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Montenegro Betrayed: The Yugoslav Unification and the Controversial Inter-Allied Occupation

A Tradition of Independence

During WWI, the Kingdom of Montenegro experienced its last troubled period of independence at the end of a process that in the 19th century had brought the country almost continuously in a state of war against the Ottomans with important political and military successes, despite the fact that Sultan Selim III, already in 1799, had formally recognized that Montenegrins “had never been subjects of the High Porte.”¹ Under the Ottoman domination, the mountains of Montenegro preserved a *de facto* autonomy from the authority of the sultan due to a peculiar tribal structure and on the basis of the payment of a tribute, which frequently had been unpaid. A particular theocracy headed by the prince bishop of Cetinje –*vladika*, elected by a local assembly– had existed from the beginning of the 16th century until 1851, when Montenegro, after the death of Petar II Petrović-Njegoš (author of a literary work that became a symbol of the Montenegrin and more generally of the South Slavic nation-building process: *Gorski Vijenac* [The Mountain Wreath]) also became a secular principality with a definitive separation between temporal and spiritual power. Over the centuries, the Ottoman army repeatedly attempted to subjugate without success the Montenegrin tribes from the mountains, while the Montenegrin cities on the coast remained

¹ Stephen Clissold, ed., *Storia della Jugoslavia. Gli Slavi del Sud dalle origini a oggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 95; Georges Castellan, *Storia dei Balcani XIV-XX secolo* (Lecce: Argo, 2004), 348. For a general overview on the history of Montenegro see Živko M. Andrijašević, *The History of Montenegro: From Ancient Times to 2003* (Podgorica: Montenegro Diaspora Centre, 2006); Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Kenneth Morrison, *Montenegro: A Modern History* (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

for a long time linked to the Serenissima: if Bar (Antivari) and Ulcinj were conquered by the Ottomans in 1571, Kotor and the territory of Boka (since 1420), and Budva (since 1442) remained Venetian until 1797 (and after the Napoleonic period under Austria until 1918). From this historical legacy, the widespread belief among the 18th century Montenegrin *vladikas* was that Montenegro, whose independence was recognized at the Congress of Berlin of 1878, had never been conquered by the Turks.²

Still at the beginning of the 20th century Montenegro, also due to the constantly increasing influence of Russia on the country in the previous two centuries, was at the forefront in the fight against “the oppressors of the Slavic peoples,” and the first among the Balkan allies to proclaim war on Turkey in October 1912.³ If in 1911, before the Balkan Wars, the territory of the kingdom had less than 10,000 km² with a population of 284,000 inhabitants, in 1914 the country’s surface reached 15,000 km² and the population rose to 470,000 inhabitants.⁴ Since 1860, King Nikola was the seventh sovereign from

² At the Congress of Berlin, the territory of Montenegro was doubled to 8,655 km² with the acquisition of the regions of Nikšić, Kolašin, Podgorica, Spuž, Bar, Žabljak, Plav and Gusinje. The transfer of the last two localities to Montenegro, however, met the opposition of the Albanian League of Prizren, therefore they remained under the Ottoman Empire in exchange for Ulcinj (1880). The Principality of Montenegro reached thereby 9,475 km² with about 170,000 inhabitants. See Živko M. Andrijašević, “The year 1878 as a Borderline between Epochs,” in *130 Years of Established Diplomatic Relations Between Montenegro and Great Powers After it Gained Independence in 1878* (Podgorica: Historical Institute of Montenegro, 2011), 49-63; Francis S. Stevenson, *A History Of Montenegro* (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1914), 198-204; Castellani, *Storia dei Balcani*, 143-4, 204, 347-9; Antun Sbutega, *Storia del Montenegro. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006), 105-7, 203.

³ For a summary on the relations between Montenegro and the Great Powers in the 19th and the 20th century see John D. Treadway, *The Falcon and the Eagle: Montenegro and Austria-Hungary, 1908-1914* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1983), 12-8.

⁴ At the end of the Balkan Wars the Kingdom of Montenegro gained new territories acquiring the cities of Bijelo Polje, Mojkovac, Berane, Pljevlja, Rožaje, Gusinje, Plav, Djakovica and Peć, due to the partition of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar and Metohija between Montenegro and Serbia, that for the first time estab-

the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty (founded in 1697 by *Vladika* Danilo I Petrović) and during his fiftieth year (1910) of reign –half a century of territorial expansion, modernization and socio-economic progress– the principality of Montenegro was elevated to a kingdom and Bar declared a free port. Moreover, since December 1905 King Nikola had introduced in the country a constitution based on the Serbian one from 1869.

Relations between Montenegrins and Serbs, in the years before and during WWI, were controversial.⁵ On the one hand, the Yugoslav idea had gradually unified the two peoples and, after the partition of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, proposals for a political, customs and military union of the two countries were advanced – despite the persistent divergences between the Petrović-Njegoš and Karađorđević dynasties, both eager to make their own kingdoms the central pillar of the Yugoslav unification. On the other hand, the tradition of independence of Montenegro was still strong and solidified by the recent wars, which had contributed to strengthen the brotherhood between the Yugoslav peoples, but had not helped in improving the relations between the governments of Cetinje and Belgrade. In this

lished a common frontier. The Kingdom of Montenegro, inhabited mostly by Orthodox Slavs (and a minor number of Catholics), for the first time included also a large part of a hostile Muslim population largely Albanians, but also mountainous tribes historically linked to Serbia. See Clissold, *Storia della Jugoslavia*, 104; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1984), 275; Sbutega, *Storia del Montenegro*, 296, 337-8.

⁵ Among the publications dedicated to the relations between Montenegro and Serbia in this period see Srdja Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss: The Annexation of Montenegro and the Creation of the Common South Slavic State* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2011). Pavlović gives particular attention to the issue of the Montenegrin identity in relation to the Serbian one and to the unification between Montenegro and Serbia in November 1918. Even if recognizing the existence of a widespread sympathy among the Montenegrin population towards the union with Serbia and the creation of a Yugoslav common state, the author affirms that instead of a unification one should speak about the annexation of Montenegro carried out by Serbia with the approval of the Entente. For another older but essential study from the Socialist period about the argument see Dimitrije Vujović, *Ujedinjenje Crne Gore i Srbije* (Titograd: Istorijski institut narodne republike Crne Gore, 1962).

sense, the Montenegrins continued to reproach the Serbian attitude towards their aspirations over Shkodër: both the Serbian abandonment of the siege during the Balkan Wars and the Serbian attempt during the retreat at the end of 1915 to assume the control of the city even though it had been previously occupied by the Montenegrins.⁶ The Shkodër area was one of the main territorial objectives for the expansion of Montenegro, together with Herzegovina, the south-eastern part of Bosnia, and the Adriatic coast from the spring of the Neretva River to the Bay of Kotor, including Dubrovnik.⁷ In addition to this, during WWI, the Montenegrin Army was subject to the Serbian Army General Staff; for this reason the Montenegrins accused the Serbian officers in command for being responsible for the defeat. In October 1915, indeed, the resistance of the Montenegrin army against the offensive of the Austro-Hungarians was ineffective. As a consequence, in January 1916, the latter had conquered Mount Lovćen and then had invaded the entire country. King Nikola fled to France and Montenegro fell under the Austro-Hungarian domination until the defeat and collapse of the Dual Monarchy.⁸

⁶ See the report about the political and military situation in Montenegro by the Italian Lieutenant Edoardo Lanino, in the Archive of the Historical Office of the Italian Army General Staff (henceforth AUSSME), E-8, Commissioni interalleate di Parigi, b. 88, Montenegro, fasc. 15, Note Montenegrine, Trieste, Pasqua 1919, 5-6. The report is included also in: Andrea Carteny, "Italy, End of the Great War and the Union of Montenegro with Serbia: Details from Italian Documentation," in *Serbian-Italian Relations: History and Modern Times*, ed. Srdja Rudić et al. (Belgrade: The Institute of History), 183-98.

⁷ See Dragoljub R. Živojinović, "King Nikola and the Territorial Expansion of Montenegro, 1914-1920," *Balkanica* XV (2014): 353-68. The well-known Serbian historian particularly focused on the Montenegrin issue during WWI and the Paris Peace Conference: Idem, *Crna Gora u borbi za opstanak: 1914-1922* (Belgrade: Vojna knjiga, 1996); Idem, *Italija i Crna Gora: 1914-1925: studija o izneverenom savezništvu* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 1998); Idem *Kraj Kraljevine Crne Gore: mirovna konferencija i posle 1918-1921* (Belgrade: Službeni list SRJ, 2002).

⁸ On the participation of Montenegro in WWI see Velimir Terzić, *Operacije Crnogorske Vojske u Prvom Svjetskom Ratu* (Belgrade: Vojnoistorijski Institut, 1954); Novica Rakočević, *Crna Gora u prvom svjetskom ratu 1914-1918* (Cetinje: Istorijski Institut u Titogradu, 1969); Francesco Caccamo, *Il Montenegro negli anni della prima guerra mondiale* (Rome: Aracne, 2008).

The Controversial Union with Serbia

Far from becoming an independent state again, Montenegro at the end of the war was occupied by the Serbian troops. With the Corfu Declaration of July 20, 1917, the head of the Serbian government Nikola Pašić and the leader of the Yugoslav Committee Ante Trumbić had already laid the basis of the Yugoslav union. The unification of the South Slavic territories with the Kingdom of Serbia was agreed by Pašić, some members of the *Skupština*, the representatives of the National Council of Zagreb and those of the Yugoslav Committee with the Geneva Convention of November 9, 1918. With the occupation of Montenegro by the Allied troops –French, British, American and Italian⁹– in the autumn of 1918 most of the country went under the control of the Serbian troops of Colonel Dragutin Milutinović, that presented themselves as the redeemers of the “oppressed brothers” and were actively engaged in propagating the union between Montenegro and Serbia. The unification was supported by relevant Montenegrin personalities such as Andrija Radović, head of the government in exile until January 1917. The split between Radović and King Nikola had lasted since August 1916, when the prime minister of Montenegro started supporting the union of Serbia and Montenegro through the unification of the Petrović-Njegoš and Karađorđević dynasties, firstly with the abdication of the former in favor of Alexander of Serbia, and then with a following rotation to the throne between the two families.¹⁰ Since February 1917, Radović was leading the Montenegrin Committee for the National Unification, founded in Geneva and in close contact with the Serbian governmental circles that worked to de-legitimize the sovereignty of King Nikola over Montenegro.

At this point, the Montenegrin sovereign, mainly due to the marriage of his daughter Elena with the King of Italy Vittorio Emanuele

⁹ The Italian troops occupied the regions of Virpazar, Bar, Ulcinj and Kotor. Some patrols reached Podgorica and Cetinje but soon withdraw.

¹⁰ Edward J. Woodhouse and Chase G. Woodhouse, *Italy and the Yugoslavs* (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1920), 98.

III, hoped that the Italian occupation of Kotor and Bar could counterbalance the Serbian one and in some way be useful for the preservation of his dynasty on the throne of Montenegro. The Italian ambitions on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, a mix of political, strategic and economic aspirations, at least were the best guarantee for the maintenance of Montenegrin independence. At a political level, however, the Serbian Prime Minister Pašić worked to legalize the Serbian hegemony over the territory of Montenegro, preventing the return of King Nikola to the country, dissuaded also by the Italian and French governments.¹¹ At the same time, the committee led by Radović began the campaign for the election of the deputies to the Great National Assembly in Podgorica, which would decide on the future status of Montenegro.¹²

On November 19, 1918, the Montenegrin elections held under the military pressure of the Serbian troops were done by acclamation rather than secret vote. Cetinje was the center of political propaganda: here the supporters of the unconditioned union with Serbia presented a list of candidates on a white colored paper, while their opponents, more cautious and with the aim to preserve the political integrity of Montenegro, presented a green colored list. The two colors became the terms used to identify the two factions: the “whites” (*bjelaši*) were favorable to the union with Serbia, and the “greens” (*zelenashi*) were the supporters of independence. If the latter were primarily an expression of the rural society, the former had among their ranks more urban exponents: merchants, artisans, and intellectuals. The military and administrative elite of the country seemed rather present on both sides, with a prevalence among the “greens.”¹³ More

¹¹ *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (henceforth *DDI*), Sesta serie, 1918-1922, vol. I, doc. 129.

¹² Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 148-9.

¹³ Sbutega, *Storia del Montenegro*, 365; Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 163; Banac, *The National Question*, 285. The division between the factions had also regional and tribal connotations that were the first form of identification of the Montenegrin population. The “greens” were in majority in the Old Montenegro, above all in the district of Katuni and in part among the tribes from the mountains (Moračani, Rovčani and Piperi) and from Herzegovina (Nikšići and Rudinjani), while the “whites” primarily came from the tribes of Bjelopavlići and Vasojevići and

generally, the two sides represented the evolution of the two main political factions that had characterized the Montenegrin political society in the early 20th century: the People's Party (*Narodna Stranka*, whose supporters were known as *klubaši*) favorable to the union of Montenegro with Serbia and to the overthrowing of King Nikola, and the Right People's Party (*Prava Narodna Stranka*, whose followers were known as the *pravaši*), who supported the policies of the sovereign and Montenegrin independence.¹⁴ The division between *zelenashi* and *bjelashi*, which reflected the question of Montenegrin ethnic identity and national tradition (*crnogorstvo*) in relation and opposition to the Serbian one (*srpstvo*), would remain a current issue in Montenegrin society until our days.

The elections brought the majority of the “whites” into the Great National Assembly, which reunited in Podgorica in the Italian “Regia Cointeressata dei Tabacchi” on November 26, 1918, and decreed –under the auspices of the Serbian government– the fall of King Nikola and the union of Montenegro with Serbia. Meanwhile, on November 24, the National Council of Zagreb officially proclaimed the unification of the South Slavic territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire with Serbia and Montenegro, offering to Aleksandar Karađorđević the regency of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (*Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, SHS), proclaimed on December 1, 1918. Three days later, the union between Serbia and Montenegro entered into force and Belgrade put an end to the diplomatic function of its *chargé d'affaires* at the Montenegrin government, an action that according Pero Šoć, acting as the Montenegrin foreign minister, fully showed all the cynicism and arbitrariness of the Serbian procedures of annexation.¹⁵

from the tribes of Drobnjaci and Grahovljani. If Cetinje was the heart of Montenegrin identity, in the periphery of the Montenegrin territory the population, based on religious belief, identified mainly with Orthodox Serbs, Albanian Muslims or Catholic Croats.

¹⁴ Banac, *The National Question*, 285; Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 12, 43.

¹⁵ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 2, Note collective envoyée aux Grandes Puissances, Le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères p.i. Ministre de l'Instruction Publique, Pierre Chotch, Neuilly-Sur-Seine, 29 décembre 1918. See also Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States 1919, The Paris Peace Conference (hence-

The Serbian authorities immediately attempted to recruit the Montenegrin population into the army of the new kingdom, in some places gradually extending the recruitment to fifty-eight years of age. Many Montenegrins, however, as well as many Albanians from the area around Ulcinj, deserted the recruitment escaping to the territories under the occupation of the Italian troops.¹⁶ In February, more than two hundred people escaped only from Cetinje, of which forty died before having reached the Italian occupation zone, while the remaining were directed by the Italians towards the Bojana (Shengjin-Šindjon), at the Albanian-Montenegrin border. In the following months, the enlistment by the Serbian authorities in the Montenegrin towns did not end successfully. In March, the Serbian efforts to recruit the population caused protests from the Montenegrins causing casualties in Miratz and Virpazar, while at the end of June riots also took place in Kotor. The creation of the Army of the Kingdom SHS, therefore, in Montenegro was difficult from the very beginning.¹⁷ According to the Italian military authorities in Montene-

forth FRUS-PPC), vol. II (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1942), The Montenegrin Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs (Chotch) to the American Chargé in France (Bliss), Neuilly-Sur-Seine, December 29, 1918, 359-60.

¹⁶ *DDI*, Sesta serie, 1918-1922, vol. II, doc. 211.

¹⁷ Despite of this, the Serbian Army was in any case redefined as a Yugoslav force, also due to the progressive enrollment, which anyway was subject to the Serbian command, of the other South Slav nationalities. For this reason, in the work the term "Serbian-Yugoslav forces" will be used for the troops, while for the commands in Montenegro and the higher authorities the term "Serbian" will remain. The Italian command in Montenegro gave a first detailed description of the new forces of the Kingdom SHS in January 1920, until that moment defined sometimes as Serbian and sometimes as Yugoslav. According to this description, the commanders of divisions and regiments were almost exclusively Serbian officers, while among the officers of lower corps there were also Dalmatians, Croats, Bosnians, Macedonians and Montenegrins. Most of those who enrolled voluntarily were officers of the former Austro-Hungarian Army who joined the Yugoslav Army in order to ensure a livelihood for themselves and their families. Usually, according to the report, most of the enrolled were not willing to serve under the Serbian command and for this reason in order to avoid the risk of disobedience among the soldiers of the other Yugoslav nationalities, the Serbian commanders

gro, the purpose of the recruitment –if they should fight for a Yugoslav kingdom or for a Greater Serbia– was not clear to the Montenegrins, an issue that increased the phenomenon of desertion. The fact that Montenegrin recruits were sent to garrisons that were distant from their native lands shows how the Serbian authorities did not trust them. The enlistments were accompanied by the replacement of the Montenegrin civilian authorities (prefects, mayors, policemen) with persons loyal to the new regime, mostly coming from Serbia.¹⁸

The Inter-Allied Occupation and the Christmas Uprising

According to the Italian military authorities in Montenegro, from the end of December 1918 there were rumors that in order to provide for the shortage of armament the Italian garrisons of Virpazar and Bar could be attacked both by pro-Serbian armed movements and Montenegrin independence supporters. This was the premise of the anti-Serb uprising that began in the surroundings of Cetinje on January 3, 1919. Jovan Simonov Plamenac and the other “green” leaders sent emissaries to the Inter-Allied command of Kotor,¹⁹ led by the French General Venel, to demand the occupation of Cetinje and Montenegro by the Inter-Allied troops with the exclusion of the Serbian-Yugoslav ones. Even in Bar the goal of the insurgents was to throw out the pro-Serbian local authorities. For Venel, however, any kind of Inter-Allied intervention against the Serbian-Yugoslav troops was out of discussion. As in the previous days, the French general in charge did not even consult the commanders of the other Allied contingents. The French seemed deliberately favoring the Serbian

often used pro-Serbian (white) “counter-*komiti*” in the fight against the Montenegrin insurgents. AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 7, Riassunto degli avvenimenti politico-militari in Montenegro e in Albania Dicembre 1919–Antivari-Virpazar, f.to generale Piacentini, Valona 14 gennaio 1920.

¹⁸ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 14, Comando Superiore forze italiane nei Balcani, Informazioni sulla situazione in Montenegro, 17 febbraio 1919; *ibid.*, fasc. 15, Delegazione Italiana per la Pace–Sezione Militare (henceforth DIP-SM), Notizie militari-politiche Montenegro, Gennaio 1920, 8.

¹⁹ The Inter-Allied garrison of Kotor was composed of Italian, French and American troops.

occupation, openly supporting Radović and the “white” faction in the area between Virpazar and Shkodër and facilitating the arrival from Dubrovnik of a pro-Serbian Montenegrin legion trained and supported by the French.²⁰ The Italian military command in Montenegro openly denounced the pro-Serbian attitude of the French, an accusation that was considered reliable also by the American Ambassador in Rome Nelson Page, who on January 9 reported to the Commission to Negotiate Peace the text of a telegram from Kotor which stated:

January 6th. French General is making a French-Serbian penetration into Montenegro admitting no other than Serbian authority. The intervention of his troops has a counterrevolutionary character. There are about 3,000 of which 500 were landed at Ragusa, 400 of the latter having already arrived at Cattaro [*Kotor*] have gone into Montenegro in French uniforms and with Serbo-French officers. Immediate help and energetic diplomatic steps indispensable since the enemy is energetically stirring up sedition.²¹

Even the Montenegrin government in exile condemned how the French authorities facilitated the arrival in Montenegro of the followers of Radović, at the same time hindering the arrival of King Nikola’s supporters to whom had been denied the permission to enter the country with trivial excuses.²² The Italians suspected that even the health precautions taken by the French in Kotor against typhoid

²⁰ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 6, Comando Supremo, telegramma generale Piacentini, 29 dicembre 1918; *ibid.*, Comando Supremo-Ufficio Operazioni, telegramma da Antivari capitano Avarna, 6 gennaio 1919; *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 758.

²¹ It is unclear who was the sender of the telegram that came from an undefined “Ministry Marine” (presumably Montenegrin) to the “Montenegrin Minister here” (probably the Montenegrin representative in Rome). *FRUS-PPC*, vol. II, The Ambassador in Italy (Page) to the Commission to Negotiate Peace, Rome, January 8, 1919, 366-7. The entire pro-Serbian Montenegrin legion organized by Radović arrived in Montenegro at the end of January from Tolone with the French navy. *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. II, doc. 87.

²² *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 514.

cases in late December –communication between the city and the rest of Montenegro was limited with a release of a safe-conduct for leaving the country– were a pretext in order to allow to the Serbian commands to isolate the Montenegrin population.²³ Pero Šoć denounced this attempt by the Serbian authorities to the American *chargè d'affaires* in France Bliss. According to Šoć only Serbian conspirators and agents had open access to Montenegro, while Montenegrin statesmen and politicians had to appeal to the Allies in order to have the permission to leave the country and reach Rome or Paris.²⁴

²³ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15, Ufficio Capo Stato Maggiore Marina, bolentino speciale no. 70, Roma 26 gennaio 1919, copia rapporto comando in capo armata basso Adriatico 11 gennaio 1919 no. 515 circa R. esploratore “Aquila,” a comando R. esploratore “Nibbio,” oggetto: Informazioni, f.to comandante Bernotti, Cattaro 31 dicembre 1918. See also *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 760. In 1928, Savić Marković Štedimlija, in *Gorštačka Krv, Crna Gora 1918-1928*, was one of the first to highlight the international support received by Serbia during the Inter-Allied occupation of Montenegro. According to Štedimlija, in this way, the promises of the Allies to King Nikola for the restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro were “betrayed.” Štedimlija sustained that the original mandate of the Inter-Allied troops in Montenegro was to preserve the power of the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty, as it was confirmed in the communication of the French government from October 22, 1918. This aim was abandoned leaving to the Serbs the military control over the entire Montenegrin territory. Štedimlija openly affirms that the Allied commands in Montenegro acted exclusively in support of the Serbian interests and of the unification, as in the case of the support received by the unionists from the French General Venel. Due to his openly pro-Serbian interventions in February 1919 the French general would lose the command of the Allied forces in Montenegro after the protests of the Montenegrin government in exile. Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 16-7, 104. An earlier work that although less openly and without direct references to the role of the Inter-Allied forces of occupation had highlighted the support of the Allies to Serbia in the process of unification with Montenegro was that by the American and pro-Italian publicist Withney Warren, *Montenegro. The Crime of the Peace Conference* (New York: Brentano’s, 1922). More recently, the same is sustained by Morrison, *Montenegro*, 43.

²⁴ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 2, Note collective envoyée aux Grandes Puissances, Pierre Chotch, Neuilly-Sur-Seine le 28 décembre 1918. See also FRUS-PPC, The Montenegrin Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs (Chotch) to the American Chargè in France (Bliss), Nelly-Sur-Seine, December 28, 1918, 358-59.

The only measure taken by the French General Venel, on January 5, was to send towards Cetinje French, Serbian and American troops, and to move an Italian company from Kotor to Krstac with the task to protect the communication between the French and Serbian-Yugoslav troops of Cetinje.²⁵ When General Carbone, commander of the Italian troops in Kotor, on his own initiative, joined a group of Italian soldiers to the American company designated to regain the control of Njeguši that was occupied by the insurgents, Venel, following the commands of Franchet d'Espèrey, at the head of the *Armée d'Orient*, ordered the commander of the American company to enter Njeguši only with his men, leaving in Krstac the Italians, who were categorically excluded from entering Cetinje. General Carbone could only follow the instructions, although he was firmly convinced that any repressive actions against the insurgents should not be entrusted solely to the Serbian-Yugoslav troops but should have to be agreed upon and carried out together by the Allies. For this reason, the Italian general accused the French command of complicity in the subjugation of the Montenegrin population perpetrated by the Serbian authorities.²⁶

Even without the support of the Inter-Allied authorities, Montenegrin insurgents (around 15,000-20,000 persons in the whole country) marched on Cetinje and other cities (Nikšić, Virpazar, Podgorica) facing Serbian-Yugoslav troops (January 6), which had a smaller number of men but were better equipped. Lacking food and ammunition, military preparation, skills and resolute leaders, around 3,500 "greens," of which only a third were armed, were soon forced to desist from taking Cetinje, the only city where for a few days the

²⁵ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15, Commandement des Troupes Alliées du Monténégro e de Cattaro, Etat Major, 3^e Bureau, no. 107, Ordre préparatoire, Venel, Cattaro 5 janvier 1919.

²⁶ It has to be mentioned in particular the meeting between Carbone and Venel on December 31, 1918, a visit of courtesy for the end of the year. Carbone blamed the behavior of the Serbs in Kotor and more generally in Montenegro, but the French general answered that he did not see anything negative in the Serbian attitude. Venel added that he did not understand why the Italians were so interested in "those few stones of Montenegro, whose inhabitants were less than half of those of Naples." Ibid., R. Esploratore "Aquila," Informazioni, Cattaro 2 gennaio 1919.

insurgents could engage into a real battle against the Serbian-Yugoslav soldiers (400 men) and the “white” militias (300 men) under the command of the Serbian general Martinović. On January 7, General Venel went to Cetinje to listen to the demands of the insurgents, which were the following: 1) liberation of the prisoners who were taken by the Serbs; 2) guarantees of no reprisals against those who took part in the revolt; 3) assurances for a repetition of the Great National Assembly elections under the control of the Allied troops. Thereby the French general had the opportunity to ascertain that in principle the Montenegrin insurgents were not against the Yugoslav unification, but that they fundamentally opposed the method used by the Serbs to subjugate Montenegro to the Serbian regime. They claimed that the elections for the National Assembly and the proclamation of the union with Serbia on November 26, 1918, were carried out under the Serbian military pressure and therefore did not represent the true Montenegrin national will. The insurgents complained about the widespread hunger in the country and demanded a reconsideration of the Allied occupation of Montenegro preferring only the presence of American, British and French troops. General Venel promised a redefinition of the Montenegrin occupation by Franco-American troops but also gave to the insurgents a forty-eight hours ultimatum: they had to free the road from Cetinje to Kotor, to reactivate the telephone and telegraph communication lines and to go back to their homes where they would not be persecuted.²⁷ At that moment, the insurgents accepted the conditions of the French general.²⁸

After the surrender, a part of the “greens” emigrated, the other took refuge in the mountains or towards the coast: Plamenac reached Shengjin in the Italian occupation zone, then moved to France across

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Commandement des Troupes Alliées du Monténégro e de Cattaro, no. 122, Conditions, Venel, Cattaro 7 janvier 1919; *ibid.*, Promemoria per il generale Carbone, f.to tenente Marcolini, Cattaro 8 gennaio 1919.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, fasc. 14, Comandante Truppe Alleate Cattaro generale Venel a Comandante Capo Armate Alleate d’Oriente, Cattaro 12 gennaio 1919. On January 8, General Carbone tried the last attempt inviting the American commander to accompany him to Cetinje to verify the situation in the city. The American officer declined the invitation with a series of excuses and Carbone renounced his aim.

Italy. Although they had the support of the population who were opposed to the violence of the “whites” and to the unconditional union of Montenegro with Serbia carried out in terms of a simple annexation, the “greens” did not prove to be as organized and cohesive as their opponents and the Serbian-Yugoslav soldiers were. The goal of the “green” armed insurrection was mainly to provoke an Allied intervention, and in particular an Italian one also if they had never explicitly affirmed it; it was not a real movement of resistance. The neutral position of the Italian troops, from which the insurgents expected a more or less direct support, diminished the hope of the “greens” for a success. The attitude of the Italians in this situation was ambiguous. On the one side, also considering the initial favorable opinion of General Pietro Badoglio, vice-chief of the Italian Army General Staff, towards an Inter-Allied intervention in Cetinje and Podgorica, the Italians let the Montenegrins believe that they would support an armed insurrection, but de facto the explicit orders of General Piacentini, commander of the Italian forces in the Balkans, to ignore the political issues in Montenegro, discouraged the “greens” in their attempt at insurrection.²⁹

After the failed rebellion, despite the assurances given by Venel, the Serbs launched retaliation. Only in Podgorica they arrested 164 persons, including three cousins of King Nikola, eighty officers and numerous dignitaries of the court, confiscating properties and eliminating the relatives of those who did not declare to be on Karađorđević’s side. One more time, the “whites” stated that the elections had been regular and claimed that the decisions of the Podgorica Assembly, led by the pro-Serbian leadership, were an expression of the true will of the country. They complained about the attitude of

²⁹ Ibid., fasc. 15, DIP-SM, Notizie militari-politiche Montenegro, Gennaio 1920, 8; *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 817. See also Banac, *The National Question*, 286. During the Montenegrin revolt the orders of Piacentini were coherent with the indications received from Rome. In a telegram from January 20, 1919, Sonnino communicated to the commander of the Italian forces in the Balkans: “It is necessary that our commands abstain from any kind of action that could implicate our responsibility for the Montenegrin movement. This does not exclude that Montenegrins who take refuge inside our lines although they should be disarmed, should be treated with consideration.” *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. II, doc. 25.

the Allies, who according to them hesitated to recognize the Kingdom SHS, and did not send food supplies despite the fact that they had already been warned about the critical situation in Montenegro.³⁰ Even during reprisals, the positions of the Allied military authorities in the country were not unanimous: the British were indifferent, while the French tolerated Serbian actions (Americans had already withdrawn their troops from Montenegro). In late January, General Franchet d'Espèrey –together with the English General Bridges, the American Lieutenant Gray, the Italian Lieutenant Colonel Vitelli (liaison officer in Thessaloniki), and Radović– travelled across Montenegro (Kotor, Cetinje and Podgorica) to carry out an investigation commissioned by the Entente governments with the aim to know the real will of the Montenegrin population. On January 27 and 28, the group led by D'Espèrey consulted about seventy persons belonging to an educated minority in the country, who studied in Serbia and were pro-Serbian; they asserted the legitimacy of the elections for the National Assembly and the desire of Montenegro to be part of the Kingdom SHS.³¹ The investigation of Franchet d'Espèrey concluded that: 1) in Montenegro Yugoslav troops rather than exclusively Serbian were present and their number did not exceed the total of five hundred men; 2) these troops did not have any influence on the elections or on the political situation in the country; 3) the elections for the National Assembly were free – five hundred Yugoslav soldiers could never impose their will on 50,000 Montenegrins in arms; 4) the elections had been much more free than those conducted under the regime of King Nikola. Finally, the investigation team, after listening to the prisoners from the Christmas Uprising, confirmed the suspicion that the revolt had been caused by the agents of King Nikola supported by unidentified Italian emissaries.³²

³⁰ About the Serbian and Montenegrin pressures towards the Allies for food supplies see the American documents: FRUS-PPC, vol. II, The Secretary of State (Lansing) to the Ambassador in France (Sharp), 636.

³¹ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15, Ufficiale di collegamento italiano a Salonico a Comando Supremo-Ufficio Operazioni, a Comando Superiore truppe italiane Balcani Valona, no. 431, f.to tenente colonnello Vitelli, Salonico 4 febbraio 1919.

³² Woodhouse and Woodhouse, *Italy and the Jugoslavs*, 111.

The conflict between the “greens” and “whites,” however, did not end with the uprising of January 1919 and continued in the following years. The Italian military authorities, in the areas under their occupation, recorded incidents and violence between the “whites” and the Serbian-Yugoslav troops on the one side and Montenegrin nationalist gangs on the other. In early June, for example, the Italian High Command and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received reports about clashes in the mountainous region of the Shkodër frontier (*Skadarska Krajina*, *Krajë* for the Albanians) between the Serbian-Yugoslav troops and the Montenegrin *komiti* headed by the well-known Savo Raspopović, on whose head the Serbian authorities placed a bounty of 20,000 dinars. Only in the evening of May 27, the assault of the bands of Raspopović caused to the Serbian-Yugoslavs several casualties. During the month, Raspopović continued his attacks in the area around Bar, a fact that brought the Serbian-Yugoslav troops to accuse the Italians of having reached an agreement with the Montenegrin leader. In fact, at the end of March, Raspopović had contacted and visited the Italian garrison of Bar asking for the Italian support to the Montenegrin national struggle – in other words asking for weapons, ammunition and money. It is not clear what was the result of the meeting between Raspopović and the Italians, but the fact that the Serbian-Yugoslav soldiers found cartridges of Italian equipment in the places frequented by the Montenegrin leader, could lead to a conclusion that at least on that occasion some kind of Italian support to his *komiti* was granted. Furthermore, the Serbian suspicion that the Montenegrin *komiti* acted in connivance with the Italians was not erased after armed men with Italian uniforms were seen around Cetinje, probably Montenegrin legionaries who came to the country from Italy.³³

The main task of the Italian troops in Montenegro was to protect the national economic interests related to the control of the port and the railway of Bar and oppose the French and Serbian interests. The

³³ See the telegrams sent by General Piacentini, head of the Italian troops in the Balkans, from Vlorë to the Italian High Command, between May and July 1919, in AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 7. On June 20, a first victory of the Serbian-Yugoslav authorities over Raspopović was made with the capture of his family.

Italian “Compagnia di Antivari,” which had the rights on the port and the Bar-Virpazar-Shkodër Railway, complained that the French had meddled in the Italian economic matters in the area.³⁴ French and Serbian authorities had seized the ships of the Italian company, which had been unable, despite numerous complaints, to recover them and reactivate the service of navigation on Lake Shkodër. The “Compagnia di Antivari” had gained this concession from the Montenegrin government in 1906, but after the war and the Inter-Allied occupation, it had to face the competition of the French services along the Bojana River. In addition to the seizure of the ships and the competition for the service of navigation, the French also interfered in the management of the Italian properties and in the Italian monopoly on the production of tobacco.³⁵

At the same time, Italian soldiers had to face frequent clashes with the Serbian-Yugoslav units and militias, which often ended in gunfight for not entirely clear reasons. The main theater was once again Bar, where on the night of February 4, for example, the attempt of a Serbian-Yugoslav patrol together with the local gendarmerie to reach the port during a sweep aimed at avoiding the landing of Montenegrin insurgents ended with a shooting of Italian soldiers who

³⁴ The interest of Italian capitalists towards Montenegro began at the end of the 19th century. In 1903, in Venice, Giuseppe Volpi established the “Sindacato italo-montenegrino,” ensuring to the “Regia Cointeressata dei Tabacchi” the monopoly over Montenegrin tobacco. The aim of Volpi was to make out of Montenegro the bridge for the Italian economic and commercial penetration into the Balkans. The “Compagnia di Antivari,” founded with Italian capital in December 1905, built the free port and the industrial zone in Bar, the railway Bar-Virpazar-Shkodër, and managed the navigation service on Lake Shkodër. What followed was the establishment of the “Società Commerciale d’Oriente,” that tried to take away from the Austrian-Hungarian control the economic monopoly obtained in Montenegro and the constitution of the “Società per le Bonifiche di Dulcigno.” See Angelo Tamborra, “The Rise of Italian Industry and the Balkans (1900-1914),” *The Journal of European Economic History* III-I (1974): 87-120; Antonello Biagini, “I rapporti tra l’Italia e il Montenegro durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale, 1914-1918,” *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* 68, 4 (1981): 443-58.

³⁵ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 5, DIP-SM, Le occupazioni interalleate in Montenegro, Questioni di Scutari e di Antivari, Parigi 29 giugno 1919.

were guarding the dock. Clashes between Italian and Yugoslav gendarmes also occurred on the high grounds around the city in late July, while in Sutorman, on June 29, another clash (this time Italian soldiers were together with a French one) ended with the death of a Yugoslav gendarme. However, the episode that the Italians consider more serious was the one that happened in the area between Bar and Virpazar in August, when Italian garrisons were surrounded by the local population who were incited by a pro-Yugoslav (“white”) “counter-*komiti*.” The crowd claimed the liberation of some “counter-*komiti*” persons of Limljani who had been arrested by the Italian command in Bar that suspected that they had been involved in the injuring of an Italian soldier around Virpazar on August 19. On that occasion, Italians asked for the cooperation of Serbian-Yugoslav soldiers to restore public order, but they did not collaborate responding that they had no authority over the pro-Serbian gangs. At this point, the Italian command warned the Serbian-Yugoslav soldiers that if they did not show decisiveness in the removing of the paramilitaries they would consider them responsible for any kind of a serious event that would happen. The situation was resolved a few days later, when on their own will, the pro-Serbian “counter-*komiti*” decided to retreat.³⁶

Finally, there were also clashes between Italian soldiers and the Montenegrin *komiti*, as it happened in early July, when a car coming from Bar with food supplies for the Italian army was attacked by a group of armed men who killed two Italian soldiers and wounded three others.³⁷ On 20 of the same month another incident occurred near Kotor (Dobrota), where Lieutenant Rubbi died during a shooting between the Serbian-Yugoslav patrols and Montenegrin *komiti*, apparently by the hands of the latter.³⁸ In August General Armando

³⁶ See the telegrams sent by General Piacentini, from Vlorë to the Italian High Command, between February and August 1919. *Ibid.*, fasc. 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, R. Esercito Italiano, Comando Supremo-Ufficio Operazioni, a DIP-SM, 9 luglio 1919, telegramma generale Piacentini, Valona 8 luglio 1919.

³⁸ The Italian authorities, in fact, sustained that Rubbi was shot to death by the “friendly fire” of the Serbian-Yugoslavs during their patrol of the area ordered by the French command against the Montenegrin rebels. The Italian version of the event did not correspond to the French one, according to which initially the Mon-

Diaz complained that the situation for the Italian troops in Montenegro “is so much intolerable that if the Paris Peace Conference will not intervene as soon as possible to contain the Serbian-Yugoslav arrogance deplorable consequences could happen.”³⁹ The head of the Italian Army General Staff also insinuated that the French command in Albania and Montenegro could be responsible for the increasingly frequent anti-Italian demonstrations in the country. The Italian Foreign Minister Tommaso Tittoni promised to bring to the attention of the Allied governments the attitude of the Serbian-Yugoslavs, who claimed at all costs that Italian troops should abandon Montenegro.⁴⁰ Above all, General Piacentini from the other side of the Adriatic asked for the end of “the comedy of the Serbs and the Yugoslav *comitagi* [sic], who say they have no relations with each other, while they are the same thing.”⁴¹

The Inter-Allied Occupation and the Montenegrin Issue at the Paris Peace Conference

The Montenegrin issue at the Paris Peace Conference was a political and territorial question not only related to the international recognition of the Kingdom SHS, but also to the Italian government’s policy, which defended the independence of Montenegro as its anti-Yugoslav policy.⁴² France and Great Britain were instead favorable to the creation of a unitary South Slavic state that could potentially overcome the fragmentation and the regional tensions of the Balkan

tenegrins were responsible for the death of the Italian officer. Finally, also an investigation conducted by the French confirmed that the Serbian-Yugoslavs were accidentally responsible for the incident, which happened when the Montenegrins took refuge within the Italian command, a fact that once again attests to the connivance between the Italian military and some Montenegrin rebel bands. *Ibid.*, fasc. 4, Cattaro e le relazioni con la Jugoslavia, 1919.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, fasc. 7, telegramma a DIP-SM, f.to generale A. Diaz, 21 giugno 1919; *ibid.*, fonogramma a DIP-SM, f.to generale Diaz, 22 agosto 1919.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, DIP-SM, telegramma in partenza f.to Tittoni, 23 agosto 1919.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Segretariato italiano della Conferenza, telegrammi generale Piacentini, Roma-Parigi 22 Agosto 1919.

⁴² I. Lederer, *La Jugoslavia dalla Conferenza della Pace al Trattato di Rapallo, 1919-1920* (Milan: Sansoni, 1966), 129.

populations as a guarantee for a European stability and at the same time halting the Italian aspirations for influence over the Adriatic and its Balkan hinterland. Consequently, France and Great Britain supported the claims of Serbia and its aspiration to incorporate Montenegro into the Yugoslav state, accepting the romantic vision of a South Slavic union under the Serbian leadership as a result of a centuries-old struggle. Thus, when during the week preceding the opening of the Peace Conference, the Supreme Council of the Allies had to decide about the request for the admission of a Montenegrin delegation at the conference (January 13, 1919), it responded ambiguously: "Montenegro will be represented by one delegate designated when the country's political situation will be clarified."⁴³

The Montenegrin government in exile protested without success stating that its delegates should be two as those of the other states that during the war fought on the side of the Entente, and not only one as granted by the Allies to those states that during the conflict just interrupted their diplomatic relations with the Central Powers. However, even the designation of only one Montenegrin delegate never took place. The position of the Montenegrin representative at the Paris Peace Conference remained unclear, which did not dissolve the doubt on the effective role recognized by the Allies to the Montenegrin government in exile in Paris. It should be also noted that even when the Kingdom SHS was recognized as a legitimate state by most of the countries represented at the conference, King Nikola was still recognized by those same countries as the sovereign of Montenegro. Italy, France and Great Britain kept their diplomatic

⁴³ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 2, Note circulaire envoyée aux Grandes Puissances, le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères p.i. Ministre de l'Instruction Publique Pierre Chotch, Neuilly-Sur-Seine le 16 Janvier 1919. See also "La question de la représentation du Monténégro a la Conférence de la Paix 1919 (Décision prise par le Conseil Suprême en date du 13 janvier 1919)," in *Le rôle de la France dans l'annexion forcée du Monténégro (Documents officiels publiés par le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Monténégro)* (Rome: Imprimerie A. Manuce, 1921), 55-7.

representatives at the Montenegrin government in Paris and Montenegro kept its diplomats and consular representatives in several capital cities.⁴⁴

In February 1919, Montenegrin representatives in Neuilly sur Seine—the new Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Plamenac (who after the Christmas Uprising had a greater authority and consideration in Montenegro), the Minister of Justice Pero Šoć, and General Anto Gvozdenović, plenipotentiary minister in Washington—tried to assert their claims appealing to Wilson's principles of national self-determination and to the guarantees for the restoration of Montenegrin independence received between 1917 and 1918 from the American president, Clemenceau and other representatives of the Entente.⁴⁵ According to the Montenegrin representatives, in his message from January 10, 1917, to the Allied governments and the Central Powers, President Wilson among other conditions for peace had precisely mentioned the restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro on the same basis as that of Belgium and Serbia. This condition later had been confirmed by the US president to King Nikola in response to a communication from the Montenegrin sovereign from July 4, 1918, and endorsed by similar statements of the governments of the other Allied Powers before the armistice.⁴⁶ After all, the guarantee of the Entente was the only chance for King Nikola to have back his kingdom. In an official communication to the Montenegrin government in exile on October 22, 1918, also the French government had assured that the military administration of the French troops in Montenegro would guarantee and protect the legitimate sovereignty

⁴⁴ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15, DIP-SM, Notizie militari-politiche Montenegro, Gennaio 1920, 9.

⁴⁵ Lederer, *La Jugoslavia*, 131.

⁴⁶ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15, DIP-SM, Restaurazione integrale del Montenegro, 1 Novembre 1919, 5. In response to the message of King Nikola from July 4, 1918, Wilson wrote: "I trust that Your Majesty and the noble and heroic people of Montenegro will not be cast down, but will have confidence in the determination of the United States to see that in the final victory that will come, the integrity and rights of Montenegro shall be secured and recognized." Citation in John D. Treadway, "Anglo-American Diplomacy and the Montenegrin Question, 1914-1924," *Occasional Papers* 26 (1991): 4-5.

of the Montenegrin king, the only recognized power in the country.⁴⁷ Still in the letter of November 4, 1918, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Stéphen Jean Marie Pichon, in addition to discouraging the Montenegrin sovereign from returning to the country, had reassured King Nikola that the troops of General Franchet d'Espèrey would safeguard in every way “the respect for the constitutional authority and the liberties of the people of Montenegro.”⁴⁸ According to the Montenegrin government in exile, finally, also the letter from Raymond Poincaré to the sovereign of Montenegro on November 24, 1918, was the best proof of the intention of the French government “not thwart the Montenegrin will and legitimate aspirations.”⁴⁹

From February 1919, Plamenac sent a series of notes to the Allies defending the historical rights of Montenegro, focusing on the “injustices,” the “violence,” the “intrigues,” and the “slander” perpetrated by Serbia –and the “Serbian delegation” in Paris– against the Montenegrin sovereignty, and remembering the “sacrifice” of the Montenegrin people during the war. The head of the Montenegrin government in exile claimed: 1) the accreditation of two Montenegrin delegates instead of one at the Peace Conference; 2) the complete evacuation from the Montenegrin territory of the Serbian civil

⁴⁷ Communication du Gouvernement de la République Française au Gouvernement du Monténégro, 22 Octobre 1918, in *Le rôle de la France*, 39.

⁴⁸ Correspondance échangée entre sa Majesté le Roi de Monténégro et S. Exc. M. Poincaré, Président de la République et le Gouvernement français, 1) Lettre de S. Exc. M. Pichon, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères de la République Française, adressée à SM le Roi de Monténégro, le 4 Novembre 1918, *ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ 2) Lettre de S. Exc. M. Poincaré, Président de la République Française, adressée à SM le Roi de Monténégro, le 24 novembre 1918, *ibid.*, 41. See also Treadway, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, 6. The letter of Pichon was a response to the new request of King Nikola to the French government to have the permission to leave for Montenegro. The Montenegrin sovereign wanted with his presence to halt the propaganda against his dynasty carried out in the country by the pro-Serbs. The French government, however, was contrary to his return to Montenegro, to the point of threatening to interrupt the diplomatic relations with him and the Montenegrin government in exile if he would leave the French territory without the permission from Paris. Italy with the intention of keeping good relations with France, averted King Nikola that if with his actions he would compromise his relations with France, he would lose also Italian support. *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 256, 400.

and military authorities as well as the administrative, judicial, and financial Serbian or the “so-called Yugoslav” organizations; 3) the restoration of public order ensured by British and American troops after the Serbian-Yugoslav evacuation; 4) the arrival in Montenegro of the Montenegrin government and establishment abroad; 5) political elections with universal suffrage in order to permit to the Montenegrin population the appointment of a parliament and a true representation of the country according to constitutional provisions; 6) the appointment of a committee of British and American representatives that could guarantee the smooth running of the elections and report to the Great Powers about the social and political situation in Montenegro.⁵⁰ On March 5, the Montenegrin representative was received by the Supreme Council of the Allies and besides requesting the full restoration of the Kingdom of Montenegro claimed the Bay of Kotor and –with little knowledge about the real situation that Montenegro was going through, or perhaps in denial of it– the annexation of Herzegovina and Shkodër with the surrounding region. The Montenegrins presented to the Supreme Council a comprehensive report signed by Plamenac, *The Monténégro devant la Conférence de la Paix*.⁵¹

France in particular, for the so-called “question of Shkodër,” intended to oppose the Italian aspirations. Since the Inter-Allied occupation from 1918 the French proposed an internationalization of the city and the surrounding area to diminish the Italian influence.⁵² The French reminded on what had been established for the occupation of Shkodër in 1913 (international administration) and on the talks from November 20, 1918, held by Orlando and Sonnino with the French Ambassador Barrère, during which the Italians agreed with the international occupation of Shkodër by Italian, English and French

⁵⁰ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 2, Note collective envoyée aux Grandes Puissances, Neuilly sur Seine, Plamenatz, le 22 février 1919; *ibid.*, Note envoyée aux premiers délégués de la Conférence de la Paix, Neuilly sur Seine, Plamenatz, le 12 mai 1919.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, *Le Monténégro devant la Conférence de la Paix*. Yovan S. Plamenatz, Paris 5 Mars 1919.

⁵² *Ibid.*, fasc. 15, DIP-SM, Questione di Scutari, Parigi 26 marzo 1919; *ibid.*, *Notizie militari-politiche Montenegro*, gennaio 1920, 18-9.

troops under the command of General d'Espèrey.⁵³ Having the mind the necessity for a compromise with the French, the solution of an international occupation for the Italians was the best guarantee against the Serbian ambitions in northern Albania. According to the Italians, the aim of the French government was to use the pretext of an international regime on the model of that of 1914 in order to ensure their command over Shkodër. The will to extend that “regime” for ten kilometers around the city was a clear demonstration how the French wanted to seize the territory to include in the French sector localities under the control of the Italian garrisons. Italy, on the other hand, even if willing to accept the Inter-Allied occupation, intended to oppose the French control over Shkodër, supporting the Albanian claims over the region. At the beginning of 1919, Shkodër came under the joint occupation of Italian troops under Major Molinero, French troops under the command of General Fortou and the British headed by General Philips.⁵⁴

At the same time, important changes with fundamental implications for the fate of the Montenegrin territories characterized the Inter-Allied military presence in Montenegro. In February 1919, at the

⁵³ *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 250.

⁵⁴ The military section of the Italian delegation denounced how the French General De Fourtou (already ready to give to the Yugoslavs the ships of the “Compagnia di Antivari”), abusing his most ranked position, had tried from the beginning to exercise government functions and to expand as much as possible his rule, trying to occupy in this way Italian garrisons at the spring of the River Bojana and stretching, without any authorization from the Italian government, until Oboti, with the excuse of setting a garrison for the protection of the French supplies that came by the river. According to the Italians, it seems that in this program of expansion, De Fortou was supported by Franchet d'Espèrey, who, referring to the regime from 1913, wanted to keep the occupation of Oboti and extend the one of Shkodër in the way to include the surrounding localities already occupied by the Italian troops, that in a new division of the zone would belong to the French. The French actions that were hostile to Italy—or more specifically those of the military section—took place also in the region of Prekalli, where the captain of the French police Billes was carrying out an anti-Italian propaganda provoking a harsh protest from General Piacentini to General Franchet d'Espèrey. *AUSSME*, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 5, *DIP-SM*, *Le occupazioni interalleanze in Montenegro*, *Questioni di Scutari e Antivari*, f.to generale Cavallero, 30 giugno 1919, 2-3.

Peace Conference, Wilson proposed the evacuation of the Inter-Allied troops from the territory of Montenegro, in order to leave the population free to decide about the future status of the country. The proposal only partially found the support of the Italian government that believed that for the guarantee of this freedom of self-determination it was necessary firstly the withdrawal of the Serbian-Yugoslav troops from the territory of Montenegro, so that no obstacle could be imposed for the eventual return of King Nikola. The government in Paris seemed not to have objections that the Serbian-Yugoslav troops should first withdraw from the territory of Montenegro, while the government in London believed that the evacuation of the Allied troops from Montenegro would amount to leaving a free hand to the intrigues of the Serbs and Montenegrins.

The British Foreign Offices, in fact, gave increasingly more importance to the news coming from Montenegro related to the “excesses” of the Serbian authorities, about which, moreover, they were aware as early as of January.⁵⁵ The British government, therefore,

⁵⁵ See, for example, the report of Captain Brodie, member of the British Mission in Montenegro, sent to Lansing, American secretary of state, by Nelson Page, American ambassador in Rome. The report, from the first days of January 1919 (Brodie left Montenegro on January 9), illustrates well the grave conditions to which the country had been heading. Page reported: “[...] The Serbians feeling themselves backed by French authorities there have occupied militarily Montenegro, dispersing Montenegrin revolutionists who rose in revolution about the 3rd and 4th demanding the withdrawal of Serbian troops from Montenegro and demanding occupation of Montenegro by Inter-Allied troops who would guarantee free expression of Montenegro’s will in an untrammelled elective or referendum. Radovich the representative of so-called Montenegrin administration is declared to be in Serbian pay and is working for the complete annihilation of Montenegrin independence. The French General Venel who is apparently supporting this side strongly stopped the American and the Italian troops who had been ordered by the Italian commander to Cetinje in response to appeal of the Montenegrin insurgent party declaring that none but Serbian and French troops should occupy Montenegro. The Montenegrin insurgent forces appear to have been dispersed after a collision in which several hundred men one side or the other are reported to have been killed, some returning to their homes, others seeking refuge in Albania or in places under the Italian flag, but all are armed with rifles and are reported as declaring that Montenegrin independence will be preserved if it takes 500 years. Captain Brodie informs me that although previous to these collisions with the Serbians

proposed that the American contingent should remain in the country to ensure full freedom in the territory, but the proposal was rejected by the US War Office. Both the French and English, however, once again were opposed to the return of the sovereign: the opposition to King Nikola that was consolidated in 1915 continued as a result of the objections raised over the doubts about the demeanor of the king on the occasion of the defense of Lovćen.⁵⁶

The governments in London and Washington agreed to establish an Anglo-American commission that would verify the real conditions in Montenegro, the rumors on the massacres made by the Serbs on the civilian population –also on the Albanians in the region (the British mission in Shkodër sustained that among the latter there were around 18,000 and 25,000 victims)– and the real wishes of the Montenegrin population. The British mission was led by Count John de Salis, the former British minister at Cetinje, the American by Lieutenant Colonel Sherman Miles. In May, Miles presented his own results on the political conditions in Montenegro. The American official reported that although the results of the elections for the Assembly in Podgorica of November 1918 probably were influenced by the Allied military presence, the Serbian regime represented an irrevocable fact. In the impossibility to know the real political aims of the Montenegrin population, Miles proposed that the Montenegrin question should be resolved through the recognition by the Great Powers of a local autonomy of Montenegro within the Yugoslav state. His considerations, however, were largely ignored. Although Miles also sustained in his reports that to abandon Montenegro to the Serbian control would represent a “political crime,” in the end, the Allied troops and not the Serbian ones would be evacuated. In London and Washington, also based on the reports of De Salis within the Anglo-

there was little sympathy with the idea of restoring the Montenegrin dynasty, since the fighting, certain change is discernible in their attitude.” FRUS-PPC, Vol. II, The Ambassador in Italy (Page) to the Acting Secretary of State, Rome, January 14, 1919, 371-2.

⁵⁶ *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. II, doc. 203, 210, 289, 320. The Count John de Salis, the last British minister in Montenegro, defined the defense of Montenegro “a farce” in the belief that King Nikola had negotiated with the Austrians to save himself and his dynasty. Treadway, *Anglo-American Diplomacy*, 2 and 8.

American Commission, all suggestions pointed at the necessity to renounce taking part in the Serbian-Montenegrin controversy.⁵⁷ The control of the larger part of the Montenegrin territory would remain in that way under the control of the Serbian General Mihailović, at the command of the Zeta division in Cetinje. Mihailović controlled all the Serb-Yugoslav troops present in Montenegro. The Serbian military authorities tightened the control over the Montenegrin gendarmerie and sent to Montenegro arms and munitions for the equipment of the battalions that had been recruited in the area. Although giving national pretexts to the various organs of the Montenegrin state, the Serbian authorities intended to retain their strong command over the territory, while the main Montenegrin generals, with the promise of a passage to the Yugoslav army, were called to Belgrade.⁵⁸

Following the orders of Franchet d'Espèrey, the garrisons in the country, including the Italian detachments, were abandoned by the Allied troops at the end of April 1919.⁵⁹ The Allied occupation was reduced to the coastal area (Bar, Kotor, Ulcinj and Virpazar) with the aim of securing the supplies for Shkodër, while the inner part of the country was garrisoned exclusively by the Serbian-Yugoslav troops. The English also left Virpazar and Bar between April 27 and 30.⁶⁰ The Italians remained in Bar (at the railways and the port), Kotor and Virpazar and were categorically ordered not to meddle in the clashes between Serbian and Montenegrin "dissident" bands.⁶¹

From the information obtained confidentially in Paris, it seemed that following the proposal of Wilson, the Council of Four had finally decided on the withdrawal of all Allied troops from Montenegro and consequently Clemenceau had ordered the evacuation of the French contingent. However, to the news that the Italian troops would

⁵⁷ Treadway, *ibid.*, 9-12.

⁵⁸ Previously the Serbian Army prohibited the return to the country to those Montenegrin officers that before the elections for the Great Assembly could have conducted among the population a propaganda campaign for King Nikola. Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 153.

⁵⁹ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 3, Sgombero truppe alleate del Montenegro, 1919.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, fasc. 1, Comando Supremo-Ufficio Operazioni, f.to generale Piacentini, Valona 30 aprile 1919.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fasc. 15, DIP-SM, *Notizie militari-politiche Montenegro*, gennaio 1920, 8.

not be evacuated from Montenegro until the Serbian-Yugoslav ones did not leave –which according to the order of evacuation were supposed to leave the last– Clemenceau answered that also the French contingent would remain.⁶² The last French troops would abandon Montenegro (Bar and Virpazar) in February-March 1920, while the Italian military would remain until summer 1920. In Kotor, before the withdrawal of the French troops (August 1, 1919), an Allied garrison under the command of French General Tahon (who replaced Venel in February) consisting of an Italian brigade, a French and three Serb-Yugoslav battalions, was present. Following the departure of the French battalion, Italians and Serbian-Yugoslavs remained, the latter in the majority. The situation although calm was delicate because of the presence of large Austro-Hungarian ships, arsenal and munitions that Italians did not want to leave in the Serbian-Yugoslav hands, at least until the Peace Conference had properly established the destinies of the Adriatic eastern shore.⁶³

Since Italy did not rule out the possibility of annexing Kotor, it did not leave the city in whose port there was still the French navy, in the protection of the former Austro-Hungarian naval base. The French, in fact, did not hide the intention of wanting to encourage the delivery of the Habsburg arsenal directly to the Serbian-Yugoslavs. Concrete talks would start in the summer of 1920, with the forthcoming evacuation of the French navy from the city harbor, despite the fact that the fate of Kotor was not yet determined.⁶⁴ Due to

⁶² Ibid., fasc. 3, R. Ambasciata d'Italia Ufficio Addetto Militare, a DIP-SM, maggiore Aloisi, Parigi 24 maggio 1919; *ibid.*, Comando Supremo, telegramma generale Piacentini, Valona 6 febbraio 1919.

⁶³ Ibid., Ministero della Guerra a generale Ugo Cavallero, DIP-SM, Parigi 13 agosto 1919. The Head of the Italian Navy General Staff, Admiral Paolo Emilio Thaon di Revel, had attracted the attention of Orlando and Sonnino to the issue of the Austro-Hungarian fleet in Kotor since November 1918, when there was a concrete danger that the French would recognize the possession of the Austro-Hungarian navy to the Yugoslav marine. *DDI*, Sesta serie, vol. I, doc. 119.

⁶⁴ On July 3, 1920, the end of the French mission in Kotor was approved by a resolution of the delegates of the Inter-Allied navies. *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (henceforth *DDF*), I^{ère} série, 1920, tome II, doc. 443.

the Italian-Yugoslav dispute over the Austro-Hungarian former arsenal, however, the French evacuation would take place only in December 1920, following the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo and the pressure from the Yugoslav delegation in Paris against the continuation of an already futile occupation. The government in Belgrade took the possession of the former Austro-Hungarian ships in the port.⁶⁵ In July 1920, the English Minister in Belgrade Alban Young, writing to Earl Curzon, commented how the disorders provoked by the Montenegrin movement in support of independence, “of an undoubtedly genuine nature,” had already largely calmed down with the evacuation of the Italians from the Montenegrin territory.⁶⁶

From the summer of 1919 indeed the “greens” again took up the arms, this time with the Italian support. In April, in fact, the government in Rome with the Montenegrin government in exile signed a military convention for the formation of a Montenegrin legion in Italy. The Italian ships landed in Montenegro with new forces ready to incite the population against the Serbian authorities without reaching the desired results.⁶⁷ The regions of Bar and Virpazar became theaters of new conflicts between Serbian-Yugoslavs, Montenegrin rebels and Italian troops. The Italians attributed the incidents to the

⁶⁵ Ibid., tome III, doc. 353.

⁶⁶ Documents on British Foreign Policy (henceforth *DBFP*), 1919-1939, First Series, vol. XII, no. 355.

⁶⁷ Sbutega, *Storia del Montenegro*, 369-75. See also Antonio Madaffari, “Italia e Montenegro (1918-1925): la legione montenegrina,” in *Studi storico-militari* (1996). As has already been mentioned, since the beginning of the Inter-Allied occupation in Montenegro at the end of 1918 the Serbian authorities believed that the Italian army supported the Montenegrin rebels. In December 1918, in Kotor the Serbian authorities arrested Giovanni Baldacci, a journalist who was following the Italian troops, with the accusation of having conducted agitations against the regime established in Montenegro. Baldacci, member of an Italian family which was involved in the Montenegrin affairs since the end of the 19th century, was in contact with the Montenegrin establishment that opposed the Serbian regime. The aim of Baldacci and Montenegrin exponents was to involve the Albanians of Shkodër in the anti-Serb insurrection. Even the French suspected that the Italians were supporting Albanian rebellions at the border with Montenegro and more generally were enrolling young Montenegrins. Italian soldiers, however, liberated Baldacci from the Serbs. AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 15. About the activity of Baldacci in Montenegro see Živojinović, *Crna Gora u Borbi*, 295-6.

“usual Yugoslav provocations and to the open policy of favoring the Serbs systematically conducted by the French authorities.”⁶⁸ On the contrary, Pašić on August 7 presented at the Peace Conference official protests against the “arbitrary and subversive maneuvers” of the Italian garrisons in Montenegro, which, according to him, lost the sympathies of the population above all for favoring the restoration of the autocratic regime of King Nikola. The Yugoslavs accused the Italians for equipping the Montenegrin bands with arms and munitions, the bands that were organized in Gaeta and then landed on the Montenegrin coast under the Italian control, a phenomenon well known to the Yugoslav secret service. The Yugoslavs proposed the withdrawal of the Italian garrisons from Bar, Ulcinj and Virpazar and that the control of Shkodër should be under the Inter-Allied command and not under the Italian command of Vlorë, given the fact that with the eventual withdrawal of French garrisons, which according to them were an element of equilibrium, any control and guarantee over the Italians would be lacking.⁶⁹ The Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, indeed, once again explicitly asked for the evacuation of the Italian troops from Montenegro to definitely complete the unification of the Kingdom SHS. In the summer of 1919, Radović (July 26-29) and then Pašić (August 14, 29 and 31) sent notes to Clemenceau calling for the withdrawal of the Italian troops that were accused of intentionally encouraging “the elements of disorder” in Montenegro.⁷⁰

The suppression of the Montenegrin revolt by the Serbian-Yugoslav troops, instead, did not end the actions of the “greens” against the “whites” and the new institutions. The opposition between the two factions remained alive in the Yugoslav state, as a kind of civil war, with the “whites” divided into many pro-Serbian parties and the

⁶⁸ AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 4, Gli incidenti in Montenegro, la proposta jugoslava, gli interessi italiani.

⁶⁹ Ibid., fasc. 8, Delegation du Royaume des Serbes Croates et Slovènes à la Conférence de la Paix, Nik. P. Pachitch, Paris le 7 août 1919.

⁷⁰ See the copies of the notes of the “Delegation du Royaume des Serbes Croates et Slovènes à la Conférence de la Paix Paris,” signed by Radović and Pašić and preserved in AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 8.

Montenegrin national opposition progressively included into the federal party and the communist one.⁷¹ Already in February 1919, moreover, the Italian command of Kotor had stated how in the city a section of an internationalist Yugoslav socialist party, strongly linked to the socialist circles of Dubrovnik and supported by a hundred of anti-Serb oriented workers and craftsmen, had been constituted. This event had rapidly aroused the hostility of the Serbian authorities, also due to the close contacts of this socialist party with the Croatian Peasant Party in Zagreb, the most important opposition force against Belgrade's centralism.⁷²

In summer of 1919, the *komiti* were still active, although less cohesive than at the beginning. In addition to the group around Bar headed by Raspopović that the Serbian authorities feared could take refuge within the Italian garrison, a *komiti* existed around Cetinje led by Captain Krsto Popović, another one around Nikšić led by a Montenegrin lieutenant, and a fourth one in the area of Kum between Budva and Cetinje. The Serbian authorities gradually eliminated dissidents and monitored suspects. Whole villages were set on fire to prevent the families of the members of the *komiti* to supply the insurgents with livelihoods. Due to this strategy, five hundred men under the command of Popović surrendered to the Serbian authorities in Cetinje. If the discontent against the Serbian regime was limited in urban centers for fear of reprisals, it was more openly demonstrated in the countryside, with frequent conflicts between the gendarmerie and the population, especially where the Albanians were predominant (the Bojana region). The Albanians, in fact, frequently in contact with the Italian garrison of Bar, openly demonstrated their hostility to the Serbian authorities. In May 1919, clashes with the Serbian-Yugoslav forces took place in the surroundings of Kolašin, while in early July fighting between Serbian-Yugoslavs and Montenegrins (the latter were the members of Montenegrin legions that came from Italy in Italian uniforms) were reported around Cetinje.

⁷¹ Sbutega, *Storia del Montenegro*, 369-75.

⁷² AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 14, Comando Brigata Barletta a Comando Superiore forze italiane nei Balcani Valona, Situazione a Cattaro e Montenegro, f.to comandante Chiodi, Cattaro 11 febbraio 1919.

The Italian garrison stated that the “komiti of King Nikola,” supported by the population, on July 9, had finally occupied Kolašin throwing out the Serbian-Yugoslavs and interrupting the communication between Nikšić and Danilovgrad. In August clashes between Serbs and Montenegrin insurgents were also reported in Ulcinj.⁷³

Even in the months of November and December 1919, the Italian command of Bar reported the attacks of the band led by Raspopović on the Serbian-Yugoslav authorities.⁷⁴ The latter began a more intensive repression against the insurgents, weaving a dense network of espionage by means of trusted men and women who were paid hefty fees to oversee and report on the actions of the Montenegrin *komiti* and the families of their members. With the support of the “whites” and of the gendarmerie, Serbian-Yugoslav troops searched the entire territory of Montenegro until the Albanian border. On January 7, 1920, during the Orthodox Christmas celebrations, Raspopović was seen in Mikulić, southeast of Stari Bar. The area was surrounded by the Serbian-Yugoslavs and the (white) “counter-*komiti*” operating in the area of Ulcinj-Bojana. On January 9, the attack was launched from Bar, but nevertheless Raspopović once again escaped the capture. He was killed only in 1923 by the Serbian-Yugoslav troops near Nikšić.⁷⁵

Conclusions

At the end of 1919, at the Paris Peace Conference, the Yugoslav delegation –as during the summer the Italian counterpart had already done– officially denounced a series of violence that the Italian com-

⁷³ See the communications from the Italian officers in Bar and Valona, from March to July 1919. In AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 7, 14, and 15.

⁷⁴ Ibid., fasc. 7, Stato Maggiore Comando Truppe Albania a Ministero della Guerra DSM Roma, a Comando Supremo-Ufficio Operazioni Roma, Riassunto degli avvenimenti politico-militari in Montenegro e in Albania (Novembre 1919) – Antivari, f.to generale Piacentini, 10 dicembre 1919.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Stato Maggiore Comando Truppe Albania a DIP-SM Parigi, Riassunto mensile degli avvenimenti di carattere politico-militare in Montenegro ed Albania (gennaio 1920), f.to generale Piacentini, Valona 19 febbraio 1920.

mand in Montenegro committed against the Yugoslav soldiers and civilians and for which a special committee was appointed by the government of Belgrade for investigation.⁷⁶ On the other hand, the Allies communicated to the Montenegrin government in exile that they no longer would anticipate the monthly credit hitherto paid to King Nikola (the subsidies ceased at the end of October).⁷⁷ In this way, King Nikola was forced to leave Paris and to reach Prince Danilo, while the Montenegrin government in exile had to reduce its personnel, leaving in Neuilly sur Seine only Plamenac and other few persons. In this situation, despite the hostility of the Montenegrin population to the Serbian annexation, which, as it had already been said, did not mean an opposition to a real Yugoslav federalist union, for the Montenegrin establishment in exile it was impossible to continue to support the historical rights of Montenegro for independence. Among other things, Plamenac tried a series of desperate and unsuccessful initiatives, such as the agreement concluded on May 12, 1920, with Gabriele D'Annunzio, who was still in Fiume with his legionaries, hoping to keep some kind of Italian support for the Montenegrin issue. At that time, in fact, the Italian government for the resolution of the Adriatic question had already abandoned the previous political radicalism and was now ready to reach an agreement with the government of Belgrade. The agreement of Plamenac and D'Annunzio, with the latter that was keeping contacts with the representatives of the Yugoslav nationalities that opposed Belgrade centralism in the Kingdom SHS, provided for the restoration of the independence of the Montenegrin kingdom as a first step towards the liberation of the Yugoslav populations from the Serbian rule.⁷⁸

The Supreme Council of the Allies briefly examined only a Montenegrin note sent on November 26, 1919, with which Plamenac

⁷⁶ Ibid., fasc. 8, Delegation du Royaume des Serbes Croates et Slovènes, Prefecture Departementale Royale SHS, no. 2035 confidentiel, au Commissaire du Gouvernement Royal Cettigne, signé le préfet Serzentitch, Bar le 7 octobre 1919.

⁷⁷ The Montenegrin government in exile, together with King Nikola and the royal family, had received a monthly subsidiary since their arrival in France in 1916. Warren, *Montenegro*, 41; Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 87.

⁷⁸ See Massimo Bucarelli, "D'Annunzio, Italy and the Independence of Montenegro, 1919-1920," in *130 Years*, 281-97.

threatened that if the Montenegrin delegate was not immediately invited to the Peace Conference for the signing of the peace treaties with Germany, Austria and Bulgaria, the Montenegrin government in exile would conclude a separate peace with these countries.⁷⁹ On December 1, 1919, the Supreme Council decided not to give any response to the threats of Plamenac, simply ignoring his letter. The Italian delegate De Martino agreed with the decision, but also asked if the Supreme Council before or later would take into consideration the Montenegrin issue, which still needed a solution. For Clemenceau the Montenegrin issue did not exist, the problem –he replied to De Martino– was moreover different: For how long did the Italian government still have the intention to pursue this matter? Clemenceau, without explicitly stating it, was reaffirming that for the Allies the Montenegrin issue had been resolved long time ago with the proclamation of the Kingdom SHS.⁸⁰

The Montenegrin issue, from the diplomatic point of view, was officially over at the end of 1920, when also the appeals of the Montenegrin government in exile to the League of Nations did not find an answer (November 1920).⁸¹ Italy, which had been the main supporter of the Montenegrin cause in order to defend its interests on the other coast of the Adriatic Sea against the Yugoslav aspirations, finally interrupted the political and military support to the Montenegrin refugees preferring an agreement with the Kingdom SHS for the definition of the border dispute and other controversial issues. The

⁷⁹ *DBFP*, First Series, vol. II 1919, Appendix L to no. 33.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 33, Note from Montenegro relative to the possible Signature of a Separate Peace with Germany, Austria and Bulgaria, 442-3. See also AUSSME, E-8, b. 88, fasc. 1, Risoluzione del Consiglio Supremo degli Alleati, 1 dicembre 1919.

⁸¹ League Of Nations, Situation in Montenegro, Letter from the Montenegrin Minister of Foreign Affairs, J. S. Plamenatz, President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, Rome, November 15th, 1920; *Le Monténégro devant la Société des Nations*, 1) Note par laquelle le Gouvernement Monténégrin a demandé l'admission du Royaume de Monténégro dans la Société des Nations, Royaume de Monténégro Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, J. S. Plamenatz, Président du Conseil et Ministre des Affaires Étrangères du Monténégro, Rome, le 18 Novembre 1920, in *Le rôle de la France*, 198-201.

signing of the Treaty of Rapallo, in November 1920, meant the definitive end of the Montenegrin issue and the legitimacy of the Yugoslav state for the country that had opposed the most its recognition in the international context.⁸²

After the apparent settlement of the Adriatic issue and of the Italian-Yugoslav relations, also France took the moment to resolve its relations with the Montenegrin king. On December 20, 1920, Delaroche-Vernet, its extraordinary envoy and plenipotentiary minister at the court of King Nikola, informed the Montenegrin government in exile that after the Yugoslav elections of November 28, 1920, for the Constituent Assembly of the Kingdom SHS, the French government officially recognized the unification of Montenegro with Serbia, quitting diplomatic relations with the Montenegrin institutions abroad and thus ending the mission of the Legation of France to the government of Montenegro.⁸³ According to the government in Paris, the elections for the constitution in the Kingdom SHS had affirmed once again the will of the Montenegrin people to be unified with Serbia.⁸⁴ Even for Great Britain, which still during the summer of 1920 had refused to recognize the annexation of Montenegro as a *fait accompli* – Vesnić, head of the government in Belgrade, was insisting on this argument for the formal recognition of the union of

⁸² Italy, due to the family ties between Elena Petrović-Njegoš and the Savoia dynasty, kept diplomatic relations with the Montenegrin government in exile (although without any political value) until 1922. Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 112.

⁸³ République Française Légation de France près le Gouvernement monténégrin, Note envoyée au Gouvernement monténégrin le 20 décembre 1920 par S. Exc. M. Delaroche-Vernet, envoyé extraordinaire et ministre plénipotentiaire de la République Française auprès de S.M. le Roi de Monténégro, Delaroche-Vernet, Paris, le 20 Décembre 1920, à Son Excellence Monsieur Yovan S. Plamenatz, Président du Conseil et Ministre des Affaires Étrangères de Monténégro Neuilly-Sur-Seine, in *Le rôle de la France*, 9-10. In June 1920, the government in Paris had already suppressed the French Legation in Cetinje, a diplomatic representative that had lost any kind of importance after the recognition of Montenegro as part of the Kingdom S.H.S. by the French government. *DDF*, I^{er} série, 1920, tome II, doc. 154.

⁸⁴ The communication was sent to the French embassies in London, Rome, Berlin and Washington, and to the French minister in Belgrade. *DDF*, I^{er} série, 1920, tome III, doc. 334.

Montenegro with the Kingdom SHS— the opportunity for the Montenegrin people to send “freely elected representatives to the Yugoslav Constituent Assembly” represented the best recognition of the legitimacy of the unification.⁸⁵ On January 10, 1921, the Montenegrin government in exile responded refusing to recognize the right of foreign governments to establish the fate of Montenegro. The French government—the Montenegrin note stated— had publicly supported the crime committed by Serbia over Montenegro, “the flagrant violation of justice and morality of all the civilized nations, the denial of the fundamental principles of international law and the arbitrary suppression of the right to self-determination of the peoples; the violation of the most basically humanitarian rights.”⁸⁶ This exchange of communication, which was followed by the interruption of diplomatic relations between the Montenegrin government in exile—that in the meantime was moved to Rome— and the United States and Great Britain respectively on January 21 and March 17, 1921, substantially was the conclusion of the vain struggle for the independence of Montenegro against the unconditional union with Serbia and the final acceptance of its incorporation into the Kingdom SHS by international actors.

⁸⁵ See the correspondence between Alban Young, English minister in Belgrade, and Earl Curzon. *DBFP*, 1919-1939, First Series, vol. XII, no. 347, 399 and 405.

⁸⁶ Royaume du Monténégro Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Note du Gouvernement monténégrin du 10 Janvier 1921 en réponse à la note du Gouvernement français du 20 Décembre 1920, Y. S. Plamenatz, Rome, 10 janvier 1921, in *Le rôle de la France*, 11-37. See also Warren, *Montenegro*, 44; Pavlović, *Balkan Anschluss*, 98-9.