

# **The Donald W. Treadgold Papers**

***In Russian, East European,  
and Central Asian Studies***

## **Ethnic Conflict and European Affairs Revisited: The Serb-Croat Quarrel and French Diplomacy, 1929-1935**

**Brigit Farley**

**No. 25**

**April 2000**

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*The Henry M. Jackson  
School of International Studies  
The University of Washington*

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ISSN 1078-5639

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## About this series

The *Donald W. Treadgold Papers* publication series was created to honor a great teacher and great scholar. Donald W. Treadgold was professor of history and international studies at the University of Washington from 1949 to 1993. During that time, he wrote seven books, one of which — *Twentieth Century Russia* — went into eight editions. He was twice editor of *Slavic Review*, the organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, and received the AAASS Award for Distinguished Contributions to Slavic Studies, as well as the AAASS Award for Distinguished Service. Professor Treadgold molded several generations of Russian historians and contributed enormously to the field of Russian history. He was, in other ways as well, an inspiration to all who knew him.

The *Treadgold Papers* series was created in 1993 on the occasion of Professor Treadgold's retirement, on the initiative of Professor Daniel Waugh. Professor Treadgold passed away in December 1994. The series is dedicated to the memory of a great man, publishing papers in those areas which were close to his heart.

Sabrina P. Ramet  
Editor

### **About the author of this issue**

A native of Pendleton, Oregon, Brigit Farley is a graduate of Georgetown and Indiana Universities. She is assistant professor of history at Washington State University, Tri-Cities, where she teaches East European, Russian, and European history. She is currently at work on a study of Russian émigrés in the first Yugoslavia.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Barbara Jelavich for urging that this study be undertaken. She was always vitally interested in the relationship between small states and great powers in the diplomatic arena. The staff of the University of Illinois Summer Slavic Research Lab and Library made it possible for me to get many of the necessary materials over the past three summers. Charles Jelavich, Philip G. Farley, and Mark Percy contributed much to the final version of the text, assisting me with their critical reading, corrections, and suggestions for improvement. Special thanks to Ann Kleimola and Vjeran Pavlaković for their sharp eyes and footwork in the final stages of publication. I am most grateful to all of them.

On the 1990s, the world witnessed the sudden revival of an old disagreement between Serbs and Croats regarding the future of the Yugoslav state. This had not been possible in post-war Yugoslavia. Josip Broz Tito had imposed a "brotherhood and unity" ethos, which suppressed the national ambitions of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and others. With the passing of Tito's iron rule, politics in the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia became increasingly fluid. In 1987, Slobodan Milošević asserted his control over the League of Communists of Serbia, ejecting his erstwhile mentor, Ivan Stambolić, from office. Less than a year and a half later, Milošević orchestrated the suppression of the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina, two provinces lying within the administrative borders of the Republic of Serbia. Milošević, who would be elected President of Serbia in May 1989, charged that the autonomous provinces had accumulated powers, under the 1974 constitution, which cheated the Serbs. From his perspective, these were Serbian territories which had been unjustly alienated from the full control of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>1</sup>

When Serbs living in Croatia rallied to Milošević's banner with a noisy campaign for autonomy within Croatia, Croats and their leaders saw a rerun of their old nightmare: an enlarged Serbia preparing to dominate post-Tito Yugoslavia. After two years of steadily escalating conflict, they followed the Slovenes in opting for independence from Yugoslavia in the summer of 1991. When Milošević used the Yugoslav army to attempt to stop this act of secession, an armed Serb-Croat conflict ensued.<sup>2</sup>

When in 1992 the civil war engulfed Bosnia-Herzegovina, parts of which both Serbs and Croats claimed for themselves, this domestic quarrel acquired a vivid international dimension. Refugees fled Bosnia for neighboring states, carrying the civil hostilities with them. Journalist Slavenka Drakulić glimpsed fresh anti-Croat and anti-Serb epithets carved into café tables in Vienna, the war "creeping out of the cheap apartments near the Gurtel" and intruding into public consciousness.<sup>3</sup> The prospect of fratricidal combat over Bosnia stunned European and American diplomats, who failed to agree upon a plan to prevent bloodshed until 1995. Only in that year were they able to prevail upon the exhausted belligerents to agree to the Dayton Accords and an international peacekeeping force for Bosnia.

As singular and horrifying as the Yugoslav wars of 1991-1995 might seem, this is not the first time that Serb-Croat difficulties have affected events outside of Yugoslavia. Earlier they had made it impossible for interwar France, the sponsor of the 1919 Versailles order

in Europe, to fashion the kind of effective opposition it deemed necessary to stop Nazi Germany's campaign to revise the territorial status quo between 1933 and 1935. France had an established relationship with the Serb leaders of the first Yugoslavia and generally supported them in their dispute with the Croats over autonomy, until it became imperative to make both Yugoslavia and Italy parties to a comprehensive anti-German security arrangement. Italy had territorial claims against Yugoslavia and aided unhappy Croats in attacks against the state; Yugoslav leaders knew this and became receptive to overtures from German diplomats, who encouraged them not to accommodate the Croats. Two French foreign ministers wrestled mightily with these contradictions, and neither resolved them. As will be seen, the Serb-Croat dispute had deadly consequences for France, for the European peace, and for the first Yugoslav state itself. Its story is a neglected aspect of Europe's road to war before 1939.

### *The French government and the Serb-Croat conflict 1919-1933*

Interwar France was a guardian of the Versailles and related peace settlements after World War I. Lacking any alliance commitments from other signatory powers, it was forced to rely for assistance on the small states created or enlarged by the settlements: Poland and the states associated with the Little Entente, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> The apparent settlement of Franco-German differences in the 1925 Locarno agreements left only Italy and possibly the Soviet Union as significant threats to the Versailles order; hence France would rely upon its small-state allies to serve as guardians of the peace in east central and southeastern Europe. From the first days of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as Yugoslavia was known until 1929, French diplomats believed it a natural part of a protective belt of Slavic states designed to counter any revanchist threats from Germany or other states dissatisfied with the Paris peace settlements.<sup>5</sup> In November 1927, the French foreign ministry made an informal arrangement official by concluding a formal friendship and cooperation treaty with Yugoslavia. Among other things, the treaty called for the maintenance of the Versailles and related settlements and cooperation in the resolution of regional disputes.

All of France's small-state allies had well-known liabilities, mainly economic but also political in nature. Yugoslavia's most serious flaw fit solidly in the latter category and manifested itself in the negotiations for the country's first constitution. In June 1917, as World War I raged

around them, representatives of the Habsburg Monarchy's South Slavs—the so-called Yugoslav Committee—met Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić on the island of Corfu. The two sides agreed that a South Slavic state should be created after the war, but the question of what kind of state it would be was left open. The Serbs favored a centralist state, in which power would be concentrated in the hands of the king and the government, which would be headquartered at Belgrade. In part, this was because Serbs had had their own state until 1918 and believed that they were the natural rulers of the Kingdom. They also believed that any other arrangement could lead to fragmentation and disunity, a dangerous thing in a hostile neighborhood like the Kingdom's.

Other groups, particularly the Croats, insisted on a federal state, an arrangement in which they would have control over institutions in their own areas, such as their legislature, schools, and police forces. The Croats had officially enjoyed local autonomy by the terms of the 1868 *Nagodba* with the leaders of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>6</sup> They could hardly accept less in the new South Slavic state.

The document that emerged from the Constituent Assembly, the so-called Vidovdan Constitution, reflected the Serbs' convictions as to how the state should be governed. It guaranteed that all the decision-making power in the new state would belong to the monarch, Aleksandar, and the national government at Belgrade. The country would be organized into thirty-three administrative districts; there would be no reference to historic lands, so that a Croat leader could correctly say later that the constitution made "1,000 year old Croatia" disappear from the map. Even at the local levels, heads of counties and districts would answer to the central government rather than their immediate constituency.

Croat representatives boycotted the vote to ratify the constitution, anticipating the imposition of centralist rule. After the inevitable ratification, the Croats' greatest concern, that the new constitution would permit Serbs to dominate them in a centralist administration, proved to be justified. They finished a distant second behind Serbs in the competition for political and economic influence in the new state. While theoretically open to all citizens, government service was overwhelmingly populated with Serbs at the highest levels. No Croat or Slovene ever held the Foreign Affairs portfolio or the highest offices of the army, navy, or finance ministry. Even private enterprises far from Serbia came under the influence of the central government at Belgrade. Pavle Ostović asserts in his memoir of interwar Yugoslavia

that foreigners wishing to do business with commercial concerns in the major Croatian city, Zagreb, were invariably informed that Belgrade was the capital of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and as such all foreign contacts must be made there.<sup>7</sup>

Croat leaders gave notice early that they would not accept their status as codified in the Vidovdan Constitution. They waged what became a permanent campaign against it. They engaged in various obstructionist maneuvers, staging intermittent boycotts of the country's parliament, or *skupština*, and going abroad to complain about the Belgrade administration. In 1925, there was a rare interlude of cooperation between the Serbian Radical Party and the Croat Peasant Party, but it proved brief. In 1926, the Peasant Party joined another large opposition group, after which political life in the country became stalemated. Tempers were short and incendiary rhetoric a commonplace in the *skupština* by 1928. On 20 June of that year, in the course of rancorous debates over the ratification of the Nettuno conventions with Italy, a Montenegrin deputy shot Croat Peasant Party leader Stjepan Radić. Radić died of his wounds a few weeks later. Croat representatives viewed the shooting as the culmination of a Serb-inspired campaign of political violence, which had begun with the ratification of the Vidovdan Constitution. They immediately walked out of the *skupština* again. The Kingdom's politics were deadlocked.<sup>8</sup>

Owing to previous ties between France and prewar Serbia, the French government had supported the Serbs, who now governed the Kingdom, in their conflict with the Croats after 1919. Serbia had fought with the Allies during World War I; so the Serbs had the natural advantages of familiarity with France, a nation which would have a prominent influence in the making of the post-war world. Indeed, French officials had routinely referred to the new Yugoslav state as "Serbia" at the Paris Peace Conference. Serbian representatives and the French government had similar views regarding the best system of governance for the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes: both parties believed strongly in a centralist state. Moreover, French diplomats shared Serbs' opposition to a federal arrangement. Federalism implied a lack of unity in a state which would have to be stable and dependable, and federalist ideas inevitably recalled the innumerable pre-1914 plans for the reorganization of Austria-Hungary, the redoubt of old thinking in what the French believed to be the new Europe.<sup>9</sup> When a Croat delegation to the Paris conference attempted to bring evidence of Serbian ill will towards Croats, Georges Clemenceau publicly reprimanded its members for selfishness and dismissed them.<sup>10</sup> The French government naturally endorsed the

Vidovdan Constitution upon its ratification, and French journalists and publicists did their part. They generally informed their readers that the Serbs deserved to rule Yugoslavia because they had created and administered an autonomous and later independent Serbia after 1815.<sup>11</sup>

Despite France's known preference for a Serbian-ruled state, some Croats felt that the French government should consider withholding its unqualified support in the wake of the Radić tragedy. It was reasoned that pressure from France and/or Great Britain might induce King Aleksandar to make changes that the Croats demanded. The respected elder statesman of the Yugoslav Committee, Ante Trumbić, visited Paris and London in the fall of 1928.<sup>12</sup> In London, he enjoyed a long audience with two of Belgrade's sharpest critics, Robert Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham-Steed.<sup>13</sup> Upon arrival in Paris, Trumbić met with a number of prominent Frenchmen, among whom was the president of one of France's best-known banks. Trumbić hoped to convince French financial circles as well as the French government to use their influence to compel Belgrade to consider the petitions of the Croat opposition.

His quest proved fruitless. The influential Paris daily *Le Temps* had already endorsed Belgrade's position, proclaiming, "the *skupština* remains the governing body for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, regardless of the Croat decision to boycott it" and dismissing the murdered Radić as nothing more than an "agitator in a troubled era that favors any kind of violence."<sup>14</sup> At the Quai d'Orsay, Trumbić met French Foreign Minister Philippe Berthelot, who offered only advice to be patient in the face of difficulties with the centralist government. "How long did it take France to achieve national unity? A century? These things take time," Berthelot intoned.<sup>15</sup> The French government was not prepared to abandon its support for the Kingdom's centralist administration, despite evidence that a serious political problem was developing within the country.

In January 1929, in the wake of continuing political turmoil associated with the Radić shooting, the Kingdom's ruler, King Aleksandar, scrapped the Vidovdan Constitution and imposed a royal dictatorship. He felt that only his personal rule could bring the country out of the crisis into which it had plunged. The king abolished all political parties on the grounds that they had formed strictly along ethnic lines. As a gesture to advocates of federalism, he renamed the country "Yugoslavia" and replaced the original state organizational scheme. The country was now to be divided into nine *banovine*, or regions, each of which cut across lines of nationality.<sup>16</sup> The monarch

additionally put restrictions on the nation's press and re-imposed the *obznana*, the law for the defense of the realm.

Within the country, there was optimism in the first days of the new regime. King Aleksandar's moves seemed to be a genuine attempt at breaking the parliamentary paralysis brought on by the Radić shootings. Even Radić's successor at the helm of the Croatian Peasant Party, Vladko Maček, was impressed.<sup>17</sup> Those hoping for fundamental change, however, soon learned that none would be forthcoming. The dictatorship gave rise to suspicions among the non-Serb population that it would become an instrument for the propagation of Serb privileges in the state. The abolition of political parties seemed not to lessen national tensions but rather to solidify the dominant position of the Serbs, who continued as before to exercise control over government and courts. Plans for the reorganization of the state into *banovine* had done nothing of substance to address the fundamental grievance of the Croats, who still saw their affairs administered from Belgrade, and who suffered most from the caprices of the Belgrade-appointed *bans*, or governors. Evidence abounded, moreover, that the law for the defense of the realm found disproportionate application in Croatian areas of Yugoslavia. In fact, even during the first months of the dictatorship, many Croats were imprisoned without trial and given punishments of unusual severity. Robert Seton-Watson, once one of the most vocal advocates of a Yugoslav state, was particularly outraged by this, decrying in a 1930 memorandum "constant arrests on trumped-up charges (not always necessarily political), long imprisonments without trial, and finally condemnation to savage sentences without any necessity of substantiating the charges in public."<sup>18</sup> A 1931 letter from Albert Einstein, then President of the German League for the Rights of Man, further attested to the regime's irregular dispensation of justice in Croatia.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this evidence of excesses, the French government gave the Yugoslav king its blessing.<sup>20</sup> "There is nothing to fear, now that King Aleksandar has the situation well in control, because he will not countenance the disintegration of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at the hands of nationalists. He will do everything possible to end a crisis he alone seems capable of solving."<sup>21</sup> French Prime Minister Aristide Briand expressed public support for the king's decision, adding only that the dictatorship should be identified with the dynasty and devoid of Fascist-style bombast.<sup>22</sup> Some French observers thought that as a well-known leftist, Briand would object to a dictatorship in Yugoslavia, especially given the drift toward authoritarian rule elsewhere in Eastern Europe by the end of the 1920s.

As it turned out, however, the prime minister took the French ambassador in Belgrade, Emile Dard, at his word. Dard assured him that France's long-term interest, peace and stability in the Danubian region, would be well-served by Aleksandar's action.<sup>23</sup>

There were dissenting voices in France outside official channels. At *Le Populaire*, a prominent leftist newspaper, columnist Oscar Rosenfeld made the French government and its support for the Yugoslav dictatorship the subject of acidic daily commentaries, hoping to persuade officials to force the Yugoslav government to accommodate its citizens' major grievance.<sup>24</sup> Official France said nothing. If it remonstrated with the king, it did so in private and applauded when the king announced a new constitution for Yugoslavia in September 1931. The document, which was to replace the Vidovdan Constitution, restored the *skupština* and introduced certain changes in political life. On the key issue, however, the administrative structure of the state, both the king and the constitution were conspicuously silent, as was the French government. The latter signaled its approval by granting a loan on favorable terms and renewing the 1927 French-Yugoslav treaty of friendship and cooperation for another five years at the end of 1931.<sup>25</sup> French officials no doubt took comfort from the assessment of Yugoslavia made by Czech Prime Minister Edward Beneš. Beneš told the French ambassador in Prague, Léon Noel, that the state of affairs in Belgrade reassured him. King Aleksandar's position seemed improved, Beneš thought, and the dictatorship was "less visible" than before.<sup>26</sup>

### *France, Yugoslavia, and the quest for Italian alliance*

The French government's position on the Serb-Croat conflict was to change with the coming to power in January 1933 of Adolf Hitler in Germany. This new regime appeared to be France's worst nightmare come to life: a resurgent, aggressive Germany determined to challenge the French-sponsored territorial order in Europe and perhaps exact revenge for its humiliation of 1919. The French ambassador in Berlin, Andre François-Poncet, certainly thought so. "If one listens closely to the songs of the SA," Poncet wrote the Quai d'Orsay shortly after Hitler's takeover, "he cannot but be deeply impressed at France's central role in them and the hate which our nation inspires there."<sup>27</sup> This report received substantial endorsement in the first public statements from Hitler himself. In one of his first speeches as chancellor, Germany's new leader declared, "not only we, but the

entire world will call for the revision of the Treaty of Versailles."<sup>28</sup> Ambassador Poncet concluded that "there is no avoiding the fact that the Hitler regime is predicated on revanchist sentiments...They are turning back the clock" in Germany.<sup>29</sup> Despite more than a decade's worth of containment, Germany was on the verge of breaking out of the constraints put upon it in the Paris settlements.

When it looked at the map, the French foreign ministry could only conclude that its defenses were insufficient to combat this new threat. Great Britain remained aloof, convinced that France had imperiled the peace in its ongoing rivalry with Italy and its refusal to make concessions to Germany after the punitive peace settlements of 1919. France's allies in Eastern Europe, small, weak and divided, did not have sufficient strength to counter this threat alongside France. In spite of the inflammatory language, few could disagree with the assessment of the Little Entente offered by the *Le Populaire*. "We have a democratic republic, a country politically stable and peaceful, Czechoslovakia. Then we have a semi-dictatorship in Romania featuring a king-adventurer with no recognizable program. Then we have the Yugoslav dictatorship, with the most corrupted administration and a court capable of the worst folly to stave off the coming revolution" among its dissatisfied national groups.<sup>30</sup> Negotiations for a mutual-assistance pact with the Soviet Union, an attempt to revive the prewar Franco-Russian alliance, had only just commenced and could not be expected to bear fruit for some time.<sup>31</sup>

When he became foreign minister, therefore, Jean Paul-Boncour faced the task of quickly constructing an effective defense against this new, aggressive Germany. He knew what his first step must be. Despite the difficult recent past, the foreign minister recalled, "as soon as I arrived at the French foreign ministry, my first concern was to bring about a relaxation of tensions between us and our old ally, Italy."<sup>32</sup> Benito Mussolini's Italy had not been regarded as an ally since the Locarno treaties, because of its rivalry with France in the Mediterranean and the Adriatic and the anti-Italian makeup of the Quai d'Orsay under the direction of Secretary-General Berthelot. Furthermore, Mussolini had something in common with the new Germany, in that neither fully accepted the Paris settlements; there was always the possibility that Germany and Italy could turn on France and form a dynamic alliance against it.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, the Italian leader had many admirers in influential French circles after the war, especially those who saw in Fascism the best guarantee against chaos and Communism. Boncour himself saw great advantage in a marriage between the so-called Latin

sisters. Italy was a respectable power, with manpower and military hardware, which shared French opposition to a strong German presence in Europe. Mussolini wanted to be an important player in Central Europe, the land of Italy's former masters, the Habsburgs; France wanted to safeguard Central Europe from German incursions.<sup>34</sup> Boncour believed that the interests of both France and Italy would be served in keeping Germany contained within its current borders.<sup>35</sup> *Le Temps* signaled the coming rapprochement in March 1933, acknowledging in Mussolini "a realistic spirit and an acute sense of political necessity" and hailing Italy as "a great nation with an important role to play in the economic and political reconstruction of Europe."<sup>36</sup>

There was, of course, a catch. In cultivating Italy, the French government risked alienating Yugoslavia, one of France's most important allies. Within the system of smaller states which were to help guard the Paris settlements, Yugoslavia occupied a pivotal position between the two revisionist states of Hungary and Bulgaria. As Yugoslavia went, so went the fortunes of the Paris settlements in southeast Europe. Additionally, France had formal political and financial commitments in Yugoslavia, having signed a Treaty of Friendship and invested considerable sums of money and time there since the early 1920s.<sup>37</sup> The Belgrade government had had difficulties with Italy in the first years of the Kingdom's existence because of Italian claims on its Adriatic territories. By 1933, it could rightly consider Mussolini a dangerous enemy owing to the consequences of the unresolved conflict with the Croats.

After it became clear that the dictatorship would not consider a federalist Yugoslavia, politically active Croats used a variety of means to express their opposition. Some, like Ante Trumbić, preferred to remain in the country and work behind the scenes for an improvement of the situation. Others fled Yugoslavia to publicize Croatia's plight in France, the United States, Great Britain, and other world capitals. This group included two Croat Peasant Party stalwarts, Juraj Krnjević and August Košutić, who went to Switzerland and began publishing a journal called *Croatia*, which documented human rights abuses resulting from the dictatorship. Krnjević and Košutić created a sensation in May 1931, when they submitted to the League of Nations a memorandum on the dictatorship's harsh suppression of its opposition. The document told a harrowing story of arbitrary imprisonment, imprisonment without trial, and torture at the hands of Serbian jailers. The authors concluded by requesting that all signatories of the post-war peace settlements convene an international

inquiry to demand King Aleksandar's abdication, so that the state structure could be changed and Croatia could have the right to administer its own affairs.<sup>38</sup>

A third group sought foreign intervention of a more tangible nature. Ante Pavelić and August Perčec founded the *Ustaša* movement, dedicated to the overthrow of the Yugoslav government and the foundation of an independent Croatian state.<sup>39</sup> They established clandestine relationships with individuals in states which had their own grievances against Yugoslavia, principally Italy and Hungary. Members of the *Ustaše* made common cause with Italian officials on the question of Adriatic territories once promised to Italy but awarded to Yugoslavia instead in the postwar peace settlements. *Ustaša* leaders declared in writing that upon the foundation of independent Croatia, Italy would receive favorable concessions from the new leadership.<sup>40</sup> It was also understood that Hungary, which regarded the Yugoslav Vojvodina as Hungarian territory, would receive some type of compensation. After all, in the *Ustaša* world view, the destruction of Yugoslavia would precede or coincide with the establishment of independent Croatia.

After the proclamation of the royal dictatorship, there occurred numerous attacks against Yugoslavia in which Pavelić, Perčec, and their supporters participated. For example, in the fall of 1932, a consignment of weapons made in Italy was discovered in an Austrian factory. Austrian officials explained that the weapons were being repaired in the factory at Hirtenberg, but the Yugoslav government concluded that the weapons were destined for Croats in Austria and Hungary, who had assembled in frontier areas and were "hoping to attempt a coup against Belgrade."<sup>41</sup> Bertrand Clauzel, then the French ambassador in Vienna, reported that the arms shipment was to have been a prelude to a "serious frontier incident." The latter would have forced Yugoslavia to mobilize its army, causing widespread desertion by Croat conscripts, who would presumably link up with émigrés waiting in Austria and Hungary for a march on Belgrade.<sup>42</sup>

In another incident that attracted wide attention, Dalmatian Croats, aided and abetted by Italy, were believed to have been responsible for a violent campaign of agitation following an alleged Serbian attack on a Roman monument in the city of Trogir in December 1932. A series of anti-Yugoslav articles followed in the Italian press, which condemned the "mutilations" at Trogir and the "impudent" response of the Yugoslav foreign ministry. The extreme tone of the articles impressed Robert Dampierre, French ambassador in Italy, who feared an Italian attack on Yugoslavia might be imminent.<sup>43</sup> At the

same time, numerous bomb attacks were reported on and near the regular Belgrade-Zagreb train route.

In all these incidents, clear evidence of complicity emerged between dissident Croats and Yugoslavia's unfriendly neighbors Italy, Hungary, and Austria. The bomb attacks on Yugoslav trains were planned and carried out from an *Ustaša* staging area in Janka Pusta, Hungary.<sup>44</sup> Other such incidents originated in *Ustaša* hideouts in Borgotaro and Bovegno, Italy. From Berlin, Poncet reported conversations with German and Italian colleagues confirming that Mussolini was spending "considerable sums" to equip those who wished the Belgrade regime ill.<sup>45</sup> "In my recent dispatches," concurred Dampierre from Rome, "I have indicated that the current attitude of the Italian government is in large part based on the assumption that the breakup of the neighboring state is inevitable."<sup>46</sup> In so doing, Yugoslav officials alleged, Italy was using disaffected Croats to destabilize Yugoslavia, detach the Croatian lands, and take a significant part of the Adriatic coast for itself.<sup>47</sup>

The Quai d'Orsay was aware of the numerous incidents of Croat violence against the Belgrade government. French journalists and the French ambassador, Émile Naggiar, had seen to that. It recognized the investments made in its alliance with Yugoslavia.<sup>48</sup> But it needed Italian friendship as well, and so it could not restrain Italy in its policy towards Yugoslavia; that could incline Mussolini towards Hitler, with whom the Italian leader had a good deal in common. Rather, French officials decided to do what columnist Rosenfeld and Croat representatives had been urging them to do: press the Yugoslav government to reorganize the state along federalist lines. If King Aleksandar and the Yugoslav government were to agree to such a reorganization, it was reasoned, Croats would be satisfied with their status in Yugoslavia. They would have no further reason to seek support among Yugoslavia's neighbors. Accordingly, Mussolini would have sharply limited means to press his claims against Yugoslavia, and France could enlist both states in the campaign against Germany.

The French government formally reversed itself on the Serb-Croat matter in March 1933, shortly after it began cultivating Italian cooperation in negotiations for the ill-fated Four-Power Pact.<sup>49</sup> "Tell your King Aleksandar," interim Prime Minister Edward Herriott told the Yugoslav sculptor, Ivan Meštrović in early 1933, "that we have better things to worry about than defending you from Italy. Until he decides to solve the Serb-Croat question, the door is open for Mussolini to cause all kinds of trouble."<sup>50</sup> The French foreign ministry's secretary-general struck an equally blunt tone in a subsequent conversation:

Your king is unbelievably self-absorbed. Or, on the other hand, perhaps he alone among all the Serbs wants a real Yugoslavia. Otherwise, all Serbs are megalomaniacs and want their great Serbia. In any case, we are not interested in Serbia or Croatia. We are interested in Yugoslavia, which we helped to establish.<sup>51</sup>

On 17 March 1933, Boncour made France's new policy official in his instructions to the French ambassador in Belgrade. "It is incumbent on the king to carry out administrative de-centralization which will bring to the peoples of Yugoslavia what they clearly want."<sup>52</sup> The foreign minister had the Four-Power pact in mind when he made this statement. The pact left open the possibility of gradual revisions of the Versailles Treaty. If the Yugoslav government reorganized itself, opportunities for conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia would be significantly reduced and revisions, if in fact they came, would be made at the negotiating table.

King Aleksandar disagreed and made this clear to the French ambassador. A federal Yugoslavia "would mean anarchy everywhere," he told Naggiar. "In view of the extraordinary polarization of races, religions, and political clans, each autonomous region would find itself in the grasp of divisions even more profound and bitter than those that exist within Yugoslavia, and in any case the clashes between a federal parliament and regional parliaments would be unending."<sup>53</sup> For King Aleksandar and the Serbs in the Yugoslav government, the preservation of centralist rule would be an absolute requirement of any arrangements with other nations. They did not share France's opinion that federalism would make Yugoslavia a more viable state, or that it would end territorial conflicts with Italy. On the contrary, as the king said, they thought that only the maintenance of a strictly centralist system would guarantee Yugoslavia's security in a dangerous neighborhood. It followed, therefore, that the king did not heed French warnings about changing the state structure. Instead, he began a search for new allies. Yugoslavia required friends who endorsed its unique interests, which was the preservation of the status quo and the territorial integrity of the state.<sup>54</sup>

The first consequence of France's change in policy toward the Serb-Croat problem was the beginning of Yugoslav talks with Germany in April 1933. That nation was France's *bête noire*, the entity against which it was directing all its diplomatic efforts in Europe: Germany

was to be isolated and marginalized at all costs. But Yugoslavia refused to follow this line, having suddenly found much of interest in the new Germany. Economics came first on the agenda, the German government signing an agreement to buy Yugoslav wheat and corn surplus. As a farm surplus nation, France was never able to fulfill its promises to absorb Yugoslav agricultural surpluses in a time of severe economic crisis. Therefore, the importance of German economic overtures cannot be overemphasized.

On the political side, the two nations found that they had much in common. Having heard from his cousin, Prince Paul, about Hitler's draconian treatment of German separatists in Bavaria, King Aleksandar registered his satisfaction with the "method by which the German states had been unified." He further remarked to the German ambassador that both Yugoslavia and Germany had pursued policies unpopular with Western democracies, and "had had to endure numerous and violent reproaches."<sup>55</sup> Most importantly, the two sides agreed completely on the question of their most pressing common enemy, Italy. The Yugoslavs believed Italy responsible for collusion with Croat dissidents and mistrusted its intentions with respect to the weak state of Austria in the north. Hitler seemed eager to point out that he, too, saw Italy as a rival—for control of Austria, as an opponent of *anschluss*, one of his principal objectives in foreign policy. King Aleksandar had once remarked that he preferred German sausages to Italian macaroni on his northern border.<sup>56</sup>

The French government's change of heart about the Serb-Croat dispute thus had the wholly unintended effect of providing Nazi Germany with an opening in Yugoslavia. It gave German officials a chance to emphasize common interests and establish a relationship between the two nations which would grow in direct proportion to France's cultivation of Italy.

German-Yugoslav talks, grounded as they were in perceived political and economic compatibility between the two countries, raised the possibility of German penetration into southeastern Europe. Boncour doubtless regretted Belgrade's new interest in Germany, but could not abandon his pursuit of Italian friendship. His challenge would be to gain Mussolini's cooperation in anti-Hitler efforts while retaining Yugoslavia's loyalty to French objectives. If King Aleksandar and the Yugoslav government accommodated the Croats, his task would be considerably easier.

The Four-Power Pact having been rendered meaningless by objections from all sides, Boncour continued to search for a vehicle through which France could rally all actual and potential allies to

action against Nazi Germany. Following a talk with the French ambassador to Czechoslovakia, Noel, Boncour hit upon a solution he believed would help him improve relations with Italy while retaining Belgrade's good will. He proposed the formation of a Danubian economic federation, an organization which would attempt to put economic relations among the Central European nations on a more reasonable foundation than had existed during the previous thirteen years. The idea had originated in a conversation between ambassador Noel and Czechoslovak Prime Minister Beneš. In the course of that conversation, Beneš opined that the best way to check German expansion into Central Europe would be to restore economic health to Austria and its Danubian neighbors. According to Beneš,

The economic interests of the Danubian states are not contradictory. The old Monarchy was a very healthy thing, from an economic standpoint, and I am convinced that, sooner or later, we will return to old economic relations. The new arrangement I envision will have a more rational base, a more sane relationship between national groups, and better development possibilities.<sup>57</sup>

Beneš' assessment was correct. As he and the French ambassador surveyed the economic landscape of Eastern Europe, they could see "seven separate customs units (representing each of the new independent states)" that had replaced the Austro-Hungarian common market after 1918.<sup>58</sup> The economic historian Ivan Berend has emphasized that after World War I, each of these units, or states, "established or maintained existing warlike import restrictions."<sup>59</sup> Some of them, notably Austria and Czechoslovakia, also adopted strict protectionist policies, having identified economic self-sufficiency with economic independence.<sup>60</sup> Because of these policies, the worldwide economic crisis had hit southeast and central Europe with particular force. It was reasoned that if some semblance of that well-functioning common market were restored in the Danubian region, the economic difficulties endured by the new states would lessen.

Boncour subsequently fleshed out this concept and proposed it to French diplomats. "On a foundation of complete moral and material equality," Boncour wrote in an explanatory circular to central European ambassadors in August 1933:

Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania...must form a cooperative economic arrangement based on bilateral accords. In our opinion, this cooperation could be achieved in the establishment of preferential tariffs and in the improvement of transportation in the region. It should not exclude the development of economic relations between the group and other states via commercial treaties which could include preferential advantages to the exclusive benefit of Danubian agriculture.<sup>61</sup>

The organization would be completed by a series of industrial accords, which would involve non-Danubian states in the desired improvement of the Central European markets while reserving for the latter the chance to develop their own interior markets and to coordinate more effectively their own economic strengths.

Boncour believed that this economic project had several advantages for French diplomacy. First, it would engage Paris and Rome in a cooperative venture; they were the two states which would oversee creation and administration of the organization. Secondly, the plan involved the fate of Austria, whose independence from Germany both France and Italy wished to maintain; it would establish a basis for long-term cooperation between the two nations. It also stood to resolve the conflicts that had dislocated the post-war Danubian economy and restore prosperity to an area devastated by the worldwide economic downturn of the early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> Boncour emphasized all three considerations repeatedly in his conversations with the French ambassador to Italy, Bertrand Jouvenel.<sup>63</sup> If the Danubian economy were revived under these circumstances, Boncour believed, it stood to reason that Yugoslavia and the other small states would share in the general prosperity. In that instance, perhaps the Serb-Croat conflict would de-escalate, since many Croat complaints against the Belgrade regime were known to be economic in nature.<sup>64</sup> Thereafter, it was hoped, Belgrade's contacts with Germany would diminish.

Unfortunately for Boncour, the negotiations for the Danubian organization did not proceed smoothly. The British Foreign Office, which was following the proceedings, reported that

The stumbling block, as usual, is mutual suspicion. The Italians suspect the French of wishing to use the

Austrian danger to force Italy into a Danubian economic federation, dominated politically by the Little Entente and therefore by France. The French suspect the Italians of wishing to form an Austrian-Hungarian bloc, backed by Germany and Italy, in direct opposition to the Little Entente.<sup>65</sup>

For its part, the French government envisioned an equal union of the Danubian states—Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania—bound by a system of bi-lateral agreements into a cooperative arrangement sponsored jointly by France and Italy. The Italians, on the other hand, seemed determined to play a leading role in the administration of the organization and stipulated that certain concessions to Italy's fellow revisionists, Austria and Hungary, would be in order before arrangements could be completed.<sup>66</sup>

It was precisely these concessions, widely supposed to be territorial in nature, that the Yugoslav government emphasized in appraising the Danubian plan. Yugoslav Foreign Minister Bogoljub Jevtić, mindful of continuing Italian and Hungarian involvement with dissident Croats, demanded that Mussolini forswear his campaign of destabilization and guarantee Yugoslavia's territorial integrity. There could be no harmonious economic relations, Jevtić told Naggiar, between countries with conflicting political goals. "Italy must make a choice, and make that choice known. Is it for the territorial status quo? If not, it is pointless to include it in a Danubian organization."<sup>67</sup> In other words, if Italy would not promise to stop aiding Croats in attacks against the Yugoslav government, the Yugoslav government would not consider signing on to any Danubian reconstruction plan, no matter how advantageous. King Aleksandar made the same point when he declared his willingness to cooperate in the implementation of the plan, provided that the Italian government "declare frankly whether it intends to be a force for peace or an instigator of terrorism" in Europe.<sup>68</sup> Notwithstanding attempts to forge a "Yugoslav" identity in the state, King Aleksandar's priority remained the preservation of Serbian centralist rule in the Yugoslav state. He and his government continued to believe that Boncour was mistaken in his demands that the state structure be changed.

Yugoslavia's apprehensions about the Danubian plan only intensified upon the publication of allegations that a restoration of Habsburg rule in Austria could become a requirement for Italian-French cooperation in the Danubian plan.<sup>69</sup> These allegations, which surfaced in the spring of 1933, were often on the agenda in

conversations between Yugoslav and French diplomats through the spring of 1934.<sup>70</sup> Talk of a return of the Habsburg Monarchy to Austria further lessened chances of Belgrade's participation. The Serbs in Yugoslavia had had an unhappy history with the Habsburgs dating from the turn of the century.<sup>71</sup> They also knew that disaffected Croats had come to draw unflattering comparisons between their tenure in Yugoslavia and their time in the Habsburg Monarchy, where after 1868 they had enjoyed the kind of local autonomy the Yugoslav authorities were denying them.<sup>72</sup> A French legislator visiting Yugoslavia in the mid-1930s was moved to remark, "the union of Serbs and Croats under one government was a big mistake. This is why Belgrade so violently opposes a Habsburg restoration...it has treated the Croats worse than Vienna did before the war."<sup>73</sup> The Yugoslav government clearly feared that if the French government acquiesced in a Habsburg restoration, Belgrade would face a magnet to dissatisfied Croats and Slovenes on its northern border and yet another threat to the state's existence.

Meanwhile, German diplomats were keeping a close eye on French plans, searching for ways in which to subvert them. In the fall of 1933, Hitler granted a personal interview to the Yugoslav ambassador to Germany, Živojin Balugdžić, who began the conversation by expressing the hope that "a good atmosphere" would be created between the two countries. Emphasizing that "Germany did not harbor any hostility or rancor against Yugoslavia," Hitler addressed all the issues outstanding in Yugoslavia's relations with France.<sup>74</sup> He proclaimed Germany's willingness to enter into a suitable economic arrangement, with no unreasonable demands on Yugoslavia, noting that a German commission planned a visit to Belgrade in March to begin work on the proposal. "The Serbian government should not doubt our good will on this question," the chancellor said reassuringly. He deliberately referred to the country's leaders as "the Serbian government," reminding them that the German government, unlike French leaders of late, recognized the Serbs as the rightful rulers of the state.<sup>75</sup> In this same conversation, Hitler also declared Germany's willingness to "buy Serbian products."<sup>76</sup> The chancellor thus demonstrated his appreciation of the state's economic plight and his ability to appeal to Serb political sensibilities.

Continuing to emphasize Germany's common interests with the Belgrade government, Hitler noted that German goals corresponded with those of Yugoslavia in that he too feared a powerful Italy in central Europe. Having followed closely the rumors of a possible Habsburg restoration, the German chancellor stated that the return of the Habsburgs was undesirable for Germany as well as Yugoslavia, since

it would have all kinds of repercussions on German domestic politics. Using language calculated to appeal to the Yugoslav government, Hitler declared that the Habsburgs were "a limited and reactionary force, which was responsible for the last war and which will undoubtedly lead us straight into another."<sup>77</sup>

Boncour's tenure as foreign minister, and therefore his plans for French diplomacy in Europe, came to an end in the Staviskii corruption scandal of February 1934.<sup>78</sup> Hoping to block German advances in Central Europe, he had sought Italian cooperation and tried at the same time to make the Yugoslav government see the need to satisfy unhappy Croats. He failed in both tasks and the consequences had already proved harmful to France: German diplomats had consequently been able to establish a good relationship with Yugoslav leaders. It would fall to the new man at the Quai d'Orsay, Louis Barthou, to reconcile France's need for a great-power alliance with the particular requirements of its Yugoslav ally.

### *Louis Barthou and the quest for Italo-Yugoslav detente: prelude to a Mediterranean Pact*

Like his predecessor, Boncour, Barthou saw French-Italian cooperation against Germany as essential, but he emphasized from the beginning of his tenure at the Quai d'Orsay that such cooperation must be a complement to, rather than a replacement for, French commitments to its East European allies. The French ambassador in Yugoslavia quoted King Aleksandar to the effect that "certain politicians and journalists left the impression that, in the interest of getting Rome's support against Berlin, Paris would abandon its fundamental positions in central and southeast Europe and loosen its ties with the Little Entente."<sup>79</sup> Barthou appeared determined to counter this impression.

The new French foreign minister faced a difficult task. Throughout Boncour's tenure, the German government had continued its active campaign to win Yugoslavia's friendship. The German ambassador in Belgrade and his staff "never stop trying to persuade the king that they have taken Yugoslavia's interests to heart," ambassador Naggiar wrote Barthou in June 1934.<sup>80</sup> In May 1934, Germany and Yugoslavia concluded a commercial treaty, in which Germany pledged to increase significantly its purchases of Yugoslav agricultural goods. France's political failures in Yugoslavia were thus underscored by this evidence

of its economic shortcomings. More importantly, Berlin continued to focus attention on what it perceived as similarities in internal development between Germany and Yugoslavia. The point of emphasis was, naturally, treatment of troublesome minorities. German officials did not hesitate to enlist the help of the Belgrade press in publicizing the two states' commonalities. In December 1933, they had welcomed for a brief visit to Berlin a writer for the Belgrade daily *Politika*. The journalist came away impressed with the regime's use of concentration camps to re-educate "in the spirit of new national discipline" Marxists, monarchists, republicans, and other agitators who threatened to disrupt the work of the new German government.<sup>81</sup> In May 1934, Berlin was counting on still more favorable publicity when it invited an entire delegation of Yugoslav journalists to visit the new Germany, where they would presumably draw favorable conclusions and pass them on to their readers. Their route would include Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Wiesbaden among industrial and commercial centers.

In the longest of a series of articles chronicling the trip, representatives from *Politika* spread the word about the new Germany. *Politika's* predominantly Serbian readers quickly became acquainted with German attitudes regarding minorities. As Croat dissidents continued their well-publicized campaign for independence from Belgrade, the journalists noted approvingly that in Germany, there was an aggressive self-confidence that manifested itself in tough treatment of troublesome elements without regard to world opinion. "We made the acquaintance of a Mr. Streicher," one journalist wrote, "who is a leader of the National Socialist movement in Germany and one of the most outspoken anti-Semites in Germany." Streicher spoke forcefully in defense of recent action taken against Jews in Germany, in absolute certainty that the National Socialist campaign against the Jews will one day be acknowledged by the world of enlightened thinking. "The whole world will be grateful to Germany."<sup>82</sup>

This news was certain to impress the king and ruling Serbs, who had once told the German ambassador that he had "a certain understanding" for the way in which the German government had dealt with its Jewish citizens.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, as King Aleksandar emphasized in a June 1933 conversation with Berlin's ambassador, Albert Dufour, Germany had become an inspiration for states plagued with nationality problems. Speaking at a banquet in the delegation's honor, Predrag Milojević declared that the spirit of German nationalism, before which all separatist-chauvinist parties must bow, could be a model for all young nations struggling with stubborn

remnants of particularism.<sup>84</sup> It was clear that the invited guests saw a great deal in Germany that had heretofore been unknown in Yugoslavia. In terms of domestic political inclinations, it seemed that the two states had a great deal in common.

Barthou followed the German overtures closely. "Yes, I know about the attempts being made by certain parties...I know about the plane rides, and the journalists. I am, moreover, fully aware," he told the French Chamber of Deputies, "that a commercial agreement was signed recently in Belgrade, but I swear that the Yugoslav-French alliance will be strong."<sup>85</sup> The new foreign minister first focused his attention on appearances, always important in relation to the small state allies. He paid a well-publicized visit to Yugoslavia in June 1934, the first ever for a French foreign minister. During his stay, he lavished praise on King Aleksandar's government and underlined the cultural affinity between France and Yugoslavia by quoting Lamartine, the best-known French poet in the South Slav lands.

Beyond public demonstrations, Barthou had plans of substance for Yugoslavia. He did not wish to confine himself to Boncour's initiatives for an economic revitalization of the Danubian states. Rather, he envisioned a grand political alliance against Hitler, in which Yugoslavia and other French allies would form an equal partnership with France. This alliance was to include two pacts. One would join the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Baltic states in an Eastern pact of mutual cooperation. It would include a mutual-defense clause and a Franco-Soviet guarantee of existing frontiers. In other words, this pact would complete the Locarno agreements by providing for the security of the eastern frontiers. The Eastern Pact would be accompanied in Danubian and Balkan Europe by a Mediterranean Pact. The idea, as British ambassador to France, George Clerk, articulated it, "is that such a pact would embrace all Mediterranean states, including Romania, who would otherwise be the only member of the Little Entente unprovided for."<sup>86</sup> A French-Soviet mutual assistance agreement would anchor the two pacts and surround Germany. It was believed that if Barthou could negotiate these agreements, he could eliminate Germany's appeal to the smaller states, bringing them back into alignment in a revived Versailles order.

In the negotiation of these arrangements, Barthou made clear his intention to gain the adherence of both Italy and Yugoslavia. Unlike his predecessor, he did not insist that the Yugoslav government change the state structure in order to accomplish this task. He declined to make an issue of the Yugoslav government's problems with the Croats; in fact, he implied that the previous French government had been too

deferential to the Italians and too harsh on the Belgrade government. He made a telling gesture of support for the ruling Serbs in an interview with the Belgrade daily *Politika* in May 1934. In the course of the interview, Barthou put to rest persistent rumors from the previous summer of French support for a Habsburg restoration. "France's position on the restoration question is based on the necessity of preserving Austrian independence. We stand firmly behind the treaties and agreements which prohibit the restoration. *There can be no question of any such occurrence,*" Barthou declared.<sup>87</sup> Coming as it did on the heels of Mussolini's negotiation of the Rome Accords with Austria and Hungary, this declaration made an immediately favorable impression.<sup>88</sup> The German ambassador in Vienna reported that his Yugoslav colleague had been just as pleased as his minister, "and even a little surprised" at Barthou's unequivocal statement opposing a Habsburg return.<sup>89</sup>

Barthou's strong beginnings made a favorable impression in many places. From a foreign policy standpoint, the German ambassador in Romania wrote, "Barthou's visit formed the brilliant final scene of the meeting of the Little Entente, at which not only the unity of the three partners, but also the alliance with France has been impressively demonstrated: it appears that French influence has gained strength." Ulrich von Hassel, the ambassador in Belgrade, agreed. As a result of Barthou's well-orchestrated voyage, "Yugoslavia is prepared to follow blindly Barthou's small-state policy initiatives in the status quo."<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, Barthou's support for King Aleksandar's government guaranteed that the Serb-Croat dispute over the structure of the state would remain unresolved. The Croat Peasant Party leader, Maček, and other prominent Croats remained steadfast in their demands for a federal Yugoslavia, while the king and the ruling Serbs stood by their opposition. Meanwhile, Croat dissidents within the state and abroad saw no reason to halt their campaign of violence against the state. They had come close to assassinating King Aleksandar on a ceremonial visit to Zagreb the previous December. Meanwhile, Italian and Hungarian officials would continue to subsidize them quietly.<sup>91</sup> This circumstance presaged difficulties for Barthou, who hoped to negotiate an Italian-Yugoslav *rapprochement* as a first step towards the formulation of the Mediterranean accord. If the Belgrade government left the door open for Italy to intrigue with Yugoslav dissidents, the Italians could make fine-sounding declarations about cooperation with France while advancing their own revisionist goals on the sly.

In spite of these apparent contradictions, Barthou worked

doggedly towards the improvement of French-Italian and Italian-Yugoslav relations following his return from southeastern Europe. With respect to French-Italian relations, the foreign minister felt it imperative to convince Mussolini that his interests would best be served in a firm anti-German alliance with France rather than in continued flirtation with Germany and revisionism. Despite the two nations' common determination to keep Germany from dominating Central Europe, Mussolini was loath to abandon his role as intermediary between France and Germany. He had taken care to avoid any permanent alliance with Germany, Jouvenel wrote the Quai d'Orsay, "and will avoid any alliances against it [Germany] with equal care."<sup>92</sup>

Barthou's campaign to win Italy as an active ally received a substantial boost with the assassination of Austrian Prime Minister Engelbert Dollfuss on 25 July 1934. Mussolini regarded Dollfuss as one of his most reliable allies, a loyal friend and soldier in the war with Naziism and socialism in Austria. When it became clear that the murder was to have served as a pretext for German *anschluss* with Austria, the Italian leader was shocked, because he believed that his country should exercise predominant influence there. Despite Mussolini's fascination with Hitler, it certainly did not appear that Italy could count on a role of any importance in a Nazi-dominated central Europe.<sup>93</sup>

Subsequent events confirmed that the Italian view of Germany had darkened. A few days after the Dollfuss murder, the French ambassador in Vienna, Eugène Puaux, wrote Barthou, "it seems that we are in an exceptionally good position to bring the Italian government to some understanding of its real interest in coming to an agreement with France...since the events of 30 June and 25 July have opened some eyes which did not want to see the danger Hitler represents."<sup>94</sup> Mussolini soon endorsed Puaux's view, declaring his willingness on 30 July to clear up all outstanding disputes with France. In fact, reported the French ambassador, "Mussolini has confirmed that agreement on all principal issues of general policy has already been realized."<sup>95</sup>

Yugoslav-Italian relations proved to be the outstanding exception to the "general principles" on which French and Italian officials were now agreed. The Serb-Croat conflict continued to poison the atmosphere between Rome and Belgrade, as became apparent in the two governments' reactions to the Dollfuss murder. Mussolini had massed Italian troops, up to six divisions by some accounts, at the Austrian border upon hearing of the assassination. The Yugoslav

government took this as evidence of an impending Italian takeover of Austria, from which Mussolini presumably could take a more direct role in assisting Croats in their attacks against Yugoslavia. Italy had rushed its troops to the border and kept them there long after it was clear that Austria was no longer in danger. Italian troops had allegedly been sighted on Austrian soil. On these grounds, Yugoslav leaders seemed to believe Mussolini intended to install Italian rule in Vienna, and they therefore prepared for war.<sup>96</sup> A Serbian daily reminded its readers of the consequences of an Italian-dominated Austria by providing a list of Italy's alleged hostile acts against Yugoslavia. The editors of *Vreme* declared

We have the right to ask who has subsidized IMRO's incursions into Yugoslavia for so many years?<sup>97</sup> Who instigated revolt by Austrian Catholics, so as to justify Italian intervention and occupation? Who was responsible for the St. Gothard and Hirtenberg scandals?<sup>98</sup> Who has not yet stopped arming Austria and Hungary on the sly? And who maintains bands of Yugoslav émigrés on the Austrian border?<sup>99</sup>

Aware that the Yugoslav government had close contacts with Germany, the Italian government launched a round of counter-charges. Immediately after the Dollfuss murder, about 1,000 German refugees, some undoubtedly members of the Nazi party, had crossed into Yugoslavia.<sup>100</sup> Although Yugoslav authorities had disarmed and interned them pending clarification of their status, the Italian press made the most of the discovery. It claimed the existence of a secret pact between the Yugoslav government and Nazi agitators, according to which Serb dominance in Yugoslavia would be guaranteed and the Yugoslav government rewarded with Italian territory when the Germans conquered Austria. The *Messaggero* newspaper of 10 August reproduced a map allegedly stolen from the German mission in Yugoslavia. It showed a scheme of "Greater Germany, 1935," which included within its borders Prague, Brussels, Amsterdam, Strasbourg, Vienna, Trentino, and Trieste. The ensuing cycle of recriminations from Belgrade and Rome gave even veteran observers pause. The British diplomat Anthony Eden believed Italy and Yugoslavia might come to blows over the aftermath of the Dollfuss murder, pronouncing the acrimony between them "the chief danger in Europe at present."<sup>101</sup> Even as French-Italian agreement appeared to be a certainty, prospects for an Italo-Yugoslav agreement seemed more remote than ever.

Despite the volatile events of the summer, Barthou's efforts began to show some results in the early fall. Paradoxically, Belgrade's dispute with the Croats appeared to have helped him. In the months since the first demonstrations of German interest in Yugoslavia, German officials had consistently shown sympathy for the king's difficulties with his Croat subjects and expressed their indignation at Italian intrigues with those Croats. Gradually, however, the Yugoslav Foreign Ministry had become aware that Germany's intentions might be as suspect as Italy's. Belgrade knew that Croat émigrés had received some assistance from German sources before and after Hitler's assumption of power; the Yugoslav foreign minister had asked for, and received, assurances that a Croat émigré newspaper in Berlin would be suppressed. In the summer of 1934, the Yugoslav government learned that Berlin had not kept its word; it had continued to allow publication of the paper.<sup>102</sup> Even more disturbing was a complaint lodged some months after the December 1933 assassination attempt on King Aleksandar.<sup>103</sup> Indignant at the discovery of a possible financial link between the Gestapo and the conspirators in the murder plot, an official at the Yugoslav embassy in Prague charged that Germany had joined the Italians and Hungarians in working for the destruction of Yugoslavia.<sup>104</sup> In view of this development, it seemed that the German government might not be the reliable ally it had claimed to be.

The suggestion of German duplicity with regard to King Aleksandar's conflict with the Croats raised the disturbing possibility of another development: a German-Italian alliance. "What the Yugoslavs fear most," Naggiar had written in 1933, is a "collusion of two fascisms."<sup>105</sup> Although it seemed unlikely at the time of the Yugoslav-German talks in May, the inexplicable purge of the Nazi party in June, followed by Nazi-inspired Dollfuss murder in July, suggested to some Yugoslavs that National Socialism and Italian Fascism might be far more compatible than they seemed. "I believe that we might soon see an agreement between Italy and Germany," King Aleksandar told the French military attaché in Belgrade in October 1934. "Italian advantages in Austria will serve as bargaining chips. Germany acquiesces in this game," he continued, "in leaving Austria alone for the moment."<sup>106</sup>

As the Franco-Italian meetings scheduled for November 1934 drew nearer, the Yugoslav government reviewed its position. The endorsement of Barthou's initiatives implied an agreement with Italy, which was repugnant to Belgrade in view of its problems with the Croats. If Yugoslavia rejected them, on the other hand, it linked its

future with Germany, which may have had clandestine dealings with Belgrade's Croat enemies, and which could ally with unfriendly neighbors Italy, Austria, or Hungary at any time. French diplomacy under Barthou had proven remarkably constant in its insistence on the Paris settlements as the basis of peace in Europe and its attention to Belgrade's interests. In spite of their abiding mistrust of Italy, therefore, the ruling Serbs decided to seek détente with Italy. King Aleksandar announced in early October his plans to visit Paris to discuss the matter with Barthou.

The Italian government would make the king's decision the right one. As had been the case with Yugoslavia, recent German actions had played a role in forcing a reassessment of Italian foreign policy. The French embassy reported that German-Yugoslav contacts exposed after the Dollfuss murder had seriously preoccupied the Italians. If Germany and Yugoslavia became allies, Mussolini could reasonably expect that a huge anti-Italian Germany would join a steadfastly anti-Italian Yugoslavia to pose a real and constant threat to the Italian state. As Mussolini's Secretary of State, Baron Pompeo Aloisi, calculated, "there are at present 14 million Yugoslavs, but in a few years, there will be 30,000,000. Mussolini concluded that if they united with 80 million Germans there will be a mass of 110 million men" opposing Italy to the east.<sup>107</sup> Evidently impressed with these numbers, Mussolini gave his ambassador in Belgrade instructions to return to the Yugoslav capital and announce that he favored an understanding between the two nations. Days later, in a speech at Milan, Mussolini publicly expressed his desire for "a precise understanding with our Mediterranean neighbor."<sup>108</sup> The Duce had never taken a stronger stand in favor of Italian-Yugoslav détente.

On 9 October, observers speculating about possible arrangements among France, Italy, and Yugoslavia focused on Marseilles, where King Aleksandar was about to disembark en route to Paris for talks with Barthou. Aleksandar's trip was expected to end with Belgrade's assent to the Franco-Italian talks to be held in November, and to a corresponding détente with Italy. With Belgrade's blessing, Barthou would travel to Rome at the end of October to sign a political agreement with Italy. That agreement would be the final preparatory step towards negotiation of the Mediterranean pact.

In the end, however, the Serb-Croat conflict would emerge again to destroy French plans for countering the German threat. In October 1934, King Aleksandar made his promised trip to France for talks with Barthou on the proposed Italian-Yugoslav agreement to precede the Mediterranean Pact. As the king and the foreign minister rode through

the streets of Marseilles, waving to the crowds, an onlooker rushed the car and shot both men. King Aleksandar died immediately; Louis Barthou expired from loss of blood in the confusion attending the mortally wounded king. As the story emerged over the next few days, the assailants had done the bidding of Pavelić's Croat dissidents, allegedly working with IMRO operatives and shadowy figures from Italy.<sup>109</sup> Belgrade's intransigence in its dispute with the Croats had finally come home to roost, having cost the life of its king and one of its best friends in interwar Europe.<sup>110</sup>

### *Aftermath of assassination and a tardy accommodation*

For both nations, the long-term consequences of the Marseilles murders were decisive. Successive French governments proved unwilling or unable to maintain Barthou's campaign for a comprehensive anti-German security pact. In fact, France's basic commitments to Yugoslavia and other small-state allies soon came into question. Barthou's successor at the Quai d'Orsay, Pierre Laval, raised suspicions that he preferred a Franco-Italian alliance to any security arrangements involving Yugoslavia and the other small states. He pressed the Yugoslav government to mute its public indignation at alleged Italian-Croat complicity in King Aleksandar's murder because it might upset Mussolini.<sup>111</sup> In the subsequent turmoil surrounding the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Laval gave unimpeachable evidence of his desire for Italian friendship, regardless of its consequences for France or Yugoslavia.<sup>112</sup>

Laval's successor, Léon Blum, briefly raised hopes that France might renew Barthou's call to oppose the forces of revisionism with a comprehensive security scheme. In one of his first public statements, Blum emphasized the necessity of *collective* security in Europe, declaring, "with Belgium, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia, France is united not only by treaty, but also by a commonality of thought and goal."<sup>113</sup> He supported his rhetoric with concrete plans for reinvigorating French alliances with its small-state allies.<sup>114</sup> As a socialist, however, Blum and his Popular Front government were inevitably associated with the Soviet Union and Communism, which plunged it into continual controversy at home and abroad and caused its demise.<sup>115</sup> After Blum's fall, France began its final retreat from its commitments in Eastern Europe. By 1938 both the French public and its leaders seemed to endorse the sentiments of novelist Roger Martin du Gard, who declared in a letter to a friend, "Anything rather than

war! Anything...even Fascism in Spain...even Fascism in France: Nothing, no trial, no servitude can be compared to war: Anything, Hitler rather than war!"<sup>116</sup>

Reeling from the shock and grief of the assassination, Yugoslav leaders initially emphasized the idea of continuity with King Aleksandar's foreign and domestic policy. The German ambassador, Victor Heeren, correctly predicted that "obviously, in view of the confused situation prevailing at home, Yugoslavia's major aim in foreign policy must be to avoid unnecessary conflicts abroad and seek protection within existing alliances against possible attempts by Italy to make political capital out of Yugoslavia's sudden weakness."<sup>117</sup> But the regent, Prince Paul, wanted to guarantee the country's stability at home and abroad in order to smooth the way for young King Peter's accession. He and Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović thus found it necessary to depart from King Aleksandar's French oriented foreign policy. In 1936, the two principal revisionist powers in Europe, Germany and Italy, forged the Axis alliance the Yugoslavs had always feared. Acknowledging France's growing political and diplomatic weakness after Barthou's death, the Yugoslav government distanced itself from that state and endeavored to find a *modus vivendi* with the Axis powers.<sup>118</sup> It expanded its growing economic relationship with Germany in 1936, helping that nation to construct its *Grossraumwirtschaft* in southeast Europe.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, Yugoslav leaders managed a détente of sorts with Italy in the Italo-Yugoslav agreement of 1937.<sup>120</sup> If it were imperative to remain neutral in the new, dangerous Europe they faced, they would have to avoid, or at least check, excessive German influence in the country. The agreement with Italy made a fine counterbalancing measure, particularly in the economic realm.

The achievement of domestic peace was a more difficult proposition, because Yugoslav leaders declined to follow up changes in foreign policy with a resolution of the Serb-Croat problem. When former Yugoslav Foreign Minister Jevtić formed a government in the immediate aftermath of the Marseilles tragedy in late 1934, he seemed to acknowledge that the ethnic conflict had played a role in the King Aleksandar's death.<sup>121</sup> He sought a broader representation in his cabinet from among those groups who had been silenced during the royal dictatorship; according to a French journalist, he believed that the participation of ex-opposition parties "would aid in the establishment of a more liberal regime."<sup>122</sup> He also granted amnesty to Maček, the imprisoned Croat Peasant Party leader. But there occurred no fundamental change in the state structure. Maček

therefore took advantage of his release to renew his campaign for a federal Yugoslavia in conversations with diplomats and reporters.<sup>123</sup> At about the same time, there occurred a series of Serb-Croat clashes throughout Yugoslavia. Several individuals were killed in Zagreb riots between 29 March and 30 March 1936, causing the rector of Zagreb University to resign in protest. On 16 April 1936, Croat villagers clashed with Serb supporters of the Stojadinović government near Krestinec castle, the former residence of the Ban of Croatia and Slovenia. The villagers attacked the Serbs, who, according to Maček, had come to make trouble. When the dust settled from the fracas, six Serbs were dead.<sup>124</sup> A month later, Maček demanded "the liquidation for once and all of the pernicious regime established by the late King Aleksandar."<sup>125</sup>

Despite the continual agitation, it seemed that only seismic change could convince the Yugoslav government to settle its most intractable domestic dispute. In September 1938, the Munich agreement dramatically altered the diplomatic landscape. The French and British governments gave formal notice that they would not fight for the integrity of Czechoslovakia, a creation of the 1919 Paris settlements. Few doubted that war was coming. Despite Yugoslavs' strenuous efforts to maintain cordial relations with Italy and Germany, it was now more than conceivable that in the event of war, Italy would help the Croats break away from Yugoslavia in exchange for territorial concessions. The Yugoslav government would be powerless to stop this. If it hoped to maintain its territorial integrity, it would have to agree at last to Croat demands for a federal Yugoslavia. If it did so, it would at least neutralize the extremists who wanted an independent Croatia.

The accommodation came in the form of an agreement worked out by the Croat Peasant Party leader, Maček, and the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Dragiša Cvetković. This agreement, or *sporazum*, reflected Croat demands dating to the discussions preceding the adoption of the Vidovdan Constitution in 1919: it established a separate Croatian *banovina*, comprised of historic Croatian territories previously assigned to other *banovine*. A Belgrade-appointed *ban*, or governor, would rule the Croatian *banovina* and the Croatian *sabor*, or legislature, would be revived to decide matters of local importance. The central government at Belgrade would retain control of matters of national interest such as foreign policy, defense, trade, and communications. In most respects, the *sporazum* replicated the 1867 compromise which had redefined relations between the Habsburg Monarchy and Hungary.<sup>126</sup>

Negotiations having commenced several months earlier, the

*sporazum* was signed on 20 August 1939. Unfortunately for the Yugoslavs, the timing could not have been worse. Just three days after the signature of the *sporazum*, Adolf Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union, guaranteeing German and Italian hegemony in Eastern Europe and the destruction of the European order established two decades earlier. Only a year and a half remained before Hitler would be able to force the Tripartite Pact upon Yugoslavia.<sup>127</sup> The signature of that pact triggered the overthrow of Prince Paul's government by Serb officers and the beginning of the German and Italian occupation of Yugoslavia.<sup>128</sup> That ordeal, which claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, would be rivaled in savagery by recent hostilities in Bosnia.

It still mattered in 1939, of course, that the Croats would become active and cooperative participants in the governing of Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the conclusion seems inescapable that had the Serb-Croat disagreement been resolved six years earlier, the prospects for credible opposition to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in Europe would have been much improved.

As has been seen, the Serb-Croat quarrel played a significant part in European diplomacy well before it triggered the Yugoslav civil wars in the 1990s. In two short years of the interwar period, it frustrated France's efforts to retain its relationship with Yugoslavia and negotiate an alliance with Italy in the interest of countering German expansion in Central Europe. It gave Germany an entrée into Yugoslavia and laid the groundwork for future economic cooperation between the two nations. It killed chances for a comprehensive anti-Hitler security arrangement as surely as it killed Louis Barthou and King Aleksandar. Finally, it helped create the conditions that brought disgraceful defeat upon France and a brutal Axis occupation to Yugoslavia. The circumstances in which the conflict wreaked its havoc changed between the 1930s and 1990s, but the results proved to be the same: death, destruction and the end of a South Slav state.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Milošević's assertions about Vojvodina and Kosovo were just one item on a long list of complaints about the alleged slights Serbs were said to have suffered in Tito's Yugoslavia; for their part, Croats had nurtured considerable resentment themselves, for different reasons. For an insightful and detailed exposition of Serbian and Croatian grievances in Tito's Yugoslavia, consult Tim Judah's recent profile of the Serbs, *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), and Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). Both books address at length the role of these grievances in the unleashing of the Yugoslav civil war.

<sup>2</sup> For a clear explanation of the background to the Serb-Croat war and that conflict's connection with the ensuing Bosnian hostilities, see "The Gathering Storm," "Brotherhood and Disunity," and "The Struggle for Bosnia" in Sabrina P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Disintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War, 2nd ed.* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Slavenka Drakulić, *Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993), p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> French alliances with the small states were a matter of necessity rather than conviction. The country's diplomats had originally sought a Franco-British-American guarantee of French post-war frontiers during the Paris negotiations. British and American representatives rejected the proposal, on the grounds that temporary military control would suffice, but expressed their willingness to substitute pacts promising assistance in the event of any acts of German aggression. French representatives accepted this arrangement, only to see the ensuing pacts with Britain and the United States invalidated when the United States Senate refused to ratify the American treaty with France.

When the grand Allied coalition fell apart, the French government had to appeal to Britain to provide guarantees. Unfortunately, the David Lloyd-George government and the British public quickly came to believe that the Paris settlements bore within them the seeds of another war, a possibility they categorically rejected. Germany and its allies could not be expected to suffer the treaty's harsh terms indefinitely, it was felt, and the component settlements left pockets of

grievance and instability all throughout Europe. Thus, the Lloyd-George government declined to commit itself to any guarantees of the Paris settlements.

French commitments in Eastern Europe should therefore be regarded as a last resort in the quest to maintain the 1919 settlements. Even so, the policy had its critics. Typical of these was Wladimir d'Ormesson, a diplomat and journalist. Upon his return from a fact-finding trip to central and southeastern Europe, Ormesson published an account of his travels with the telling title, *Nos illusions sur l'Europe centrale*. Ormesson asserted that political, social and economic conditions in eastern Europe led to the conclusion that France's allies there were "fragile and vulnerable," beset with intractable problems and likely to prove to be a burden rather than a help. Ormesson opined that "the Little Entente, while it constitutes an important part of the current European political structure, is an organization based on temporary interests, covering a small area and pursuing limited goals." It would not behoove France, he implied, to place all of its hopes for the successful defense of the peace on this fragile configuration of states. The country would do better to enforce the Versailles treaty strictly, extract maximum financial compensation from Germany, and resurrect the old Franco-Russian alliance with the Soviet Union. Wladimir d'Ormesson, *Nos illusions sur l'Europe centrale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1922), pp. 122-130.

<sup>5</sup> After he imposed a royal dictatorship on the country in January 1929, King Aleksandar declared that henceforth the country would be known as Yugoslavia.

<sup>6</sup> By terms of the *Nagodba*, translated either as compromise or agreement, Croatia had a special arrangement with the Hungarians in the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy. In contrast to other nationalities in the Hungarian lands, who were subject to forced cultural assimilation (Magyarization), Croats retained their own legislative body (the *Sabor*) as well as the right to use Croatian as the language of local administration.

<sup>7</sup> Pavle D. Ostović, *The Truth about Yugoslavia* (New York: Roy Publishers, 1952), p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief but illuminating discussion of Serb-Croat politics in the 1920s, see Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe Before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 192-194.

<sup>9</sup> According to a Yugoslav historian, some at the Quai d'Orsay (the French Foreign Ministry), also believed that the Croats remained pro-Austrian and therefore pro-German, and that federalism in the Croat lands could provide an entrée for German penetration towards the Adriatic. See Gordana Krivokapić, "Francusko vibenje unutrašnje politike kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca v vreme njenog konstitusanja 1918-1921," in *Jugoslovensko-francuski odnosi (Rapports franco-yougoslaves): Povodom 150 godina od otvaranja prvog konzulata u Srbiji* (Belgrade: Istorijski institut, 1990), pp. 252-253.

<sup>10</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 246.

<sup>11</sup> This view was dominant, but not universal. At *Le Populaire*, columnist Oscar Rosenfeld made the French government and its ties to the Yugoslav dictatorship a point of special emphasis, hoping to persuade officials to force the Serb government to relinquish its monopoly on the country's institutions. He disparaged King Aleksandar as "the assassin-king," the "king-perjurer," and caricatured the "dictators' rendezvous," meetings between Aleksandar and other Balkan monarchs. More substantially, Rosenfeld warned that loans made by the French government would never be repaid when the dictatorship's opponents overthrew King Aleksandar; France's investment would meet the same fate as the prewar government's loans to Tsarist Russia. For examples of Rosenfeld's views on Yugoslavia, see *Le Populaire* (Paris), 6 January 1931, p. 3; 6 April 1931, p. 3; 12 June 1931, p. 3; and 5 May 1931, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslav Committee, a group representing Habsburg South Slavs who advocated the creation of a South Slav state, helped negotiate the terms for the first Yugoslavia with Serbian representatives during talks on the island of Corfu in June 1917. Ante Trumbić, a Dalmatian Croat, was an important player in these negotiations, which resulted in the Corfu declaration—the blueprint for the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

<sup>13</sup> Bogdan Krizman, "Trumbićeva misija u inozemstvu uoči proglašenje šestojanuarske diktature," in *Historijski pregled*, No. 3 (July-August 1962), p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> *Le Temps* (Paris), 24 August 1928, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Krizman, "Trumbićeva misija," p. 191.

<sup>16</sup> The *banovine* were Dravska (Slovenia), Savska (Croatia-Slavonia, parts of Bosnia, Vojvodina and the Adriatic coast between Fiume and Zadar), Primorska (central Dalmatia and part of Western Bosnia), Dunavska (most of Vojvodina and part of northern Serbia), Drinska (central Bosnia and part of western Serbia), Vrbanska (northern Bosnia), Žetska (Montenegro, Hercegovina, and Kosovo), Moravska (central Serbia), and Vardarska (Macedonia and southern Serbia). See Fred Singleton, *Twentieth Century Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 84-85.

<sup>17</sup> Maček had once described what he wanted to see happen in the Kingdom after the ratification of the Vidovdan constitution. He had borrowed a metaphor from the Hungarian statesman Francis Deak, asserting that if a vest is buttoned the wrong way, one must unbutton it entirely to fix the problem. In other words, to make the Kingdom work, the Vidovdan constitution ought to be abandoned and federalism implemented. Upon the proclamation of the dictatorship, the Croat Peasant Party leader declared—prematurely—that the vest had been unbuttoned. See Henri Levray, "La Yougoslavie actuelle," in *Monde slave*, No. 9 (December 1932), p. 392.

<sup>18</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson and the *Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906-1941*, Vol. II (Zagreb: Institute of Croatian History, 1976), p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> Vladko Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1971), pp. 126-141.

<sup>20</sup> There is evidence that some French officials urged the king to make more substantive changes. In early 1933, the French ambassador in Belgrade, Émile Naggiar, made an interesting reference to previous conversations with King Aleksandar. According to Naggiar, the king was telling him, "we are suffering from traditions of lethargy, minutiae, and excessive centralism dating back to the former Austrian administration." "And yet," Naggiar added, "I have been telling him for two years that *administrative decentralization is necessary*. Once this is realized, all current difficulties will lessen." Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 2 March 1933, *Documents diplomatiques français*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 737 (hereafter DDF).

<sup>21</sup> *Le Temps* (8 January 1929), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> XXX, "La dictature yougoslave," in *Le Monde slave*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (June 1931), p. 329. See also Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 134-135;

and *Le Populaire* (Paris), 7 January 1929, p. 1. Rosenfeld asserted that the Quai d'Orsay had encouraged Aleksandar in the imposition of the dictatorship. "Let's not forget," he wrote, "that Yugoslavia is France's ally. Nothing is done in Belgrade without the authorization of the Quai d'Orsay."

<sup>23</sup> Vuk Vinaver, "Početak 'nemačke orientacije' stare Jugoslavije," in *Istorijski zapisi*, No. 3-4 (1977), p. 795.

<sup>24</sup> A couple of examples: on 6 January 1931, Oscar Rosenfeld warned that loans made to Yugoslavia's "absolute monarchy" would never be repaid by the dictatorship's opponents, who would overthrow King Aleksandar eventually. On 6 April of the same year, the columnist accused the French foreign ministry of fomenting civil war within Yugoslavia because official France refused to intervene and stop Belgrade's press censorship, which he felt would transform verbal combat into overt action at some point. On 6 June, he again addressed unconditional French financial support of the dictatorship, equating French loans to Yugoslavia with those made to the government of Nicholas II before World War I.

<sup>25</sup> Živko Abramovski, *Britanci o kraljevini Jugoslavije 1921-38: Godišnji izveštaji Britanskog poslanstva u Beogradu 1921-1938*, Vol. 2 (Belgrade: Arhiv Jugoslavije, 1986), pp. 100-101.

<sup>26</sup> Letter from Léon Noel to Jean Paul-Boncour (Prague), 15 January 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, pp. 298-299.

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Andre François-Poncet to Jean Paul-Boncour (Berlin), 15 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 1819. "SA" reference is to Hitler's *Sturm Abteilungen*, or Storm Troopers, led by Ernst Röhm until his death in the so-called "Night of the Long Knives" in June 1934.

<sup>28</sup> Norman Baynes, ed., *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, Vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 1014.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Andre François-Poncet to Jean Paul-Boncour (Berlin), 7 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 751.

<sup>30</sup> *Le Populaire* (Paris), 17 February 1933, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Franco-Soviet talks had begun in the early 1930s, covering economic and political affairs. Among the first post-war agreements signed between the two nations was a non-aggression pact negotiated between 1931 and 1932 and signed on 29 November 1932. After Hitler's rise to power in Germany, evidence of a *rapprochement* became clear in Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov's endorsement of French proposals at the London disarmament conference. Boncour's government did not push the matter far, however, because its leftist orientation did not permit it to do so, and because the USSR was not yet a member of the League of Nations.

<sup>32</sup> Jean Paul-Boncour, *Entre deux guerres: souvenirs sur la Troisième République*, Vol. III (Paris: Plon, 1945), p. 341.

<sup>33</sup> Like Germany, Italy had always been aggrieved at the loss of territories to which it felt entitled. By the terms of the Treaty of London, signed 1 April 1915, Italy was to have received the South Tyrol, Trieste, Gorizia-Gradišča, much of Istria and Dalmatia, and a protectorate over Albania. In the ensuing peace settlements, United States President Woodrow Wilson declared that he would not be bound by the London agreement since it did not qualify as an open covenant. While he was willing to see Italy granted the South Tyrol and other territories, he rejected Italy's claim to Dalmatia and Fiume, declaring that Dalmatia belonged properly to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (as the first Yugoslavia was known until 1929). Eventually, the government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes reached a compromise with Italy over Dalmatia in the 1920 Treaty of Rapallo. But Italy remained unreconciled to the Kingdom's possession of Dalmatia, and the latter remained the major point of discord between the two countries throughout the interwar period. See Carlile A. MacCartney and Alan Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), pp. 128-129.

<sup>34</sup> Mussolini once remarked to his foreign minister, Pompeo Aloisi, that Italy could "march with Germany on the Rhine, but not on the Danube." Pompeo Aloisi, *Journal 25 juillet 1932-1914 juin 1936* (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 51. The Duce clearly viewed Germany as a threat in Central Europe, a fact on which French diplomats hoped to capitalize.

<sup>35</sup> Paul-Boncour had only to consider comments made by the French ambassador to Italy in 1925 to see antecedents for French-Italian cooperation against a strong Germany in Europe. René Besnard had

written, "Mussolini spoke with me today about Austria. His greatest fear was the union of Austria with Germany, and he told me that he had issued a formal warning to the German ambassador to the effect that Italy would never tolerate a German annexation of Austria." At the same time, the Italian general Pietro Badoglio called for joint French-Italian initiatives to prevent such an occurrence, declaring, "We, French and Italians, must form a close union: the Germans have already made more preparations than is generally believed...Italy and France must face it together, with great resolution." See Robert Dampierre, "Dix années de politique française à Rome," Part 1, in *Revue des deux mondes* (1 November 1953), p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Le Temps* (17 March 1933), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> In a year-end summary for the year 1931, for example, British diplomats reported a French loan to Yugoslavia in the amount of 1.025 million francs, to be supplemented with additional sums from Czech and Dutch banks. In addition to proffering this type of assistance, the French government withheld demands that previous Yugoslav loans—some dating to World War I and the prewar Kingdom of Serbia—be repaid. See Abramovski, *Britanci o kraljevini Jugoslavije*, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> *Le Populaire* (Paris), 6 March 1931, p. 3; Henri Levray, "La Yougoslavie actuelle," in *Le Monde slave*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 1933), pp. 24-25.

<sup>39</sup> "Ustaša" derives from the Croatian word "ustanak," which means insurrection. Ante Pavelić outlined his views on the Serb-Croat issue in a 1929 appeal to the League of Nations. The Croatian people, Pavelić asserted, had expressed their desire for autonomy peacefully, avoiding violence and/or armed conflict, because they were certain that this course was best. They were rewarded with silence, then the assassination of one of their most respected leaders, Stjepan Radić, in 1928. In general, the time had passed for peaceful opposition, because the Belgrade government had used its power to thwart the wishes of the Croatian people and treat Croatia as it would a conquered enemy. See Rudolf Horvat, *Hrvatska na mučilištu* (Zagreb: Hrvatski Rodoljub, 1942), pp. 352-353. See also "Ustav ustaše, hrvatske revolucionarne organizacije," in Petar Pozar, ed., *Ustaša: dokumenti o ustaškom pokretu* (Zagreb: Zagrebačka stvarnost, 1995), pp. 45-47.

<sup>40</sup>In a 1929 exposition of principles, Pavelić wrote, "Adriatic questions should be decided between Italy and the Adriatic peoples (Croats, Montenegro, and Albania). Without any reservations, Croats acknowledge Italy's right to dominance in the Adriatic and condemn anyone who denies it this right." See Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978), pp. 14-15.

<sup>41</sup>Jacques Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1975), p. 136.

<sup>42</sup>Letter from Bertrand Clauzel to Jean Paul-Boncour (Vienna), 14 January 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. III, pp. 436-39.

<sup>43</sup>Letter from Robert Dampierre to Jean Paul-Boncour (Rome), 28 December 1932, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 327.

<sup>44</sup>According to the historian of the *Ustaša* movement, Bogdan Krizman, the Janka Pusta camp was organized in late 1931 or early 1932. Its original population consisted of 25 émigré "warriors" for independent Croatia. See Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, p. 102.

<sup>45</sup>Letter from Andre François-Poncet to Edward Herriot (Berlin), 15 December 1932, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, pp. 262-263.

<sup>46</sup>Letter from Robert Dampierre to Jean Paul-Boncour (Rome), 15 January 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. III, p. 454.

<sup>47</sup>The Italian foreign minister, Pompeo Aloisi, included several meetings with *Ustaša* leaders in his memoir. In one such meeting on 9 January 1933, he spoke openly with Pavelić and others about when direct Italian intervention would be most advantageous. See Aloisi, *Journal*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>48</sup>In early 1933, Naggiar informed the Quai d'Orsay, "Italy wishes to detach the Croats and Slovenes from Belgrade...it believes, or claims to believe in Croat and Slovene friendship...and imagines the quarrels between Croat and Slovenes and Serbs are a harbinger of the coming destruction of the Yugoslav state." Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 2 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 371.

<sup>49</sup>The Four-Power Pact originated in French and British hopes to

convince the new Germany to accept a measured revision of armament and other restrictions Hitler believed unfair—rather than risk having Hitler denounce them and begin re-arming on his own. The idea was to have France, Britain, Italy, and Germany sign an agreement pledging their cooperation in a gradual, rather than immediate, revision of those aspects of the Versailles Treaty most unacceptable to Germany. In March 1933, Mussolini submitted his own version of this pact, which stipulated equality of armaments for Germany and reiterated the necessity of other revisions of the Paris settlements. Boncour seized upon this as a cooperative French-Italian diplomatic initiative, declaring, “the two guarantors of the Locarno treaties having agreed on 18 March to guarantee the maintenance of the European peace for ten years...it is inconceivable that any French government could fail to assume responsibility for such an initiative.” See Dampierre, “Dix années de politique française à Rome,” Part 2, pp. 265-266.

The French government did not, however, count upon the vehemence with which its small-state allies rejected this agreement. Typical of the reaction was Romanian Prime Minister Nicolae Titulescu’s tirade upon hearing of the Pact. The journalist Genevieve Tabouis overheard him raging at Boncour during a visit to Paris. “If France betrays her mission to protect the small nations,” Titulescu warned, “we will do without her. We are not so weak and unfortunate that we cannot find other allies who will be more loyal...we shall not bow before your Paris Peace club.” See Genevieve Tabouis, *They Called Me Cassandra* (New York: Scribner, 1942), pp. 112-113.

These objections made multiple revisions of the Pact necessary, so that the final version—signed on 15 July 1933—was essentially an endorsement of the 1919 peace settlements.

<sup>50</sup>Ivan Meštrović, *Uspomene na političke ljude i događaje* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1961), p. 200.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Letter from Jean Paul-Boncour to Émile Naggiar (Paris), 17 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 846.

<sup>53</sup>Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 2 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 327.

<sup>54</sup>Vuk Vinaver, “Promene u jugoslovenskoj spoljnoj politici 1927-1934 u vezi sa nacionalnim pitanijem,” in *Istorijski glasnik*, No. 2 (May-June 1969), p. 128.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Albert Dufour to Foreign Ministry (Belgrade), *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1957-1966), Series C-1, p. 510 (hereafter *DGFP*).

<sup>56</sup> Dampierre, "Dix années de politique française à Rome," Part 1, p. 269.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Léon Noel to Jean Paul-Boncour (Prague), 19 June 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. III, pp. 739-740.

<sup>58</sup> Berend, *Decades of Crisis*, p. 235.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>61</sup> Boncour-representatives of France in Rome, Bucharest, London, Budapest, Belgrade, Warsaw, Prague, and Vienna, 25 August 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 247.

<sup>62</sup> The Boncour government was aware that French economic assistance to Yugoslavia and its other Danubian allies was continually insufficient. The world economic crisis of 1931-1932, while it brought hard times for France and other developed countries of the west, could hardly be considered fatal. The same could not be said with respect to Yugoslavia and its neighbors. Because they were primarily agrarian-industrial, they were not only "shaken and depleted" but "attacked at their very core," as two economic historians of the area asserted. In spite of the latter circumstances, the French government had not been able to increase its exports to or imports from these countries, because of its obligations to its own producers. Although French officials had promised the Yugoslav government in 1931 that France would take some 80,000 tons of wheat, it was able to import only a disappointing 15,000 tons. Therefore, a sensible organization of agrarian and industrial states in central Europe had great attraction for French politicians—not least because Nazi Germany, a natural trading partner for the southeast and Central European states, would doubtless be pleased to undermine French influence there with economic enticements.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Boncour wrote Bertrand de Jouvenel in late March that Jouvenel should underscore in his conversations with Mussolini the necessity of working together to “deal a decisive blow to *anschluss*” and tie the Danubian nations together with a series of agreements in order to revive the area’s depressed economy. Letter from Jean Paul-Boncour to Bertrand de Jouvenel (Rome), 17 March 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 841.

<sup>64</sup> In his new history of Yugoslavia, John Lampe discusses the disproportionate impact of the economic crisis on Croatian banks and Croatian farmers. John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 168-170.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Sir Ronald Campbell to Sir John Simon (Paris), 5 September 1933, *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1950-1957), Second Series, Vol. V, p. 566 (hereafter *DBFP*).

<sup>66</sup> The Italian under-secretary of state, Fulvio Suvich, told the departing ambassador to Italy, Bertrand de Jouvenel, that “an understanding between Italy and the Little Entente was a precondition of any Danubian agreement,” because “Yugoslavia in particular had not been ‘very friendly’ lately.” The concessions to which Suvich alluded almost certainly implied territorial revisions, because both Italy and Hungary disputed Yugoslavia’s claim to certain territories. The French ambassador to Poland underlined this in a dispatch to Boncour, noting that within the Duce’s entourage, it was widely held that revision of the Treaty of Trianon was a “just and necessary step.” Letter from Jules LaRoche to Jean Paul-Boncour (Warsaw), 23 January 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. II, p. 500.

Hungarian statesmen were adamant throughout the interwar period about the necessity of revising the Trianon Treaty in Hungary’s favor. They achieved this objective eventually, in the Hitler-sponsored “Vienna awards” of 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 7 August 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. IV, pp. 168-169.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 3 September 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. IV, p. 245.

<sup>69</sup> *Politika* (Belgrade), 29 June 1933, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Aleksandar Vukčević, the new Yugoslav ambassador in Budapest, told the French minister Louis de Vienne that he had learned the Vatican had been talking to Hungarian legitimists in Rome about supporting the return of the Habsburg heir, Otto. According to Vukčević, the Pope was "praying every day for Otto's return" to his rightful place, and that the pontiff was contemplating abandoning his traditional neutrality to express his public support for a Habsburg revival. Additionally, there had appeared an article in the Italian daily *Popolo d'Italia* in which it was stated that the Italian government had "no hostility in principle" to a Habsburg return. The possibility of a Habsburg return was admittedly remote and would cause all kinds of legal difficulties, but the Yugoslavs continued to believe that it was possible and took any and all information tending to support that view deadly seriously. Letter from Louis de Vienne to Louis Barthou (Budapest), 21 April 1934, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. VI, pp. 318-319.

<sup>71</sup> The Kingdom of Serbia had clashed repeatedly with Austria-Hungary on both economic and political grounds, especially concerning Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. Serbs considered Bosnia-Herzegovina to be historic Serbian territory and believed Austria-Hungary's annexation of it to be a provocation. In 1914, it will be recalled, the Bosnian Serb Gavrilo Princip had assassinated the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand. The Austro-Hungarian government was moved to take retaliatory measures against Serbia, measures which led to the outbreak of World War I.

<sup>72</sup> In an interview with French journalist Georges Roux, Croat Peasant Party leader Vladko Maček made the following comments: "In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, we had to submit to a special constitutional arrangement. We did not like this, because Hungary exploited us economically. This is why we, Croats and Serbs living in Croatia, wanted Croatia to be separate from Hungary. Finally, we achieved this, thanks to the Allies. Unhappily, our situation today is a hundred times worse than it was then. If we had known what we were in for, we would have done nothing to destroy the Monarchy. Before, we had at least some independence, where public instruction and civil justice were concerned; economically, we had some of our own money to spend. Now we have nothing: no administrative authority, no cultural or economic justice in this country." See Georges Roux, "Inquiétudes yougoslaves," in *Revue de Paris*, No. 40 (May-June 1933), p. 107.

<sup>73</sup>XXX, "La fin d'une dictature," in *Revue de Paris*, No. 43 (March-April 1936), p. 726.

<sup>74</sup> Memorandum of the Foreign Minister (Berlin), 8 March 1934, *DGFP*, Series C-II, p. 578.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 579.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 578.

<sup>78</sup> The Staviskii affair rocked France in January and February 1934. A French citizen of Russian Jewish ancestry, Serge Staviskii, stood accused of issuing fraudulent bonds on the security of a municipal pawnshop in the town of Bayonne. Staviskii committed suicide before being formally charged with corruption, but the scandal took on new life when it became known that Staviskii's dubious financial dealings had enjoyed protection from high-ranking French judges and government officials. Representatives of the French Right and Left seized upon the revelations to criticize the weakness of the Third Republic and serious street riots took place at the beginning of February. A respected former French President, Gaston Doumergue, quickly formed a new Government of National Unity to save the day. This affair marked the beginning of the end of the Third Republic, the first step on the road to Vichy.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 8 March 1934, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. VI, pp. 433-434.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 2 June 1934, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. VI, p. 596.

<sup>81</sup> *Politika* (Belgrade), 3 December 1933, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 May 1934, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> The German ambassador's account went as follows: "[King Aleksandar] said there were, in his opinion, quite excellent Jews: for example, the Jews in Yugoslavia, in Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Skopje, were very patriotic, while in Romania they were a curse to the morals of the nation. Germany was now exposed to sharp attacks from abroad, and

he [King Aleksandar] therefore had a certain sympathy for Germany...but every government had to try to put through vigorously what it considered right, and if no danger resulted from this for the outside world, other countries that employed different, possibly democratic methods would gradually calm down." See letter from Albert Dufour to Foreign Ministry (Belgrade), 1 June 1933, DGFP, Series C-I, p. 510.

<sup>84</sup> *Politika* (Belgrade), 5 May 1934, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> *Le Temps* (27 May 1934), p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from George Clerk to Sir John Simon (Paris), 15 June 1934, DBFP, Second Series, Vol. VI, pp. 759-760.

<sup>87</sup> *Politika* (Belgrade), 20 May 1934, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Signed 17 March 1934, these accords provided for closer relations among the three Danubian revisionist powers and increased economic collaboration. In the eyes of status-quo nations, these agreements seemed to indicate that Italy was dominating and directing Austria and neighboring Hungary.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Kurt Reith to Foreign Ministry (Vienna), 10 March 1934, DGFP, Series C-II, p. 581.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Victor Heeren to Foreign Ministry (Belgrade), 27 June 1934, DGFP, Series C-III, p. 93.

<sup>91</sup> At the beginning of 1934, August Perčec, then the commanding officer of the Janka Pusta outpost of the *Ustaše*, reported, "there are thirty Croatian émigrés here, working daily on their skills with bombs and weaponry." See Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, p. 128.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Bertrand Clauzel to Jean Paul-Boncour (Rome), 23 May 1933, DDF, Première série, Vol. II, p. 557.

<sup>93</sup> This must have been particularly galling in view of the persistent rumors that in the event of an Italo-German alliance, Italy would be accorded predominant status in Austria, while Germany would feel free to seize Danzig and the Polish corridor.

<sup>94</sup>30 June refers to the notorious “night of the long knives,” when Hitler and his SS murdered Ernst Röhm and approximately 150 other members of the S.A., or Sturmabteilung; 25 July was the day on which Dollfuss was assassinated.

<sup>95</sup>Letter from Robert Dampierre to Roger Chambrun (Rome), 30 July 1934, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. VII, p. 35.

<sup>96</sup>*Politika* (Belgrade), 9 August 1934, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup>IMRO is the acronym for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization, founded in 1893 in Thessaloniki, Greece. In the interwar period, its members were split into two factions, one favoring the creation of an autonomous Macedonia and the other the annexation of Macedonia to Bulgaria. Both factions, however, shared the *Ustaša's* belief in violence as a means of achieving their ends. IMRO and the *Ustaše* also considered the Yugoslav government as their enemies, IMRO because Yugoslavia had Macedonia and the *Ustaše* because the Yugoslav government had mistreated Croatia in their view.

<sup>98</sup>These were incidents in which Italian officials were alleged to have provided Croat dissidents with weapons for use against the Yugoslav government. See page 29.

<sup>99</sup>Quoted in *Le Temps* (2 September 1934), p. 6.

<sup>100</sup>Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1934* (London: Oxford, 1935), p. 476.

<sup>101</sup>Letter from Sir Maurice Peterson to Sir John Simon (Rome); 18 September 1934, *DBFP*, Second Series, Vol. XII, p. 100.

<sup>102</sup>The German Foreign Ministry acknowledged Yugoslav inquiries about Croat émigrés and the newspapers in a November 1934 memorandum. “The Yugoslavs suspect,” a senior Wilhelmstrasse official concluded, “that the Croats are still receiving support here.” Memorandum by an official of Department II (Berlin), 16 November 1934, *DGFP*, Series C-III, p. 637.

<sup>103</sup>The attempt took place 16 December 1933, as King Aleksandar was visiting the Croatian capital of Zagreb.

<sup>104</sup> Dušan Biber, "Ustaše i Treći Reich: Prilog problematici jugoslovensko-nemačkih odnosa 1933-1939," in *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, No. 2 (1964), p. 41.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Émile Naggiar to Jean Paul-Boncour (Belgrade), 6 April 1933, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. III, p. 184.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from General Antoine Bethouart to Marshall Philippe Pétain (Belgrade), 2 October 1934, *DDF*, Première série, Vol. VII, p. 640.

<sup>107</sup> Pompeo Aloisi, *Journal 25 juillet 1932-14 juin 1936* (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 214.

<sup>108</sup> Benito Mussolini, *Scritti i discorsi del gennaio 1934 al 4 novembre 1934* (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1935), pp. 128-129.

<sup>109</sup> The assassin's name was Vlada Georgiev, a Bulgarian with documented ties to anti-Yugoslav groups, including IMRO and the *Ustaše*. It was universally assumed that he had not acted on his own.

<sup>110</sup> Even if French-Italian Yugoslav negotiations had succeeded, Barthou seemed certain to encounter insurmountable opposition when the time came to involve the Soviet Union as an anchor of both the Eastern and Mediterranean pacts. The Yugoslavs had never recognized the Soviet Union and harbored great hostility towards it. In part, this hostility resulted from King Aleksandar's close relations with the murdered Tsar Nicholas II and his family as well as the presence of a sizeable Russian émigré community, which had found a hospitable welcome among the Serbs. "Yugoslavia continues to be the principal refuge of the counter-revolutionary emigration," Soviet foreign minister G. V. Chicherin declared, "where it plays a major and almost official role, creating schools, cadet groups, and paramilitary organizations." Of greater importance was the USSR's nationality policy, which recognized all national groups as equal. Croat Peasant Party leader Stjepan Radić had visited Moscow in the 1920s, complaining loudly to Soviet leaders of the Croats' mistreatment at the hands of the Serbs; a Yugoslav historian notes that the Belgrade government viewed these trips as the beginning of all the international unpleasantness it had experienced because of its insistence on centralist rule in the country.

Belgrade's animosity was not solely the product of bad publicity—it regarded Communism as a direct threat to state security, with good

reason. As early as 1920, Communists numbered about 60,000 in Yugoslavia, spurring the passage by the Yugoslav legislature of the 1921 *obznana*, the so-called Law for the Defense of the State, which made Communism illegal in Yugoslavia.

It is true that, at Barthou's urging, the Yugoslav government dropped its opposition to Soviet membership in the League of Nations in 1934, a prerequisite for the negotiations leading to the Eastern and Mediterranean pacts. On the other hand, the time had not yet come for the negotiation of controversial details, such as the passage of Soviet troops through Eastern Europe in the case of a German attack. It seems most unlikely, in view of its particular circumstances, that any Serbian-dominated government would acknowledge the necessity of bringing the Soviet Union near Yugoslav territory. Because of the conflict with the Croats, anti-Sovietism seemed likely to remain solid pillar of Yugoslav foreign policy throughout the interwar period. For an extended discussion of Soviet-Yugoslav differences, see Vuk Vinaver, "Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi 1919-1929," in *Istorija XX veka*, Vol. 7 (1965), pp. 93-183.

<sup>111</sup>It was not as if Laval did not know of the Italian-Croat relationship. Leftist newspapers in France, particularly *Le Populaire*, took care to report extensively on known ties between Italy and dissident Croats in the days following the assassination. On October 12, for example, the paper's lead article offered readers a look inside the *Ustaša* camps at Janka Pusta in Hungary and Borgotaro in Italy, stressing that food, lodging, and other assistance came straight from Rome. "The collusion between Ante Pavelić and Mussolini's Italy is an established fact," declared the article's author André LeRoux. See *Le Populaire* (12 October 1934), p. 1. See also 14 October 1934, p. 1; 14 October 1934, pp. 1-3; 18 October 1934, p. 1; 21 October 1934, p. 1; and 28 October 1934, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup>After the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, the Laval government was in a quandary: how to retain Italy as an ally against Germany while maintaining France's traditional opposition to aggression. Laval decided to take a public stand against the invasion by instructing French representatives to vote in the League of Nations for economic sanctions on Italy. He urged France's allies, including Yugoslavia, to follow suit. Sanctions promised to be a severe trial for Yugoslavia, since Italy was a major market for Yugoslav timber and agricultural products despite the political animosity between the two countries.

Misgivings aside, the Yugoslav government decided to vote for the sanctions, perhaps hoping that a severe setback for Italy might result in Mussolini's ouster. When French journalist Genevieve Tabouis discovered and disclosed the secret Hoare-Laval agreement, which sought to appease Italy with a colonial mandate over the periphery of Ethiopia and territories which had belonged to Italy before the 1896 Adowa disaster, the Yugoslavs were outraged. The sanctions had hurt the country's economy and done little else except to make Yugoslavia the easiest and most accessible target of Italy's wrath. Hoare-Laval left no doubt for the Yugoslav leadership that the Laval government would make any kind of compromise, however injurious to other allies, to retain Italian friendship.

<sup>113</sup> Léon Blum, *L'oeuvre de Léon Blum, Vol. IV: Du 6 février 1934 au front populaire, les lois sociales de 1936, la guerre d'Espagne* (Paris: Editions Albin-Michel, 1964), pp. 360-361.

<sup>114</sup> The Blum government made a good-faith effort to revive France's relations with its East European allies. It sent the French chief of staff, Maurice Gamélin, to Poland to discuss ways to strengthen the Franco-Polish military alliance. Blum and his foreign minister, Yvon Delbos, also contemplated concluding agreements with the Little Entente governments that would transform the character of the Entente. Originally formed to counter the threat of revisionist Hungary in the early 1920s, the Little Entente was to transform itself into an alliance against *all* enemies of the status quo in Europe.

These efforts foundered on the likely participation of the Soviet Union; France had a mutual assistance treaty in place with that state and any alliance plans would be incomplete without it. Neither Czechoslovakia nor Romania wanted Soviet forces on their territory. By this time Yugoslavia, which did not even recognize the USSR, had determined to chart a neutral course in order to avert conflict with ascendant Germany and Italy. It therefore rejected Blum's plans.

Of course, before Blum came to power, France had acquiesced in the German remilitarization of the Rhineland. It was difficult to see how France could anchor an alliance of East European states without access to the Rhineland for troops it would send to fulfill its alliance commitments.

For more information on Blum/Delbos foreign policy, see John Dreifort, *Yvon Delbos at the Quai d'Orsay: French Foreign Policy during the Popular Front 1936-1938* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973).

<sup>115</sup> The Yugoslavs' reaction to the Popular Front government was not enthusiastic, despite Blum's apparent determination to fight Italian and German advances in Europe. Yugoslav leaders rejected the idea of close contact with a nation they had shunned throughout the inter-war period, fearing the possible effects of that contact on its national-ity problems and domestic Communists. The French ambassador in Belgrade relayed a sense of Belgrade's feelings about Blum and the Popular Front in a November 1936 report. "If at one time Stojadinović welcomed the advent of a Popular Front government because of his personal friendship with Mr. Blum, the troubles wrought by the past few months in the interior of our country—street fighting, strikes, work stoppages, etc.—have certainly given him something to think about. They have had an even greater effect," the ambassador continued, "on the court, in particular Prince-Regent Paul, who feels—as he has told me several times—that especially in view of events in Spain, Communism is currently Europe's greatest menace." See letter from Robert Dampierre to Yvon Delbos (Belgrade), 10 November 1936, *DDF*, Deuxième série, Vol. IV, p. 729.

<sup>116</sup> Eugen Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York and London: Norton, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Victor Heeren to Foreign Ministry (Belgrade), 22 October 1934, *DGFP*, Series C-III, p. 520.

<sup>118</sup> As Yugoslav Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović told his French counterpart, Léon Blum, in the summer of 1936, "We are now obliged to reckon with the German danger you have allowed to emerge and flourish." Stojadinović then added, "Yugoslavia has only a short time in which to save itself from these two powerful enemies before they can combine to do us serious damage." See *Assemblée nationale, 1946-1948. Session de 1947. Commission chargée d'enquêter sur les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1935 I* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952), p. 127.

<sup>119</sup> Between 1933 and 1936, Germany nearly doubled imports from Yugoslavia; in 1936, Berlin proposed to double them yet again. In June 1936, the Yugoslav government of Prince Paul and Milan Stojadinović received Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, the German finance minister. Schacht arrived bearing gifts of considerable value to Belgrade, in the form of proposals for a dramatic increase in German purchases of Yugoslav goods. From a series of meetings with Yugoslav officials, Schacht could

boast of two important agreements. By terms of the first, the Yugoslav government agreed to restrict imports from other countries in favor of an exclusive arrangement with Germany whereby the latter would buy the entire exportable surplus of Yugoslav wheat, in addition to large quantities of corn, hemp, and grapes. Payment, it was stipulated, would be made entirely in German products. Also discussed in the course of these meetings were plans to expand German involvement in Yugoslav mining concerns, which "would take fully into account the legitimate concerns of the Yugoslav state." See letter from Victor Heeren to Foreign Ministry (Belgrade), 16 June 1936, *DGFP*, Series C-V, pp. 631-632.

<sup>120</sup>This agreement, born of Italy's desire to secure its coming invasion of Albania, actually had two parts: it began with a Italo-Yugoslav Commercial Treaty signed in September 1936, by the terms of which Italy promised to double its imports from Yugoslavia. In the formal political agreement signed in early 1937, the Italian government pledged to respect the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, withdraw its sponsorship of anti-Yugoslav activity on Italian soil and continue favorable economic relations with Yugoslavia. See letter from Robert Dampierre to Yvon Delbos (Belgrade), 30 September 1936, *DDF*, Deuxième série, Vol. II, p. 437. Terms of the political agreement can be found in Jacob Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in Crisis 1934-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 169-170.

<sup>121</sup>Jevtić's government lasted until July 1935, when Milan Stojadinović replaced him as prime minister.

<sup>122</sup>*Le Temps* (31 January 1935), p. 1. Among the parties included in the Jevtić cabinet were the Slovene People's Party and the Yugoslav Muslim organization.

<sup>123</sup>In one of many interviews with European and American newspapers, he told the *London Times*, "Yugoslav nationality is a fiction. There remain three separate nations in the country: Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes." Maček reiterated his party's demand for federalism, noting that only federalism would bring about equality of opportunity and the restoration of all national and political liberties in Croatia. See *The Times* (London), 13 February 1935, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup>Maček, *In the Struggle for Freedom*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>125</sup> Maček made this statement in an interview with a reporter from the French paper *Le Populaire*. *Le Populaire* (Paris), 27 May 1936, p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, pp. 190-192.

<sup>127</sup> Originally signed in September 1940 by Germany, Italy, and Japan, the Tripartite agreement obliged the signatories to come to each other's assistance in case of attack by an outside power not already involved in the war. The Yugoslav government signed the pact in late March 1941, after which Prince Paul's government was overthrown in a coup d'état. The *Ustaša* state of Ante Pavelić eventually signed the agreement.

<sup>128</sup> Ante Pavelić and the *Ustaše* followed on the heels of the occupiers and achieved their long-desired goal in the establishment of the independent state of Croatia (NDH, *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*) in April 1941. That state, which was located in both the Italian and German zone of occupied Yugoslavia, included Bosnia-Herzegovina and parts of Eastern Slavonia. It did not encompass the whole of the historic Triune Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia. That did not, however, stop the first president of post-Yugoslav Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, from referring to the NDH as an "expression of the Croatian nation's historic desire for an independent homeland." See Tanner, *Croatia*, p. 223.

Because the revolt of Serbian officers brought on the Nazi invasion, Serbia was under direct Nazi occupation during much of the war.

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ISSN 1078-5639

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