

Thanks for the invitation. I am a PhD at Vienna University. For this paper I have been using sources from the public records office, the Seton-Watson archive and various newspapers from the Adriatic, the Atlantic and the Alps. I shall be giving a paper based on a chapter that I finished writing this year for the book 'The history of the First World War in the Balkans' published by the Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, München.

A hundred years ago, near Rijeka, a minor Hungarian port town where the Croats spoke Italian, a young Vladimir Nazor looked jealously upon the contested Adriatic whilst writing. His fable, *Medvjed Brundo* speaks of bitter struggles between the forest animals and their enemies, the plundering Venetian loggers. The South Slavs are allegorically represented by wild animals trapped in a two way battle between themselves and against the Venetians. The fable alludes to the region's linguistic and political struggles between the Italians and the South Slavs, which had crystallised in the 19th century during the South Slav rebirth and the Italian Risorgimento on the Eastern Adriatic. This was not an exception. Earlier in the 19th century, the Slovene poet Simon Jenko's melancholy verses display the longing nostalgia of a lost sea:

Buči, buči, morje adrijansko!
Nekdaj bilo si slovansko,
morje adrijansko!

Jenko's verses show that in the 19th century, the Adriatic has already become a contested entity, becoming more of a barrier rather than a bridge. Lying on the crossroads of the Balkan Peninsula, Central Europe and the Mediterranean, the Eastern Adriatic became the object of the Entente's purchase of Italy's services in the First World War. Less than a few months into the war, the Italian foreign minister San Giuliano noted that

'Italy's major interest is in the Adriatic, with Austro-Hungary, not Germany being the enemy'.

During the First World War, the maritime outposts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would take a disproportional geopolitical significance that involved lobbying from the British Establishment and personal interventions from President Wilson.

The Trieste born Slovene historian Klabjan has described this period of history the 'scramble for the Adriatic'¹. Transplanting a term more common in the study of European imperialism in Africa, Klabjan argues that the minor Mediterranean bay developed into a key stake between the Entente powers and the Central powers. Indeed, the Triple Entente and the Triple alliance would use their respective proxies the Italians and the South-Slavs as a chess piece in a larger European game.

As we shall see, Italy jumped into the Entente ship in the spring of 1915, launching its 'fourth war of independence'. Rome aimed to unify the socially divided country, redeeming the almost 800 000 Italians and securing dominance on the Adriatic. In return, the Entente internationally legitimised Italian territorial aspirations by promising them the AH territories of South-Tyrol, Dalmatia, the Kvarner bay and the Austrian littoral I through the secret treaty of London in 1915. In return, Italy would, according to the newspaper the Near East bring 'one million bayonets' to fight the Central powers.

The Eastern Adriatic became caught up in a tangle of transnational battles, war and diplomacy that became one of the most intractable problems of the Versailles peace conference and would cause geopolitical problems beyond the First World War.

Italy's claims for the Eastern Adriatic rested partially on historic and cultural arguments. The notion of *jus primis occupantis* went back to antiquity. The provinces had all been part of Roman Empire, with several emperors being born there including Diocletian, whose palace at Split even in 1914 seemed to stand as an architecturally enduring imprint of the Italian *civiltà*. During the early modern period, the centuries-long dominance of the Venetian empire on the Eastern Adriatic gave major coastal cities like Zadar, Trogir and Korčula a distinct imprint of *il Serenissima*. The presence of the Italian language on the Eastern Adriatic coast meant that it was only in 1909 that Croatian became an official language in provinces such as Dalmatia. Here we can see the building of the Austrian naval ministry, built in 1908, with the coats of arms of the various Adriatic ports, all written in Italian.

¹ Klabjan, B The scramble for the Adriatic Austrian history journal 2013

Yet the Eastern Adriatic since the fall of the Roman Empire had been the junction of Europe's three largest people, Italian, German and Slav, all with historic claims to the region. In the **Middle Ages, Dante's *Inferno*** rhapsodised that the Eastern Adriatic was: 'where Italy bathes her boundaries'. Dalmatia, the 'firstborn province'² of Venice, had a special place in the Italian consciousness, having been romanticised as an exotic paradise by the Venetian dramatist Carlo Goldoni³. In 1910, Trieste had a bigger Slovene population than Ljubljana. One of Slovenia's greatest novelists Ivan Cankar famously stated that: 'If Ljubljana was the heart of the Slovenes, Trieste was its lungs.'

Since the mid-19th century, the Italian unification movement had led to regular wars between Austria and the nascent Apennine state. Under the leadership of the house of Savoy, Italy had pecked at the Austrian eagle's territory throughout the 19th century, taking Lombardy in 1859 and Veneto in 1866 in what Italian historiography would call the second and third wars of independence. Indeed, even today, the **Italian national anthem's ultimate verse speaks** of depluming the Austrian eagle:

Son giunchi che piegano
Le spade vendute:
Già l'Aquila d'Austria
Le penne ha perdute.

Use of South-Slav troops to quell pro-unification risings in Italy meant that strong antipathy had developed between South Slavs and Italians as can be seen by the negative portrayal of the Croats in Giusti's Risorgimento poem Sant' Ambrogio. Here we see a caricature of Croat soldiers serving in the Austrian ranks who were used to put down revolts in Lombardy. The First World War as a prolongation of the Risorgimento can be seen in an image drawn at the time of Italy's entry into the war. The caption reads: 'After centuries of martyrdom, Italy breaks her chains'. It demonstrates how the 'fourth war of independence' would finally complete Italian unity. It shows the mounted Italian king Victor Emanuel III leading a successful charge of Italian bersaglieri through the Austrian border to rescue the irredemed provinces Trieste, Dalmatia, Istria and Trent. The dashing romantic scene is observed by Garibaldi and other historical figures who fought for Italian unification. Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic in the First World War were presented as a natural finale of the revolutionary ripples of the emancipatory Risorgimento.

The movement for unity had been scuttled by the Austrian navy off shores of Vis in 1866 as the Austrians in a rare wartime victory halted the Italian advance. In negotiations about transferring the Eastern Adriatic to Italian hands in 1915, the Italian ambassador refers to 1866 as the key date as recalled by the British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey:

He said that for six centuries it had belonged to Venice and, till 1866, was Italian by nationality. If, since that date, the Italian element had been weakened, it was owing to the deliberate policy of Austria in introducing a Slav element.

The Zadar born Antonio Cippico, who taught Italian at University College London outlined the reasons for Italy's intervention in an article written in 1915:

The reasons of the present Italian war, as well as the open affirmation of Italian aspirations and rights, are deeply rooted in those 'sacrifices' of the new and not yet completed nation, as well as in the long and

² Wolff, L: Venice and the Slavs of Dalmatia: The Drama of the Adriatic Empire in the Venetian Enlightenment Slavic Review, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997) p438

'E per mare e per terra siete alla gloria nati, Oh dell'Adriatico impero popoli fortunati.'

Both by sea and by land you are born to glory, Oh fortunate peoples of the Adriatic empire. Goldoni, C-La Dalmatina (1758)

indescribable sufferings of the Italians on the eastern shore of the Adriatic –through the iniquitous denationalising policy pursued by Austria.

Despite the historic claims of Italy, large parts of the Eastern Adriatic were ethnographically and linguistically Croatian and Slovene. The last Austrian census in 1910 reveals a clear majority in Dalmatia and a more balanced picture slightly in favour of the South Slavs in the Austrian littoral⁴. Only Trieste, Western Istria and Zadar had an absolute Italian majority.

Nevertheless, in the year of the treaty of London, hundreds of thousands of Italians still lived in the territories from the Brenner Pass to the bay of Kotor. Contemporary Italian posters shows Italy being baited by the different European powers by offers of different territories claimed by Italian irredentism. This included Garibaldi's birthplace Nice, while Tunisia had more Italians living in it than Dalmatia.

A contemporary Italian postcard entitled 'The Italian war aims' shows a fort with three doors. The doors are labelled with the irredeemed provinces of Trent, Trieste and Dalmatia, with the first two being guarded by soldiers and the last being guarded by a sailor. Italian neutrality at the outbreak of the war made a significant amount of irredentist interventionists write articles to encourage Italy to intervene on the side of the Entente in order to secure the vulnerable position of Italy on the Eastern Adriatic. Since the Austrian annexation of Bosnia, Italian defence and political experts had believed that:

'Control of Dalmatia was crucial to determining the outcome of military conflicts in the Adriatic.'

Those involved in this campaign included nationalists such as the poet-soldier Gabriele d'Annunzio and the parliamentary representative for Venice, Foscari. In a newspaper article, Foscari explained Italy's aims and ambitions for the Eastern Adriatic, focusing on a mixture of historical, geological and strategic reasons why Dalmatia needs to be in Italy's hands for: *'in the hands of others, it is a continual and grave threat to our heart.'*

The Italian Admiral Thaon di Revel would outline the naval dimensions regarding Italy's strategic vulnerability in an article for the New York Times. The admiral points out the serious disadvantages for the Italian naval forces due to the dearth of naval ports that are vastly inferior on the Western Adriatic compared to the sheltered, deeper lying and strategically superior ports of the Eastern Adriatic.

'Our Dreadnoughts are shut up in Tarento because we do not possess a harbour large or deep enough on the Adriatic to hold a large squadron, whereas Austria exerts her Empire on the whole of the upper Adriatic... each channel, each isle, and especially the Curzolari, possesses excellent ports for a numerous and powerful fleet... Whereas the Italian coast from Otranto to Venice is entirely low-lying, without ports, without anchorages, exposed to the North wind, the Curzolari Isles and Dalmatia offer numerous and vast points of refuge, marvellous ports, and the possibility of navigating inside for shelter from the bad weather. No matter where an Austrian ship may be in the Adriatic, she can always find refuge by steaming a few miles and reaching the numerous channels of the interior; no matter where an Italian ship may be in the Adriatic she can only take shelter either at Venice or Brindisi, our only natural naval ports. But Brindisi and Venice are 1,300 kilometres apart, and, moreover, are not practicable for large modern warships.'

Italy's and the Entente's attempt to turn the Adriatic into an Italian lake hoped to shut off the Central powers supply lines by corking the Adriatic which was a major supply route for Austro-Hungary. By offering Italy large parts of the Eastern Adriatic, the Entente hoped to drive a wedge between the Triple Alliance, breaking the Central power's stranglehold on the Adriatic and thus prevent Germany from advancing south. Italy's plans for the Eastern Adriatic would have allowed them to hold the keys of the Adriatic and be secure from all military attack behind two impregnable mountain walls on the northern Alps and the Dinaric Alps.

Italy had declared neutrality as it claimed that its intervention would only occur in the case of a defensive war. Only after the French successful riposte of the Germans in the West and Austrian defeat in the East did the Italians begin to consider the possibility of a war against the Danube Monarchy. Italian neutrality did not go unnoticed by the press in the UK. The British newspaper, *The Spectator* noted in an editorial that Italy could not expect to 'have

⁴ With 96.2% Croatian speakers, Dalmatia had an overwhelming Croat and Serb majority compared to a 2.8% Italian speaking minority, over half of them in the Italian enclave of Zadar. The Austrian littoral had a three way division between Slovenes (37.3%), Italians 34.5%, Croats 24.4% and Germans 2.5%. Austrian Census data from 31 December 1910

a great say in the remaking of Europe if she ‘did not purchase her right through sacrifice’. The Spectator continued that:

‘If the Italians elect for safety and security, they cannot expect at the same time to play the part of a Great Power in the remaking of the map of Europe. It stands to reason that they will be unable in that case to make any claim to influence the settlement. To be concrete, it will be the voice of the Serbians, who have fought and struggled and risked everything, which must be listened to in regard to the settlement of the coast of the Adriatic, and not the voice of Italy.’

Less than two months after the Spectator article, the Serbian parliament passed the Niš resolution declaring that Serbia’s war aim was ‘the liberation and unification of all our brother Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.’ This meant that Serbia and Italy were competing with each other for territories with a South Slav population. An Italian postcard from 1915 shows a dialogue in a hotel between the Italian King and a Serb soldier. The caption underneath shows the dialogue with the Serb soldier asking: ‘Your majesty, Russia sends me for a nice room in Dalmatia with a view of the Adriatic’. This is an allusion to Serb claims on the Eastern Adriatic, to which the Italian King responds that ‘all the rooms are taken, but the corridor remains.’ In this way, the Eastern Adriatic became a point of discord between the Entente, whose need for future larger allies like Italy meant going behind the back of present smaller ones like Serbia. Gathering more allies became a pressing issue for the Entente as the war dragged on.

The start of 1915 showed the Entente that the war was not going to be over by Christmas. On the rain soaked fields of the Western front, khaki-clad British troops became bogged down in muddy trenches. The ‘Empire on which the sun never set’ found its blindly vigorous enthusiasm for war blunt against the towering Teutonic enemy. Worse, Britannia’s rule of the waves was no longer absolute, as German submarines sank British battleships like the HMS Formidable. Even the ‘fortress built by nature’ was now regularly penetrated by German Zeppelins, whose bombings in January 1915 caused Britain’s first civilian deaths **in Great Yarmouth and King’s Lynn**. The Ottoman Empire, who Britain had defended during its previous continental engagement in the Crimea, was now fighting alongside the Central Powers. The sick man of Europe was being helped into recovery by the Prussian perversity of general Liman von Sanders. Calling for ‘*Deutschland, Deutschland über Allah*’, the fear of tri-continental dominance via the Berlin-Bagdad axis sent a shiver down the spine of the usually placid British colonial governors. As a young Winston Churchill prepared both Britain’s navy and colonial troops for an attack in Gallipoli, the writer Chesterton commented on the situation in continental Europe:

The savagery of Prussia and the stupidity of Austria are now combined. Mercilessness and muddle-headedness are met together; unrighteousness and unreasonableness have kissed each other’

The only major German offensive on the Western front in 1915 was assisted by the use of poisonous gas at Ypres (April 22), causing 10 000 casualties and making chemical warfare enter the military vocabulary. The gravity of the situation meant that it was seen as vital to win over Italy as rapidly as possible at almost any cost, even if an additional alliance agreement was, in the words of the New Statesman ‘a glaring departure from the principle of nationality’. In this way, the Entente would act as a magnet for the other neutral states such as Bulgaria, Romania and Greece and thus start encircling the Central powers and blocking their route to the East. Indeed, the fact that neutral countries like the Ottoman Empire had joined the Central Powers was seen as a ‘great disaster of Allied diplomacy.’ Thus it was Italy’s plans for the Eastern Adriatic that were seen as more important as it was the only neutral remaining great power that could bring an extra ‘one million bayonets⁵’.

The negotiations for Italy’s entry into the war can be read in the official correspondence between Russia, France and Italy. Politicians like the future Prime Minister Lloyd George constantly advocated ‘bringing Germany down by the process of knocking the props under her.’ The Entente believed that the unbreakable Western Front could be turned by an attack through Italy. London wanted to prevent Germany from advancing south through breaking the Triple Alliance’s decade’s long stranglehold on the Adriatic.

Secret document of the UK foreign office shows that by the beginning of March 1915, most of the demands of the Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic were already in place, including demands for a loan to be floated on the London stock market and a promise to keep the Vatican out of future negotiations. Private and secret correspondence at the foreign office between the British foreign secretary Sir Grey and the British ambassadors

⁵ The Near East, 21 May 1915, p23

in Russia and France, besides affirming Italian claims to the cities of Dalmatia, reports that Italy's principle motivation of entry into the war was to remove:

'The intolerable situation of inferiority in the Adriatic vis-à-vis Austria.'

Sir Edward Grey and the British ambassadors in the Entente capitals demonstrated a hard-nosed diplomatic pragmatism vis-à-vis the principle of nationality which was seen as secondary compared to winning the war. The Italian alliance was said to be the 'tipping point' with officials at the foreign office predicting that it was *'likely to decide the war in three months.'* The British foreign secretary in his correspondence with the British ambassadors in Paris and Moscow agrees that the Italian claim is more strategic rather than ethnic for the coasts and islands of Dalmatia provides Austria with an *'ideal haven for submarines.'*

In correspondence with the British ambassador in Italy Rome, Sir Rennel Rodd, Grey admits that he sympathises with the Italian position of vulnerability to naval danger. The negotiations lasted several weeks, with Grey soon agreeing in principle to Italian demands subject to detail. The broadly sympathetic British attitude towards Italian claims can be seen in the letter of Rodd, who recognises Italy's need to *'make the Adriatic her naval base and acquiring absolute security for the future of the Adriatic.'*

The British felt that Italian intervention would decisively change the course of the war and that victory was more important than the principle of nationality. In an old-style diplomatic game, the British foreign secretary felt that diplomatic success in getting Italy on side would set an example to others such as Romania, in an attempt to encircle the Central powers from both sides. This is shown in his correspondence with the British representatives in the Entente capitals:

Italian co-operation will decide that of Romania and probably of some other neutral states. It will be the turning point of the war and will greatly hasten a successful conclusion⁶. ... I am informed that the Rumanian attitude is closely associated with Italy, and failure of negotiations with Italy will cause a setback in Rumania. ... It would, in our opinion, be a thousand pities to lose the great prize of Italian co-operation for the sake of so small a difference. I understand the French also hold this view very strongly.

The fragility of the Entente was confirmed a few days later by Sir Rodd in a letter a few days later:

We are therefore up to a critical issue. We can have immediate co-operation of Italy, ensuring, I believe the co-operation of Romania and affecting that of all the other Balkan states, with great results if we do not insist on applying to her acquisitions the very unreliable condition of neutralisation, and if we agree to her occupation of Cursola islands with Sabbioncello, which would be neutralised together with Serb coast. Price of Italian co-operation involves sacrifice of Dalmatia.

A major cause of disagreement with Russia was what to do with the southern Dalmatian coast. Standing in the middle of the Adriatic, the strategically vital harbours around the Curzolari islands were close to a potential maritime outlet for Serbia. The Curzolari islands were roughly at the strategic halfway point of the Adriatic, offering ideal places for ships and submarines to seek shelter and launch an surprise attack on Italy.

Disagreements arose due to the question of whether some of southern Dalmatia should be given to Italy, shared in some way between Serbia and Italy or neutralised. The Russian ambassador Sazonov, despite accepting the document in principle, insists on Serbian access to Dalmatia:

In order for Serbia to have access to the sea in proportion to its territory, it would be necessary to give her the Dalmatian coast with the adjacent islands, from the mouth of the Krka up to the Montenegrin frontier, which would pass probably somewhere a bit north of Ragusa.

Russia was seen to be pulling the strings behind Serbia's drive towards an outlet to the sea and potentially challenging Italy's aspirations for the Eastern Adriatic. Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic would cause disagreements between the allies, with the Russians in particular keen to maintain Serbia's right to access the Adriatic, which she had been denied at the end of the last Balkan wars. Fear of Adriatic ports in Serb hands being

turned into Russian ports is mentioned by the Italian foreign minister Sonnino to Sir Rennel Rodd. It was not an enlarged Serbia that Sonnino feared but Russia, who:

'If she obtains control at Constantinople may become in future the leading naval power in the Mediterranean.'

Eventually, with the pressure growing from the Entente, Italy withdrew its demands for the town of Split and the Pelješac peninsula. Russian obstinacy in the face of Entente negotiations can be explained by the Tsar's connections to Montenegrin royal family and still existent pan-Slavic sentiment within the largest Slav country. Despite the adjustment, the treaty of London has been described as a 'triumph of Italian diplomacy'⁷ due to Italy's territorial aspirations being grounded in an international Treaty that would guarantee gains made in war and went beyond the 'minimum expectations of the Italian ruling class.'⁸

Two days after the start of the Armenian genocide and a day after the British invasion of the shores of Gallipoli, the Entente signed the Treaty of London on the 26 April. The Futurist artist Bocconi caught the brash bravado of battle with his painting 'Charge of the lancers', showing the Italian *fanti* galloping through the moving canvas into their 'the fourth war of independence' while the Entente attempted to scuttling the Central powers stranglehold on the Adriatic lake. As the Italian navy was mobilised, Austro-Hungary's only maritime supply route via the Adriatic was shut off by the combined Entente naval forces, slowly strangling the already overstretched empire.

Although a flagrant violation of the principle of nationality, the Treaty of London was typical of old diplomacy. Italy's demands for strategic bases in the Adriatic followed Britain's logic of maintaining naval bases in Gibraltar, Cyprus and Malta. Not content with fiddling with the Mediterranean, Britain and the Entente were also re-arranging the Middle East and *Mitteleuropa*. The Constantinople agreements between the Entente meant that the Bosphorus straights were promised to the Russians on March 14. The Entente also baited Bulgaria with Serb land in Macedonia and Romania with the Hungarian territory of Banat. Further East, Britain also offers Hussein bin Ali Sharif of Mecca their recognition of an independent Arab kingdom. Even today, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Syria are know in the Arab street collectively as Britain's children.

Italy's plans for the Eastern Adriatic benefitted from a pronounced Italophile section within the British establishment who had been raised in the spirit of the classics, the Grand Tour and the shining relics of the Apennine peninsula's past. Britain's affinity with Italy went back to Venetian days. Shakespeare had marvelled Venetian society in his plays. James I had written a pamphlet in defence of Venice, which like England was a constitutional, maritime and mercantile empire fortified by nature. The British Empire, like Venice was fortified by nature, commercially based and anti-papist. The wistful nostalgic poetry of William Wordsworth, lamenting the extinction of the Venetian republic⁹ shows the cultural imprint that an early-modern, Italian speaking and trans Adriatic entity had made on the British conscience. In the 19th century, the city of the lagoons continued to capture the British imagination as the wistful Venetophilism of Britons like Shelley, Turner and Ruskin demonstrate.

This affinity developed a new élan during Italian reunification that connected the previous affinity with Venice with a certain strand of British Whig politics that supported intervention in European causes. Like Byron a few generations earlier, the historian Trevelyan the elder had gone south in order to fight for liberty in a war of independence against a reactionary empire. Parts of the liberal party, following the anti-Austrian heritage of Gladstone, would have agreed with the Italian and pro-Italian population along the Eastern Adriatic in seeing the *Risorgimento* an anti-clerical, liberal and progressive movement and thus the last libretto of the Risorgimento. Support in Britain for Italian plans included the Saturday Review, the Pall Mall Gazette, the Cambridge Magazine and the Spectator, which celebrated the entry of Italy into the war, alluding to the liberal elements present in the Risorgimento, the significant armed forces at its disposal and the vital morale booster for the Entente:

Italy has joined the forces of freedom with whom her heart has long been beating. It is her right and natural place. Even if the Italian Army were defeated, it would have occupied the attention of some half-million of Austro-German soldiers. The increment of moral power which Italy brings to us is enormous. The spirit of the Risorgimento is still alive.

Not everyone in the UK supported Italy and its imperialist aspirations for the Adriatic. Three days before the treaty of London was signed, Seton-Watson sent a long letter complaining about the treaty to the London Times.

Seton-Watson had travelled around the Eastern Adriatic and had made friends with numerous local politicians and journalists such as the Split mayor Trumbić, the journalist Supilo and parliamentary representatives of Eastern Adriatic regions like Smodlaka and Lupis-Vukić. Being aware of the Rijeka resolution, Seton-Watson became convinced that South Slav unity would naturally follow the pattern established by France, Britain, Italy and Germany. The unique pan-Slavic parliamentary co-operation in Dalmatia seemed proof to Seton-Watson that an alliance between Serbs and Croats was possible on a national scale which together with an Italo-Slav alliance would replace hostile Teutonic *Mitteleuropa* with a more benign political order friendly to the Atlanticist interests of the Entente:

It was from Italy that the Croat and Serb leaders in Dalmatia took their inspiration, alike in political thought and literature. Today their chief aim is an intimate understanding between Slavs and Italians, as the sole basis upon which they can hope to resist the German Drang nach Ostern...but this understanding cannot be purchased at the expense of national suicide.

Campaigning against Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic, Seton-Watson highlights the importance of not betraying potential allies in an area where millions of anti-Austrian Slavs could yet rush to the Entente colours. Yet because of the Treaty of London, Seton-Watson claimed that South Slav loyalty to the Habsburgs would increase as they preferred an Austrian to an Italian regime

To all the South Slavs of Austro-Hungary this war has been one long and hideous martyrdom. There is one means, and only one means of rendering it popular. It is that Italy should engage in the war with the object of annexing the Dalmatian coast and islands. In that event, the entire population will offer a desperate resistance to the Italian invader, and Austria-Hungary, by representing the Entente powers as the inspirers of an anti-Slav conspiracy, will have one last chance of rallying her disaffected southern Slav populations.

Seton-Watson's prediction proved to be right. In response to Italian irredentist claims on the Eastern Adriatic, Austro-Hungary galvanized its South Slav population by sending the South-Slav general Svetozar Borojević to lead the defence of the realm. Borojević, the only South Slav who became a field Marshall in the Hapsburg army, acted as an extra motivator for South-Slavs to fight what was perceived as a perfidious invasion of their own territories. The field Marshall's success in leading the Habsburg army to twelve victories against the Italians during the war gained him the nickname the 'lion of Isonzo'. Borojević became an honorary citizen of over seventy different towns and cities on the Italo-Slav borderlands such as Ljubljana, Varaždin and Karlovac.

Seton-Watson's letter to the Times also points out how the Treaty of London would damage the reputation of the Entente as it would be a counterproductive measure only serving the interests of the Central Powers. Moreover, he outlines his vision of the South Slavs as intermediaries between Britain and Russia, whose betrayal would be a betrayal of all the principles and aims that the Entente stands for:

Those who advocate an Italian Dalmatia are consciously or unconsciously playing the game of the Central powers...The South Slavs and it should be added the Bohemians are our natural allies, as the intermediaries between Britain and Russia, between Britain and the great Slavonic world...if we abandon them, we deliberately turn our back upon the future and renounce the principles of justice, liberty and nationality in favour of those motives of racial dominance and strategic grab which inspire the German and Magyar authors of this war.

London became the embryo of important post-Hapsburg institutions that were to shape Austro-Hungarian succession including the School of Slavonic studies, Seton-Watson's weekly newspaper *New Europe* and the Yugoslav committee that spent most of the First World War in the British capital. The London School of Slavonic Studies, which this year also celebrates its centenary, was set up as an academic institution for supporting long term British ascendancy in South-Eastern Europe. Seton-Watson became the chief intermediary between the foreign office and the nationalities of the Habsburg Empire though his friends in the Yugoslav committee.

An example of this is the telegram written by Frano Supilo that RSW delivered to foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey, where the former Novi List journalist Frano Supilo demonstrates an eloquent argument against the Treaty of London:

A terrible injustice will be done to our cultured and civilized nation, if Italy is allowed to occupy our shores. Such a crime against our nation on the Adriatic could only be dictated by the brutal force of the stronger, in the same way as German militarism occupied Belgium. It is impossible to believe that Europe, which rose against Germany for this very reason, should now allow Italy to enforce the principle of the stronger against our compact and overwhelming majority on the Adriatic coast. By such a proceeding civilized Europe would only contradict all her own assurances to Belgium: for Italy does not enter to liberate but to conquer the territory and towns of our nation.

Lobbying against the Treaty of London became a major priority for Seton-Watson. In a tireless advocacy campaign, his letters to newspapers such as the Nation reveal a criticism of the Entente for their collusion with Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic as being harmful to long term interests of everyone:

A close understanding between Italy and the South Slavs and Romania is an essential preliminary to any lasting settlement of the Balkan and Adriatic problems, and to the reconstruction of South Eastern Europe on healthy national and economic lines; and if Dalmatia falls to Italy such an understanding will be ipso facto impossible.

Seton-Watson's private notes reveal an admiration for the 19th century concept of Adriatic multinationalism. Seton-Watson's idea of a revitalisation of a Slavo-Italian alliance was based on the fact that early Mazzini and Nikola Tommaseo considered Slavs as allies in the struggle for national and political emancipation against Austria. The British journalist private notes contain a collection of the quotes of the major figures of Adriatic multinationalism such as Mazzini, who claimed in the 19th century that: '*our future political and economic power rest in an alliance with Yugoslav, Daco-Roman and Hellenic people*¹⁰' while the contemporary chairman of the Yugoslav committee Trumbić mentioned in 1903 that '*the Adriatic sea ought to unite Croats and Italians*¹¹'.

The Yugoslav committee, set up and financed initially 'on the initiative of Nikola Pašić'¹², the Serb Prime minister included Seton-Watson's friends from the Eastern Adriatic Supilo, Trumbić and Meštrović. One of the first things that the Yugoslav committee did was publish a program that it addressed to the British people in the Times newspaper using the pen of Seton-Watson and the connections to the Times foreign editor Henry Wickham Steed for a full page appeal to the British nation and parliament in the Times on 12 May 1915. Translated by Seton-Watson, it appealed deliberately against the Treaty of London and Italian plans for the Eastern Adriatic as well as embraces the principle of nationality and the ideas of South Slav unity:

*The Yugoslavs inhabit the following countries, Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro; the Triune kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia (with Fiume and district)... to transfer even portions of them to another rule, would be a flagrant violation of our ethnographical, geographical and economic unity.*¹³

Despite the best efforts of Seton-Watson and the Yugoslav committee, the strong Italian lobbying led by Italy sympathizers at major universities such as Piccoli at Cambridge and Cippico at UCL meant that the British public knew little about the Eastern Adriatic ethnographic realities. An extract from contemporary media tendentiously and deliberately refers to the Eastern Adriatic, as 'Italy's other shore'. The article shows the major Roman remains in the Adriatic coastal towns of Split, Pula, Zadar and Kotor, noting that:

*If you want a spectacle of beauty... you must slip out of the lagoons of Venice and steam across the Adriatic to what was once, and will be again, Italy's other shore, Dalmatia. Some of it she only lost a hundred years ago, while in other portions the Lion of St Mark is still rampant, as in Zara.*¹⁴

The Yugoslav committee and their supporters in the UK wanted to demonstrate to the public how the South Slavs were a viable ally the Eastern Adriatic. In a successful public relations exercise, just a month after Italy entered the war, Ivan Mestrovic's sculptures were exhibited at London's Victoria and Albert museum. Mestrovic, a living symbol of South Slav unity was able to connect Eastern themes of heroic resistance, sacrifice and struggle for freedom through a Western medium, sculpture. This symbolically set in stone the unity between East and West. The Dalmatian sculptor ideally captured the new Yugoslav synthesis ideally, since it took Eastern themes of Serb heroic epics about Kosovo yet presented them in a western medium which had been well developed in the Eastern

Adriatic cities. In this way, the gap between Oriental Serbs and Occidental Croats was bridged together through the works of Mestrović. The exhibition, opened by the undersecretary of foreign affairs, Lord Robert Cecil, highlighted the successful intermediary element of Meštrović's artworks: 'Ivan Mestrović can be said to have grasped the significance of the soul of the Slav and to have translated it into imperishable marble'¹⁵

Meštrović's captivating statues of Slav folk heroes were reviewed as rare examples of contemporary art that *'stabs the spirit awake*. 'The intellectual and cultural reconceptualization of the South Slavs as a link in the bridge between East and West was thus given public prominence as reviews described him as: *'A southern Slav who, racially, stands mid-way between Eastern and Western civilisation'*¹⁶. The message to the British public was evident, a Slav revitalisation of Europe was possible from Teutonic, militaristic, materialistic might. *'A better propaganda cannot be invented'* according to Seton-Watson who saw the exhibition as a sign of Yugoslav unity through an artist from the Eastern Adriatic. In many ways, the exhibition was a resounding success, although it did reveal the omnipresent cracks in South Slav unity. Numerous reviews of the exhibition presented the sculptor as a Serb, although Mestrović insisted on the term Yugoslav. In fact, the Serbian ambassador in London, Bosković had boycotted the exhibition due to Mestrović's refusal to call himself a Serb. The Serb ambassador objected to the brochure of the exhibition being called 'Mestrović the Yugoslav artist' demanding that it be changed to Serb. Prof Cvijić, in the name of Bosković, the Serb ambassador, attempted to persuade Mestrović, who is said to have answered: 'with this Yugoslav, I wanted to say both, i.e. that we are one'.

Serbia did not see the Yugoslav committee as a legitimate partner due to an inherent distrust of South Slav politicians from Austro-Hungary who were seen as contaminated by Teutonism, Papisism and Western ideas. Pašić, despite having helped set up the Yugoslav committee, had, according to Mestrović *'objected initially to the name Yugoslav committee, claiming that an enlarged or greater Serbia would be preferable as Serbia already had a status as an ally'*¹⁷. The Serbian prime, who had seen in their lifetimes Serbia double in size through territorial extractions from the Ottoman Empire, saw no reason why similar extractions were not possible from Austria without resorting to compromise. As a result, Serbian attitudes towards the Eastern Adriatic issue were ambivalent at best and indifferent at worst. Despite the Niš declaration of 1914 committing Serbia to freeing all of the South Slavs, the Eastern Adriatic hardly appeared in their plans. Trevelyan and Seton-Watson had made journey to Serbia in December 1914. During the unofficial visit, Seton-Watson, in conversation with the king, having been told that he *'would sooner lose Bosnia than give up Macedonia'*¹⁸, has the opportunity to try to persuade him towards engaging more towards the Eastern Adriatic:

*'We hope that Serbia will turn her eyes more towards the West (pointing to Bosnia and Dalmatia on map) and less to the East. For Macedonia represents the past and Dalmatia the future for you.'*¹⁹

In spite of the overtures of Britain's South Slav supporters, it seems that Serbia was more concerned with the other fronts and gave little consideration to the Eastern Adriatic. Mestrović recalls a 1915 conversation with the Serb foreign minister Jovanović that dismissed the Eastern Adriatic as almost irrelevant:

'We want to get Bosnia and an exit to the sea, the rest does not concern us, we will have time later..., Bosnia and Dubrovnik, the rest of the coast shall go to the Italians and Croatia shall remain with Hungary.'

Serbia's recent victories in Macedonia and Belgrade's vulnerable position on the Austrian border meant that Serbia was more interested in securing its south-eastern and northern border as a buffer against future Austrian attacks rather than concerns about a maritime outlet. The major Serbian politicians, despite knowing the value of the Eastern Adriatic to the Yugoslav committee were not concerned. In April 1916, Pašić gave an announcement to Italian newspaper *Corriera della Sera* correspondent in St Petersburg, promising the Italians the predominant position on the Eastern Adriatic:

There are no serious misunderstandings between the Serbs and the Italians... we Serbs cannot deny the clear right of Italy to hegemony on the shores of the Adriatic.

Others report that away from officialdom, Pašić was even blunter with: *'Jebeš vodu koju ni kobila ne pije'*.

The excessively pro-Serbian attitude that was making its presence felt in the Yugoslav committee eventually led one of its most capable members, Frano Supilo to resign in 1916, citing numerous reasons including lack of consideration for the Eastern Adriatic from Serbian politicians, who were ready to let Croatia be divided in the 20th century like Poland in the 18th. Ivan Meštrović recalls the comments of Supilo in his memories:

‘Ako ima da se Hrvatska trga, kao prosjačka kabanica, da se pravi sprdnja od nje, i da je se skreše na nekoliko kajkavskih županija, onda ja ljubim I onaj mizerni Zagreb I one jadne moje Krobote I kažem, da ćemo mi svi Hrvati, pa gdje bili, biti za Zagreb I raditi da ta naša Hrvatska bude sve veća’

By 1918, things had changed dramatically in Europe. Russia was out of the war. The USA had joined. In January 1918, two of Wilson’s fourteen points specifically applied to the situation in the Eastern Adriatic. Point nine spoke of ‘*a readjustment of the frontiers of Italy along clearly recognizable lines of nationality*’. Point 10 indicated that ‘*the peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest possible opportunity of autonomous development.*’

Despite the Austro-Hungarian and German armies merging, the *K.u.K* army collapsed in 1918. Wilson’s principle of ‘self-determination’ led states like Czechoslovakia and the South Slav parts to declare independence in 1918. As Austro-Hungary collapsed a week before Armistice Day, **Italian troops occupied most of the Eastern Adriatic, using the Treaty of London as a justification.** The Eastern Adriatic was the *casus belli* for intervention in the bloodiest war Italy had ever fought. Italy hoped that entering the Great War would be the culmination of the Risorgimento. Yet the Risorgimento’s revolutionary ride was corroded by the immense casualties of the war.

Due to the Treaty of London, the Adriatic question became the most intractable territorial issue at Versailles. Wilson’s rejection of Rome’s maximalist claims led to the Italian president Orlando to declare that ‘*he could not accept the propositions of President Wilson as the line of the Eastern Adriatic border that he has taken is that which has been published by ‘The New Europe’ which is a form of official publication of the Yugoslavs*’. Sketched out by Sir Arthur Evans in the October 1917 edition of *The New Europe*, the map erased both British promises and Italian expectations of 1915 by adjusting the Eastern Adriatic border towards Istria. Steed’s good relations with the British foreign secretary Balfour and Wilson’s deputy colonel House resulted in Wilson validating Evans’ border proposal.

Writing to the Italian president, the Versailles victors pointed out that Rijeka ‘*taken as a whole is Slav, not Italian.*’ The letter finished by noting that Rijeka should not be ‘*severed from the territories to which economically, geographically and ethnologically it naturally belongs.*’ The Italian delegation promptly left the negotiations in protest, complaining of ‘mutilated victory’ and seriously damaging Seton-Watson’s vision of an Italo-Slav alliance as a brake on German aspirations. President Wilson, a staunch opponent of secret diplomacy, declared the Treaty of London null and void, an act which ultimately led Italy’s Prime Minister Orlando to leave the peace conference in protest, starting the legend of mutilated victory.

The Italian premier was not the only one that left the peace negotiations in disgust. Seton-Watson, who was an observer at the Versailles negotiations had an intimate insight into the goings on behind the scene. Internal dissent within the Yugoslav camp that would poison the atmosphere. Like the animals of Natorp’s Medvjed Brundo, who pay lip service to ‘justice and liberty’, internal dissent within the Yugoslav camp was noticed by Seton-Watson even as the country was being born. In a letter never sent or published, and omitted by his sons in the book ‘The making of New Europe’, Seton-Watson laments the irreconcilable differences between the South Slavs:

‘There is a difference between the mentality of a Turkish pasha and a Croat advocate brought up in Western (and Italian culture). The struggle is between the 20th and 16th century...not between Croat and Serb or still less Catholic and Orthodox’.

Post-war irredentist ideas would claim that Italy had not gained enough territory, eventually produced the first fascist dictatorship. A prequel of this would occur in Rijeka.

After Versailles was signed, the Italian poet D’Annunzio and two thousand Italian veterans occupied the port of Rijeka. For a brief period, the former Magyar port became a centre of the world’s attention. After forcing the withdrawal of Entente forces, D’Annunzio attempted to deflect the illegitimacy of his occupation through playing the anti-imperialist, anti-British card:

'We may all perish under the ruins of Fiume, but from the ruins our spirit will rise strong and active. From the indomitable Sinn Fein in Ireland to the Red Flag... That voracious empire which has taken possession of Persia, Mesopotamia, the new Arabia, a great part of Africa, and is not yet satisfied, can, if it wants, send its aerial murderers to us'.

The inventor of the black shirts and the raised hand salute defiantly announces:

'a crusade of all poor and free men, against the nations which are usurpers and accumulators of riches. This new crusade will establish true justice; justice which has been crucified by a cold hearted madman with his 14 blunt nails and with a hammer borrowed from the German chancellor'.

Despite the Italian navy bombing D'Annunzio out of his self-proclaimed republic, tensions relating to the Italian occupation of the Eastern Adriatic coast would lead to the first fascist act in Europe according to the historian Rusinow. Taking the shooting of the Italian captain Giulli in Split in 11 July 1920, irredentist extremists in Trieste incinerated the Slovenian cultural centre in Trieste, an act saluted by Mussolini as the *'capolavoro del fascismo triestino'*. According to the US historian Rusinow, 1920 saw *'the first Fascist violence struck Europe, with the police looking on as a mob burned down the Slovene cultural centre in Trieste'*. The winds of the fascist bora spread like a summer wildfire. The day after the *Narodni Dom* arson, the Pazin seat of the Croatian newspaper *'Pučki Prijatelj'* was incinerated. The border question was only partially resolved by the treaty of Rappalo in November 1920 as Italian troops left most parts of the territory promised to them by the Treaty of London. Nevertheless, Istria, Trieste, Gorizia, Rijeka, Zadar, Lastovo and Palagruža remained in Italian hands.

Ironically, the Italian irredenta had created an irredentist problem within its own country, with some 400 000 Slovenes (a third of the total population) and 100 000 Croats bitterly remaining within Italian borders. The British historian AJP Taylor in his 1940s pamphlet *'Trst or Trieste'* wrote:

'Italian rule over the South Slavs in the littoral had no parallel in Europe until the worst days of the Nazi dictatorship'.

Politically, the South Slavs response was to organise Europe's first anti-fascist resistance movement TIGR, representing the letters of the contested territory Trieste, Istria, Gorica and Rijeka. Culturally, the mournful, haunting solidarity sentiments of the Slovene poet's *'More Adrijansko'* became a popular acappella songs on the Slovene part of the Eastern Adriatic that lamented the sorrowful fate of the stolen sea:

'Silence, Silence Sea, where have you hidden them

Have you buried our ships

The sea hasn't buried them

They weren't wrecked on the cliffs

If they are not seen anymore

It is the fault of the foreigner's sword'

For the South Slavs of the Eastern Adriatic, memories of the treaty of London, the subsequent occupation and a strong representation in the Yugoslav committee mean that union with other South Slav provinces had significant support. The post-war organisation, *Jadranska straža* would become one of the most numerous organisations in the new SHS state, with King Karadordze as its honorary president. Despite deep divisions in all fields of political life, it would be the Adriatic question that could unite south Slavs as Seton-Watson's article in the interwar period claimed:

'Every Yugoslav would unite to defend Dalmatia against a foreign invader'.

Watching the rough waters of the Adriatic, a now middle aged Nazor started writing again. Like most Croats and Slovenes, he experienced the loss of the Eastern Adriatic as an amputation, musing on its loss in religious terms, promising one day to return, calm the choppy waters of the Adriatic and salvage its contested heart:

*'I čekajte nas. Čekajte nas!
Doč ćemo.'*

*Jest zavjet neki između nas I vas.
O Istro, grano osjećena,
vezem te za srce svoje baš u ovaj čas.´*
