Declaration was an imperialist and anti-Wilsonian document. (DDI, 5, X, 39–40; 5, XI, 531, 561)

21 — *Građa o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 70.

In Paris the Prime Minister of Italy Vittorio Orlando declared that Italy would 'gladly extend its hand to all nations willing to contribute to the Allied cause – even those that have yet to achieve independence.' Pašić asked his envoy in Rome to thank Orlando and personally expressed his gratitude to Sforza, who told him that only 'general statements' about harmony were welcome and that it was 'too early' for anything more.²² As Pašić's mouthpiece, in his newspaper *La Serbie* published in Geneva, Lazar Marković wrote that Italo-Serbian talks were progressing and that a general agreement could help convince democratic Europe and the US of the necessary dissolution of Austria-Hungary: 'How strange must now seem the anecdote [...] about the first meeting between Pašić and Sonnino in Rome in 1916, when a person from the minister's entourage, when pressed to recount what had been said, replied in confusion: *Well they didn't say anything!*'²³

In fact, in February 1918, this anecdote was perhaps still untrue, but it was certainly apt, to quote the Italian saying. Once again Sonnino and Pašić had little to say to each other, and hence Italo-Yugoslav negotiations were taken over by Italian unofficial representatives, the Yugoslav Committee, and unofficial Serbian representatives, with the most important among them being Lazar Marković. While Trumbić led the main talks in London, with Pašić's consent Marković worked towards the restoration of the Serbo-Italian Committee, which was supposed to work on a rapprochement under the control of the Serbian government. After a conversation with Marković, a member of the Yugoslav Committee informed Trumbić that 'Mr. Laza, and presumably others, were unhappy' with the importance he had gained in his negotiations with the Italians. On the other hand, Marković was aware of suspicions within the Committee, but assured Pašić that precisely these suspicions 'demand[ed] continuing the course of action that promised the best results'. These results were achieved by Trumbić, who made the agreement that paved the way for the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities of Austria-Hungary, convened in Rome in April. Pašić also authorized Trumbić to make an agreement, advised him to be patient and avoid 'clashes about issues of second-rate importance', and wrote to him to not 'delude himself that everything could be easily settled'. At the same time, he assured Sforza that Trumbić would be more restrained and would realize that the Italo-Yugoslav border 'could not be merely demographic, but also geographic and strategic.'²⁴

22 — 'Déclarations de M. Orlando', *Le Temps*, 1 February 1918, 4; AS, MID-PO, 1918, b. IV, f. VI. D. Stevanović to N. Pašić, 1 February/19 January 1918; N. Pašić to V. Antonijević, 3 February/21 January 1918; DDI, 5, X, 180. Pašić and Orlando continued to exchange polite messages congratulating important anniversaries or military victories. On the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war, Pašić expressed hope that the fourth war year would bring 'the fulfillment of legitimate national aspirations and desires' to the Italian people, and the President of Italy returned the sentiment using similar wording. On the fourth Serbian anniversary, Orlando telegraphed stating that Italy – who was also fighting for 'national unity' – believed that Serbia would 'rise from its bloody ruins even more glorious and greater for its own sake and for that of its brethren in the Yugoslav race, who are now disunited and oppressed'. (AS, MID-PO, 1918, b. IV, f. VII. N. Pašić to V. Orlando, 23/10 May 1918; b. IV, f. VI. V. Orlando to N. Pašić, 25/12 May 1918; 1 August/19 July 1918; *Srpske novine*, 24. July [6 August] 1918, 1)

23 — 'L'Italie, l'Autriche-Hongrie et les Yougoslaves', *La Serbie*, 26 January 1918, 1; L. M[arković], 'L'unité yougoslave et l'Italie. A propos du livre de M. Voinovitch', *La Serbie*, 16 February 1918, 1.

24 — *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 94–95, 109–111, 118–120, 123–124, 139, 144–145; AS, MID-PO, 1918, b. IV, f. VI. N. Pašić to A. Trumbić, 15/2 March 1918; Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 424–425, 436; DDI, 5, X, 367–368, 381, 383, 400; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916–1922*, 397–398; A. Trumbić, *Izabrani spisi*, ed. by I. Petrinović, Split 1986, 310–311; R. W. Seton-Watson i Jugoslaveni: *korespondencija 1906–1941*, I, Zagreb–London 1976, 320–321; M.

After the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Rome, which he personally attended, Marković wrote that the oppressed nationalities had indignantly rejected autonomy within Austria-Hungary, but that all of this was merely 'happy improvisation' and grounds for reaching an agreement between 'competent governments'. For his part, Sforza recorded that Pašić welcomed the success of the Congress and was glad to hear that Trumbić's 'legalistic prolixities' had vexed the Italian participants.²⁵

However, at this time Pašić was struggling with more pressing problems, as the opposition was trying to remove him from power. The Italian envoy had little affection for opposition politicians and believed that Pašić's retirement would be a 'leap into the unknown' for the Allies – even more so because his political adversaries included the Yugoslav Committee and the London envoy Jovan Jovanović, the opposition candidate for the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Although he thought that Pašić was losing some of his resoluteness and self-confidence, Sforza did not exaggerate the importance of the Yugoslav Committee and claimed that 'real Serbs' – first and foremost Prince Regent Aleksandar – saw 'Yugoslavs' as the stepchildren of 'Greater Serbia', i.e. 'the Kingdom of Serbia expanded by military conquest of as many South Slavic lands as possible'.²⁶ Whatever his personal opinions might have been, in a declaration to the National Assembly Pašić publicly endorsed a 'free and unified Yugoslavia', which could put a stop to the 'Germanic invasion' 'in close friendship with Italy'.²⁷

Over the following three months, Pašić and Sforza did not discuss a political agreement, but the Italian and Serbian government continued their rather futile talks about the formation of volunteer units composed of Yugoslavs imprisoned in Italy.²⁸ Pašić left Corfu in late July. On 1 August in Rome he met Sonnino, who recorded a single word in his diary: 'Pašić'. This suggests that the conversation was not particularly meaningful, although before his trip the

Paulová, *Jugoslavenski odbor (povijest jugoslavenske emigracije za svjetskog rata od 1914–1918)*, Zagreb 1925, 435, 437–439; Lj. Trgovčević, *Naučnici Srbije i stvaranje jugoslavenske države 1914–1920*, Beograd 1986, 199–205; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 205–207, 291–293; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 213–215, 218–219; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslavensko pitanje*, II, 194–196.

25 — L. Marković, 'Le Congrès des nationalités opprimées', *La Serbie*, 20 April 1918, 1; 'The Congress of the oppressed nationalities', *Serbia and Europe, 1914–1920*, ed. by L. Marcovitch, London [1920], 277–279; Sforza, *Fifty years*, 159. On the eve of the Congress in Rome, Sforza complained to Pašić about the writings in the emigrant press affiliated with the Yugoslav Committee, and was himself unsure if Trumbić was merely being arrogant or purposely trying to sow the seed of discord. The following month, after Trumbić told him about the advantages of the Treaty of London and the Yugoslav willingness to suffer sacrifice in order to create an independent state, it seemed to him that the chairman of the Yugoslav Committee had 'matured'. Not hiding his resentment of Pašić, Trumbić attempted to placate other Italian diplomats, although they were distrustful of him and saw his nature as 'more Levantine than Dalmatian' and him as their 'fiercest, most insidious and darkest enemy'. (DDI, 5, X, 417–418, 560; XI, 413–414, 438, 453–454; 6, I, 148)

26 — DDI, 5, X, 265, 293, 298, 304–307, 565. Italian diplomats probably remembered Jovanović's statements in 1915, when he said that Italy – with which no solidarity was possible – had taken the place of Austria-Hungary as Serbia's 'true enemy'. On the other hand, the wary Pašić had never said anything of the sort to the Italians and was held in high regard. The Italian ambassador in Paris and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Tommaso Tittoni wrote to Sonnino that Pašić was the 'wisest and most moderate' man in Serbia. (DDI, III, 437, 482; IV, 375, 382; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, I, 186–187, 295)

27 — *Nikola Pašić u Narodnoj skupštini*, IV, ed. by Đ. Stanković, Beograd 1998, 152; *Građa o stvaranju jugoslavenske države*, 151; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme rađanja Jugoslavije*, II, 295; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić i jugoslavensko pitanje*, I, 184.

28 — B. Hrabak, *Jugoslaveni zarobljenici u Italiji*, 107–120.

Ante Trumbić and the Italian politician Andrea Torre after the signing of the treaty in London



Prince regent Alexander Karadordjevic



Vandorck

Serbian Prime Minister did hint to Sforza that he would be happy to exchange some 'ideas about Albania' with the Italian's superior. However, since the statement to the press underlined that there were no differences between the views of the two statesmen, the members of the Yugoslav Committee and their British patrons wrongly suspected that an agreement had been reached.²⁹ When in September the Italian government issued a statement supporting Yugoslav independence, Pašić wrote that some Yugoslavs were 'falling for it' and failing to understand that Italy was not renouncing the Treaty of London.³⁰

In the last months of the war, one of Pašić's main concerns was the intention of the Yugoslav Committee to become an internationally recognized factor equal to the Serbian government. He justified his objection to this plan by claiming that the 'Italians were eagerly waiting for a split to appear' to muddy the waters and ask for the establishment of independent Croatia. Developments in the battlefields were crucial for the resolution of the Italo-Yugoslav dispute and therefore both Sonnino and Pašić stalled and waited. In October Sforza reported that Serbian official circles, although after the breakdown of the Salonica Front they initially hoped for an Italian offensive that would facilitate the liberation of Serbia, were happy about the passive role of the Italian army. When it did eventually spring to action, he noted an air of excitement after the news about the occupation of Yugoslav lands. As regards the dispute over the Austro-Hungarian fleet, which the Yugoslavs tried to appropriate, he reminded the Serbs of Pašić's earlier statements that the new state had no intention of creating a war fleet in the near future.³¹

While the fateful events leading up to the Yugoslav unification unfolded in November and December 1918, the Serbian Cavour became increasingly inconsiderate towards the Italians and even began to speak of a war against them. Italian diplomats reported that Pašić endorsed 'the Slovenes' exaggerated territorial pretensions' to secure their support for the 'organization of greater Serbia' and that he had allowed the press to launch attacks against Italy in order to strengthen his 'destablized personal position' and find a 'cohesive element' for the new state in the potential conflict.³²

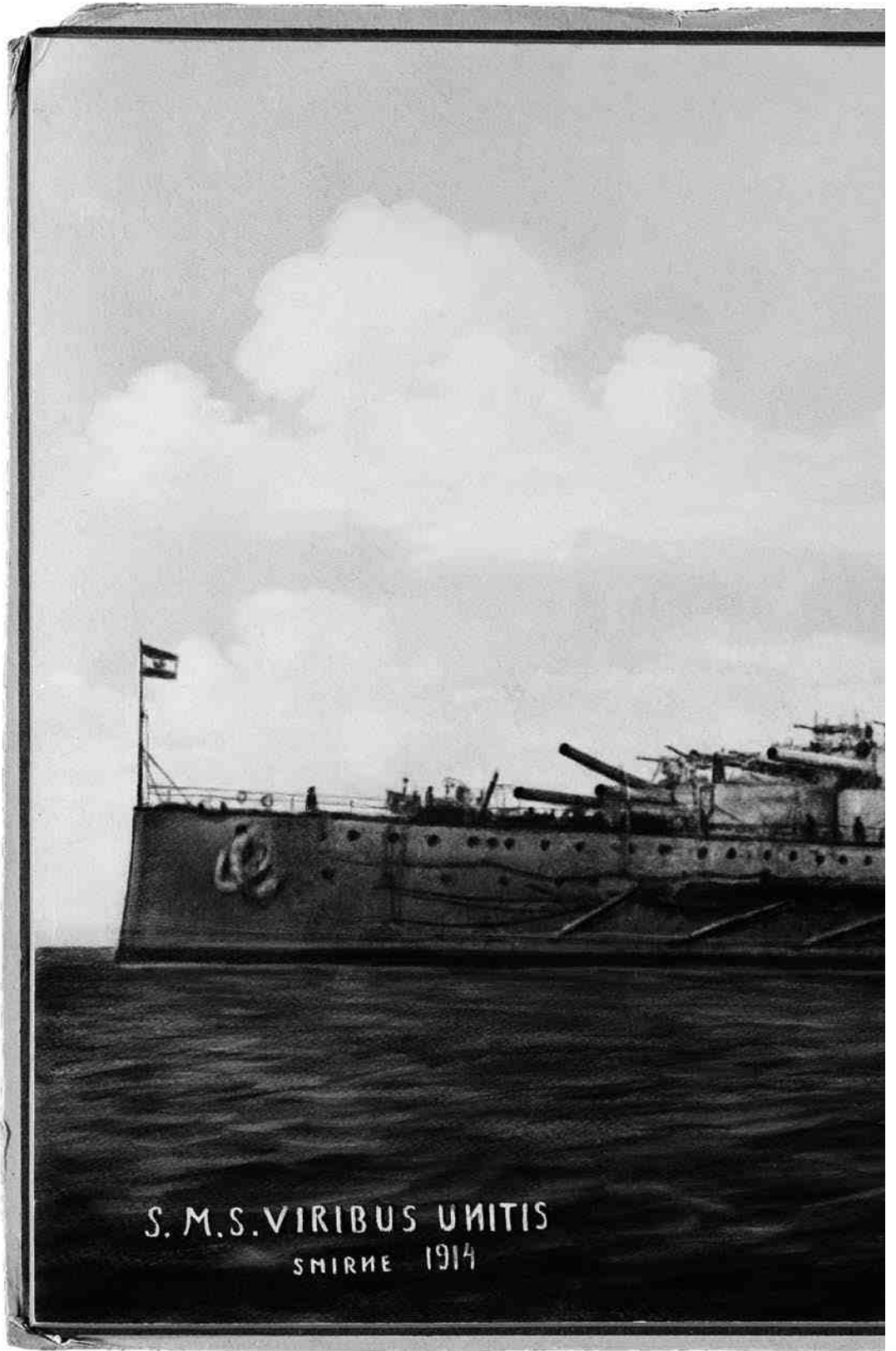
At the first session of the Geneva Conference on 6 November, according to Trumbić's notes, Nikola Pašić warned that Italy had plotted against the Yugoslav Committee and then 'emphasized great Serbia': 'This calls for unity on our part [...]. We have America on our side [...] and the idea of freedom'. On

29 — Sonnino, *Diario 1916-1922*, 289; DDI, 5, XI, 34-35; Sonnino, *Carteggio 1916-1922*, 420-421; *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 265; Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 509, 524; A. Mandić, *Fragmenti za historiju ujedinjenja*, Zagreb 1956, 71-72; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme radanja Jugoslavije*, III, 49, 52; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 227. Even Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, believed that there was a covert agreement between Pašić and Sonnino, and this piece of information was forwarded to Quai d'Orsay. However, the well-informed French ambassador in Rome Barrère firmly denied this assumption. (Ibid, 238, 292)

30 — *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 308, 370; Stanković, *Nikola Pašić, saveznici i stvaranje Jugoslavije*, 232-233; Šepić, *Sudbinske dileme radanja Jugoslavije*, III, 122-123.

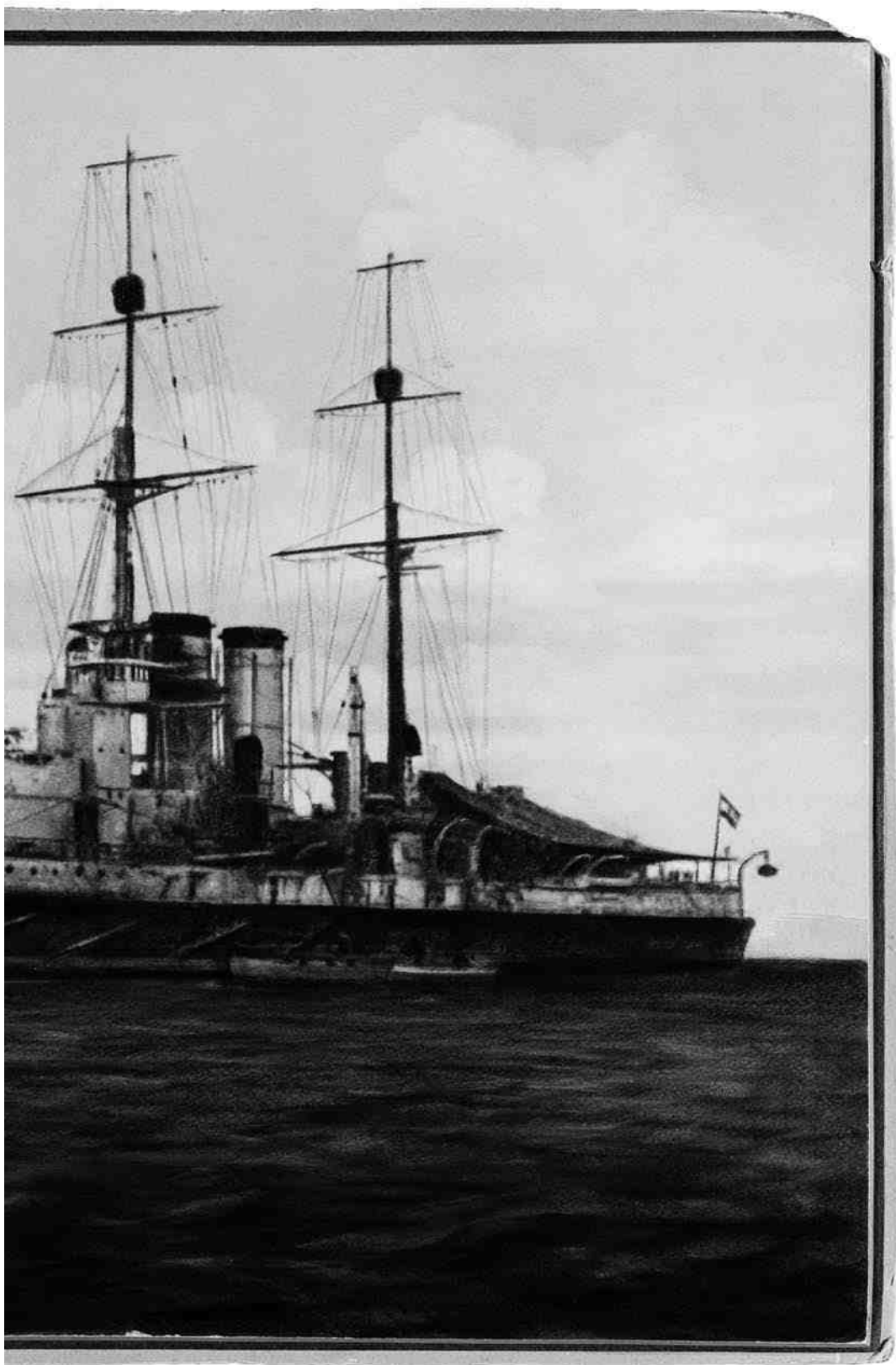
31 — *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 329, 356; DDI, 5, XI, 521-522; 6, I, 13. Sonnino had information that Quai d'Orsay - despite his relatively cold reception by the French - supported Pašić's policy for the Yugoslav question, and that Balfour had given him 'a reality check' when he showed his 'great aspirations', above all the "annexation of future Yugoslavia to Serbia". (DDI, 5, XI, 451-452, 528)

32 — *Grada o stvaranju jugoslovenske države*, 502, 609; Jovanović, *Dnevnik*, 554; DDI, 6, I, 31-33, 111, 296-297, 365.



S. M. S. VIRIBUS UNITIS
SMIRNE 1914

The Austro-Hungarian ship *Viribus Unitis*, given to the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and sunk by the Italians just a day later



the other hand, he claimed, there were the limitations imposed on France and Great Britain by the Treaty of London – which would have been ‘annihilated’ if Kerensky had remained in power instead of Lenin, whose ascent had ‘ruined everything’.³³ Although he formulated his speech to accommodate the sensitive political situation, his assessments were essentially not incorrect. The fact that the Italians had noticed a rift between the Yugoslav Committee and the Serbian ruling circles and emphasized their aspirations to Greater Serbia was due to their attempts at intrigue and ascribing their own desires at least as much as it was rooted in reality. In its dispute with Italy, democratic notions of national self-determination were really on the Yugoslav side, and at the time such notions had a strong champion in the USA and President Wilson. The emerging state would have had an even firmer pillar of support in democratic Russia, but Russia – democratic or otherwise – was no longer an actor on the European diplomatic scene, from which Wilsonian America would also soon disappear. The leading role would be taken over by three victorious European powers. Out of these three, Italy was the least entitled to feel victorious, but the infamous motto of ‘sacred egoism’ (*sacro egoismo*) that had been used by its statesmen to lead it into the war once again became its guiding principle in international relations. In these circumstances, the Adriatic question could not be resolved to the advantage of the Yugoslav state or become its cohesive element.