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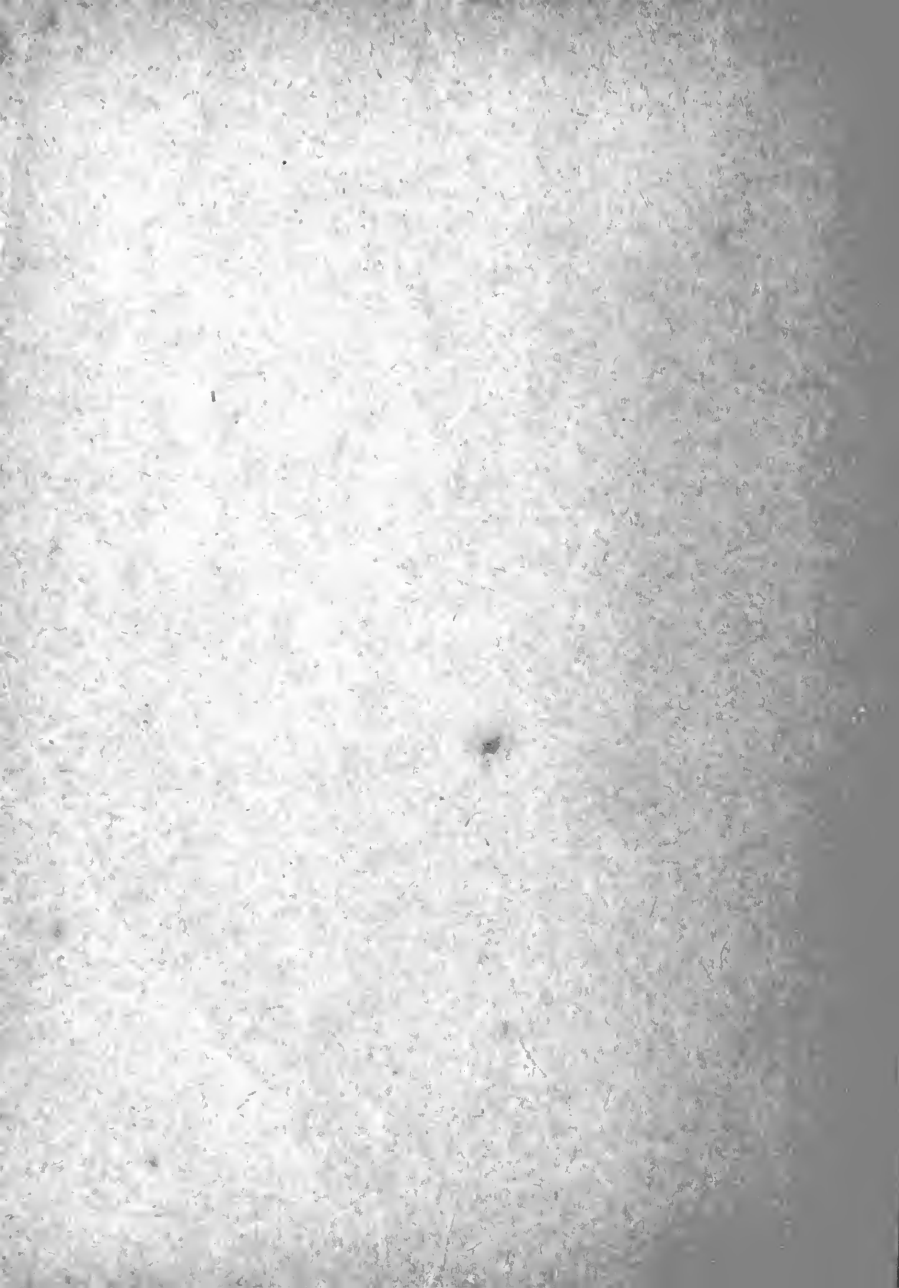
Published by the National Council of Rijeka (Fiume)-Susak

The Question of Fiume

By **A. E.**

PARIS
PRINTED BY LANG, BLANCHONG & C^o
7, Rue Rochechouart, 7

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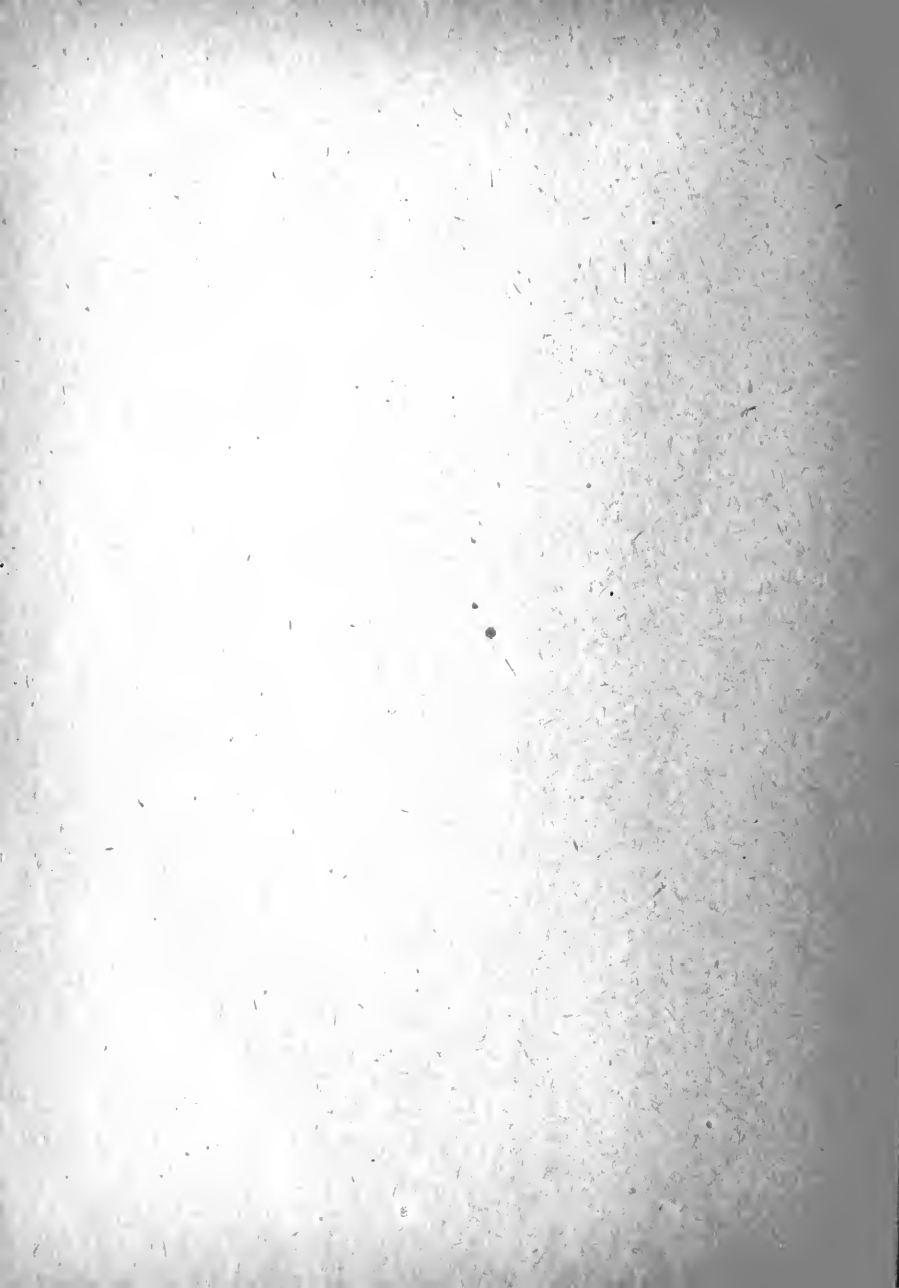
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1919

R. H.



We publish an English translation of this pamphlet, which was written by an eminent French author, who is well acquainted with the subject. In submitting it to the English-speaking public we believe that we are doing useful work. The question of Fiume, in fact, touches very closely the interests of the Anglo-Saxon countries, for Jugoslavia, in order to establish commercial relations with them, must have possession of this port.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF RIJEKA (FIUME)-SUSAK.



THE QUESTION OF FIUME

The revendication of Fiume by Italy is of quite recent origin; as a matter of fact it dates from hardly three months ago. When in April 1915, the Italian Government signed, with Great Britain and France, the secret treaty of London, it not only made no claim to Fiume, but it expressly recognized (art. 5) that "...the whole coast of Croatia, *the port of Fiume*, and the small ports of Novi and Carlopago... will, by the act of the powers, *be included in the territory of Croatia*". It is from the day when the downfall of Austria-Hungary opened the road to Trieste to the Italian troops, whence they were able to extend their occupation to Fiume, that Italy has discovered an affection for that town and "rights" to the port. As a result of an interallied victory (for the break through on the Italian front is only the result of the victories on the eastern and French fronts) it is intended to take from an allied nation — the united people of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes — the port which rightly belongs to it, for ethnical, geographical and economic reasons, and without which it is stifled: and if national sentiment figures in this as a pretext (and a very feeble pretext, as we shall show) the true motive of Italy is commercial jealousy and economic imperialism.

Fiume is not Italian territory. To speak of irredentism in the case of this port is to pervert the truth. Irredentism has

never revendicated it. The italianisation of Fiume, as will be seen further on, is the work of the Magyars; historically, Fiume—proofs of this are numerous and decisive—has belonged for centuries to Croatia and, through Croatia, to the crown of Hungary, which was, by right and fact, a federation; ethnically, the town of Fiume has—according to the official census returns of 1910, compiled by the municipality, that is, by the Italians—a majority of Italian or italianised inhabitants of Yugoslav origin (italianisants), 24,212 against 15,687 Yugoslavs, 6,493 Magyars and 3,383 other nationalities. But what conclusion can be drawn from these figures? What is a proportion of 48.6 per cent to 51.4 per cent? A minority of 2.8 per cent? Even if we set aside the other nationalities is a majority of 20 per cent decisive, especially when three lines of argument can be brought to bear against the gross figure :

1) The immense majority of the Italian population of Fiume is not autochthonous, but immigrated and, more often than not, artificially italianised by the political or economic pressure of the Magyars, who set themselves to favour the Italians to the detriment of the Yugoslavs, whom they distrusted and hated more. In 1851, out of 12,598 inhabitants of Fiume, 11,581 were Croats and 691 Italians. Towards 1890, when the Hungarian Government suppressed the last remaining Croat School of Fiume, it had 450-500 pupils, while the Magyaro-Italian gymnasium (lyceum) had under 200. The figures of the Magyar statistics are in other cases open to suspicion, but, in the case of Fiume, they are out of all reason : while in the whole of the littoral the Yugoslav element has, during the decade 1900-1910, considerably increased, at Fiume it would, according to the statistics, have diminished, and the number of the Yugoslavs, which in 1900 was 16,180, would have fallen in 1910 to 15,687. What are claims based on such falsified figures worth?

2) Fiume, geographically and economically, forms one whole with Susak, from which it is only separated by a narrow river. Now Susak is purely Yugoslav : 11,706 Yugoslavs to 658 Italians. The combined town of Fiume-Susak has, therefore, a total popu-

lation of 63,020, or 27,393 Yugoslavs to 24,870 Italians and 10,757 other nationalities. Thus the evidence of numbers turns against the Italians, or at any rate is of no assistance to them.

3) Fiume-Susak itself is, geographically and economically, only the centre, the urban home of a territory comprising the district (rural) of Susak and the three islands (Krk or Veglia, Cres or Cherso, Losinj or Lussin) which enclose the Quarnero on the south. Italy caused Cres and Losinj to be allotted to her by the Treaty of London; we will therefore leave them aside for the moment. The district of Susak is inhabited by 29,361 Yugoslavs and 2,504 other nationalities, and on Krk, the Slav population is about 19,562 against 1,544 Italians. An additional 64,610 Yugoslavs are, then, attributed to Croatia by the treaty of 1915 itself and the Italian claims to Fiume carry with them the annexation of these by Italy. And doubtless Italy, in order to protect Fiume and assure territorial continuity, would also demand eastern Istria (the district of Volosca) which reckons 47,842 Yugoslavs to a bare 954 Italians.

We therefore have a total on the one hand of 25,000 Italians of Fiume (who are certainly not all indisputably Italians) who would be sacrificed to the Slavs; on the other the 100,000—and even 120,000—Slavs of that territory who with the union of Fiume would be annexed by Italy. Is it a Yugoslav who frames the proposition contained in this paradox? No, it is an Italian, and one who, in his anxiety to appear just, makes no compromise with regard to what he considers to be the legitimate and absolute rights of Italy: Professor Salvemini, of the University of Florence. He rightly emphasises the impossibility of dividing up to an extreme or excessive extent the right of free disposition, and how absurd it would be to recognise it separately in the case of each zone of a district or each quarter of a town. A territory must be considered in its entirety and the decision given in favour of the people putting forward the best claim.

Now what are the grounds pleaded in Italy by those who, whether government or public opinion, conceived and put for-

ward the idea of the revendication of Fiume? Some speak of national sentiment. But until the war the Italian movement of Fiume was never irredentist; it was purely autonomist-municipal. It is only since the outbreak of war that the Committee *Pro Fiume italiana* has been established in Rome by a few refugees, but even during the war, and especially at the time of the Congress of oppressed nationalities, held in Rome in April 1918, the question of Fiume did not present itself to serious Italian politicians. Others acknowledge more frankly the true motive of Italy: i.e. to create a "commercial rampart" for the defence of Trieste, in order to avoid the eventuality of the traffic of Trieste, either by the present branch-lines or by others to be laid down, being diverted to Fiume. "Fiume is indispensable to the commercial progress of Trieste". "On Fiume depends not only the existence of Trieste, but of Italian commercial supremacy in the Adriatic", "he who defends Italian Fiume defends also the prosperity of Italian Trieste; the destinies of the two are closely interdependent (1)." Thus do the moderate organs express themselves in the Italian press; it is useless therefore to quote others.

We can understand now why the revendication of Fiume did not burst out until the day when the common victory assured to Italy the realisation of her just aspirations. But is it not possible that in Italy the intoxication of this long looked for triumph may conceal the dangerous consequences of this claim? Not only is it an attack on the most obvious right of the Jugoslavs, in whom the Allies have found, all through the war, faithful and valuable associates, but it marks the beginning of a scheme for economic imperialism. Now, economic imperialism must necessarily result in political imperialism, which in itself is a cause of war (1).

(1) *Secolo*, 16th and 23rd January.
Corriere della Sera, 25th January.

II

The claim of the Yugoslavs to Fiume is not only a claim based on numbers, as is proved by the figures given above. It is, above all, the right to live. The economic life of Fiume is Yugoslav. Detached from Jugoslavia, Fiume must necessarily decline and be in jeopardy. But moreover, without Fiume, the state and the Yugoslav nation, deprived of their only real port, are condemned to vegetate, to suffer, and are faced by the alternative of falling into economic vassalage to a powerful neighbour, or, in order to maintain their independence, of having recourse to a policy of resistance the fatal issue of which can only be a fresh conflict.

1. — *The economic life of Fiume is Yugoslav.*

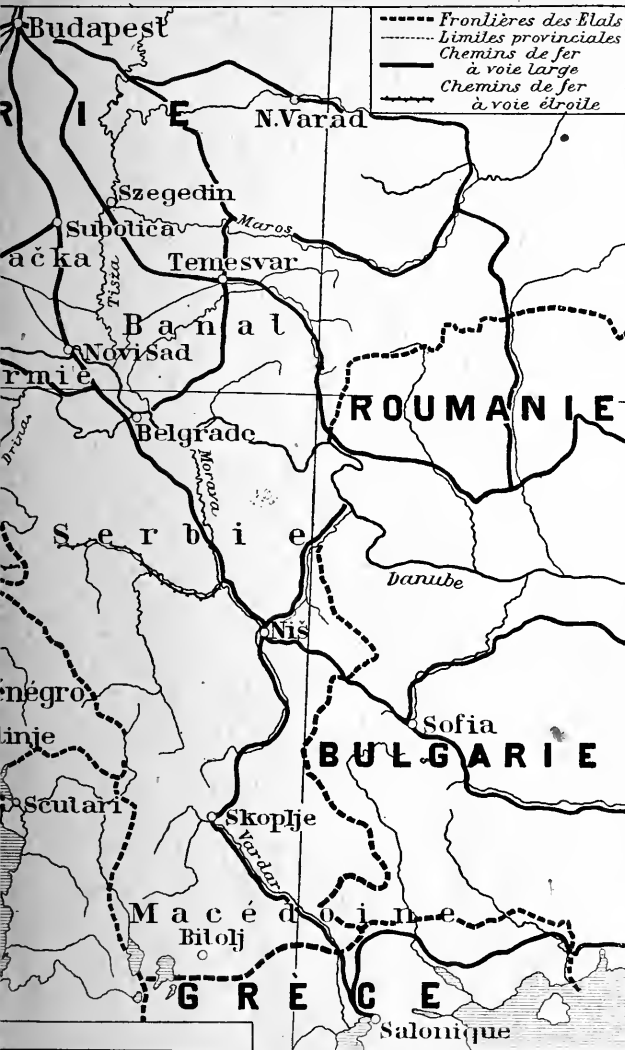
Fiume is first of all sea, port and shipping. Now its shipping is, in the great majority, Yugoslav. The principal shipowners are Croats, also nearly all the officers, and without exception, the seamen. The Magyars, who, implacable in their policy of prestige and imperialism, have tried for the last twenty years to supplant Yugoslav influence on the sea, have doubtless succeeded in taking from the Yugoslavs one of the companies to the formation of which the latter had contributed and in creating with the help of subsidies two other companies, some of the captains of which are Magyars. There still remain two purely Croat, two partly Croat and partly Italo-Magyar, and none of them are Italian. As to the sailing shipping companies, they are all Croat.

Not one of the large banks of Fiume is Italian; four are Croat, two Croat and Italian, one Hungarian, one mixed (the branch of the Austro-Hungarian Bank). The Italians have only the municipal saving-banks. All the large fortunes of Fiume are Yugoslav and there are none Italian.

Seven-tenths of the house property is Yugoslav. The major-



Principal Railway Co



rity of the principal tradesmen and manufacturers are Jugoslavs. The President of the Chamber of Commerce is a Yugoslav. In trade and industry the Italians by themselves are of no significance. If they occupy certain positions it is only as associates of the Magyars, supported by them, dependent on them.

2. — *Detached from Jugoslavia, Fiume declines and is in jeopardy.*

The prosperity of Fiume is of recent date. She received her first impetus when, by means of the railways — first the junction with the line from Trieste to Vienna, then with the system of Croatia and of Hungary — the port was able to receive the various products from an ever extending hinterland and to supply the latter with imported goods. Timber from Carniola and Croatia and cereals from the Hungarian plain and the Banat, English coal, colonial products and raw textile materials maintain a trade which, from 130,000 tons in 1869 (when its only railway was the system towards St. Peter, on the Vienna-Trieste line) rose to 4 millions in 1913. The accomplishment of Yugoslav unity will extend the port's field of activity towards Serbia and Bosnia, as also towards Rumania, mistress of Transylvania and part of the Banat, and the establishment of new railways towards the Sava and the Balkans, the plans of which are already under consideration, will double its attraction and its capacity.

Let us imagine, on the contrary, an Italian Fiume, situated at the extremity of Italy, with Trieste hardly 60 kil. to the west and the Yugoslav frontier running over the limestone ridges which command it. Can it then escape its fatal destiny? Italy, naturally inclined to favour both Venice and Trieste, would bestow upon it neither care nor subsidies. Can it be imagined that Italy would really be disposed to trouble about a port on her territory for the Jugoslavs who, in their justifiable resentment, would shun it as much as possible and, despite all obstacles, would seek elsewhere — and in vain — their outlet?

3. — *Fiume is the indispensable port of the Jugoslavs.*

If Fiume were indeed taken from the Jugoslavs, what port would they have henceforth at their disposal? The only two to be thought of, Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and Spljet (Spalato) — the first a last resource, the second, with a more promising future, — are separated from the hinterland by a mountainous barrier difficult to cross. Ragusa is connected by rail to the territories from which an outlet must be assured, but this connection is by means of a narrow railway line; Spljet up to now is not connected. To improve the communication with Ragusa, to establish communication with Spljet, is a difficult and above all extremely costly enterprise; whilst communication with Fiume already exists and could, at the cost of a very few improvements, be made very satisfactory.

In the same way Fiume has all the equipment of a modern port, with which it would be necessary, at great difficulty and expense, and a great outlay of time, to endow Spljet. Fiume can from the present moment suffice for the needs of the great maritime commerce of a nation which will number, as a beginning, 12 to 13 millions men. Of all the other ports of the Adriatic littoral none lends itself to the development of a maritime life extending beyond the local limits, unless it is Spljet; and Spljet, we must repeat, has not and could not for a long time to come receive either the commercial installations nor the railway line necessary to enable it to play this rôle. Now Italy from the outset has recognised the right of Jugoslavia to possess a "commercial outlet" on the Adriatic. A commercial outlet does not mean *any* sort of port; it is a port capable of subsisting, of supplying, receiving, manipulating and selling merchandise. With the exception of Spljet which, in any case, is out of the question for years to come, none of those ports left to the Jugoslavs by the Treaty of London has these qualifications, nor can they really be bestowed upon them.

If therefore Fiume is snatched from the Jugoslavs, their two only maritime outlets — Trieste and Fiume — are, practically

in the hands of Italy. They are faced with the alternative of putting up with this dangerous, inconvenient and humiliating situation or of trying to free themselves from it. To put up with it is, clearly, to renounce their independence, to fall under the control of a rival power, to submit to the same fetters with it is, clearly, to renounce their independence, to feel in the whole of their national life, now further extended and more intense, to the Banat, Belgrade, the heart of Serbia, a foreign influence. A precisely similar situation gave rise to the state of mind from which the Balkanic wars sprang, and, following them, the European war : to-day, when it is no longer a question of little and weak Serbia, but of a Jugoslavia grown great and conscious of her worth, could the effects be different? To free themselves from such a position is again, as after 1905, to try to turn their trade towards Salonica and to endeavour to substitute Spljet for Fiume. Expediency on the one hand, a long and difficult enterprise, yet still expediency, on the other. One does not do violence to nature : and nature in this case is Fiume, whither gravitate also the currents of established trade, which it is always difficult to divert. The Jugoslavs might for a time lose Fiume; they could never cease to aspire to it. We have too often seen the inevitable result of these legitimate and necessary aspirations, when a narrow policy tries to do violence to them. Did not the wars which, for seven years, have stained Europe with blood, spring from a conflict of this nature, between the right to live of the Jugoslavs and the imperialism of Austria-Hungary?

III

It may be that the Italian policy expressed by the revendication of Fiume does not contain a desire for imperialism. But it is certain that it is imperialistic, even if in spite of itself, and that it is doomed to develop, in its immediate and future

consequences, all the effects of imperialism — even to the risk of war, even to war itself.

It is imperialistic, in fact, from a double point of view; it involves : 1) a claim to the maritime domination of the whole of the Adriatic; 2) a claim to the exclusive control of all the communications between Jugoslavia and the West.

1) Closing the Adriatic on the south, by Valona, Italy would thereby hold also the only true ports if, on the north, she added to the possession of Venice that of Trieste and Fiume. All the trade with its outlet on this sea, whether it comes from the north, from the Germans of Germany and Austria, but also from the Czechs and the Poles, or from the east from the Magyars and Jugoslavs, would in the end come into her hands. In the Adriatic there would be no merchant fleet but that of Italy.

Such a situation would perhaps be admissible if it were the result of a natural order of things. But, as we have seen, it is precisely contrary to nature, and results only from the arbitrariness of a narrow and too material policy. Is it, besides, compatible with the new principles of liberty and justice proclaimed on all sides to-day, especially with the principle of the freedom of the sea, with the justice due to her allies such as the Czechs, to a nation such as the Poles, whose necessary access to the Adriatic will be far better assured if this port is allotted to a people already so much bound to these nations.

It is possible that Italian policy does not see the perilous position in which it would involve itself if it persisted in trying to take Fiume from the Jugoslavs and if it succeeded. The Italian nationalists and imperialists were more far-seeing and more logical when, in the name of the rights of their country in the Adriatic, they revendicated, with Fiume, the whole of Dalmatia, so that there might only be one Italian coast on the Adriatic, and when, with Mario Alberti, whose book *L'Adriatico e Mediterraneo* was such a success, they foresaw a time when Italy would be "safe for ever", when her economic penetration into the Balkans "would no longer be threatened", when she

would no longer meet "alarming" competition on the part of a foreign sea-service, when her merchant fleet, augmented by those of Trieste, Fiume, Dalmatia, would be nearly doubled, when the Adriatic would become "the property of Italy, of Italy only" and the position of Italy in the Mediterranean "the first".

2) This dream of domination in the Adriatic by Italy would finish up with the seizure of all the communications between western Europe and Jugoslavia. As a matter of fact, not only would the sea route belong to her, but the railway routes: for the only two great railway lines which assure these communications would cross her territory, that of Mont-Cenis or of Simplon over some hundred kilometres, from the great tunnels as far as to the east of Trieste, that of Arlberg and of Pustertal between Brenner and the station of Toblach, a corner which the Treaty of London promised to Italy in order to assure to her a strategical frontier.

The liberty of Jugoslavia would be threatened by this state of affairs: but would not that of the western powers be equally menaced? (1) Could they accept the idea that all their lines of communication with Jugoslavia and with the East, the future railway line of the 45° of latitude should be under the control of Italy, that for reasons sometimes economic, sometimes political, their commercial relations with those countries should be exposed to chicaneries which, during the time of German and Austro-Hungarian ambitions, they have known only too well, that the monopoly of transport across Central Europe should only have been taken from Germany and Austria-Hungary to pass to Italy? Who does not see all the dangers with which such a state of things would threaten the peace of Europe, who does not discern all the seeds of conflict and of war which it conceals?

Who does not see besides this contradiction?

(1) For the line Munich-Vienna-Budapest cannot be considered here.

Everywhere in Europe we are talking of securing commercial outlets to those States which are deprived of access to the sea; everywhere we are considering the idea of guaranteeing to peoples who are not masters of the territory, the free use of railways, waterways, ports; and the idea of internationalisation is, in more or less attenuated forms, in great favour. Now here is a people which has its railways, with their natural outlet, its own port, which it has used for centuries, on which all its future depends. And this port is to be taken from it, and this people condemned to suffocation and reduced to economic and very soon political slavery by a foreign power, at the risk of planting in the new Europe the germ of an abscess which would gradually spread through and infect the whole body — at the risk of making another war inevitable.

In all rather knotty problems, we find well-meaning but timid intellects supporting a solution by compromise. Thus, with the best intentions in the world, it has been proposed to make Fiume a free town, a Hanseatic city.

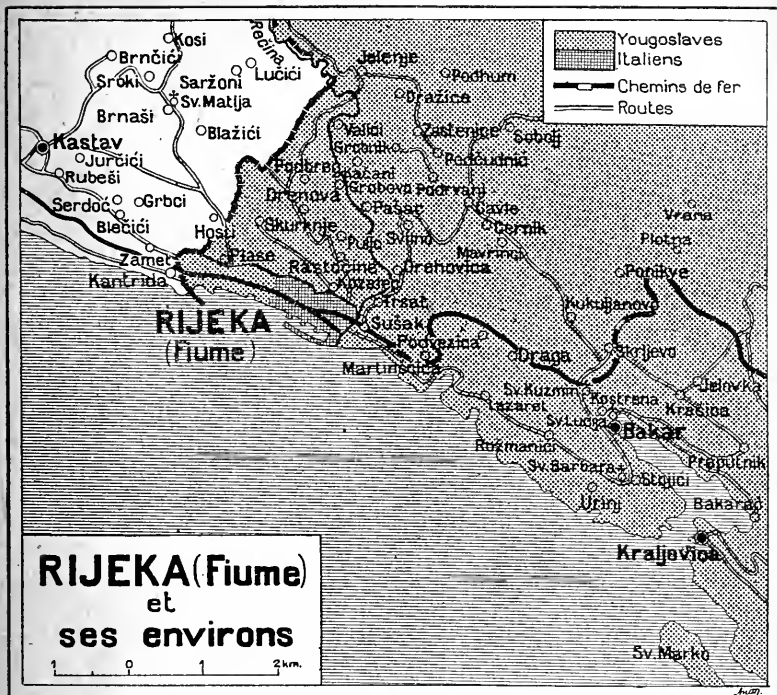
If it be less an outrage to the right of nationalities than the annexation to Italy, this compromise, by which it is thought to spare the feelings of Italy and the vital interests of the Jugoslavs, is no less a defiance to nature. It implies that Fiume would remain of Italian nationality: it would therefore be necessary to separate Susak from it, to forbid all Slav immigration and to establish by law an artificial policy of Italianisation. But who would undertake to defray the costs which the maintenance and improvements of a great port would involve? The town itself is incapable of this; Italy would have no interest in it, Jugoslavia still less. And who would supply Fiume with means of subsistence? It lives solely on the trade of the port and the industries which the port has brought into existence. What would remain to it of its commerce, what would become of its industries?

The only possible solution is the right, fair, frank, natural and just solution: the union of Fiume to Jugoslavia. We have seen the geographical and economic reasons which justify and

demand it. Perhaps it is not amiss to insist on one particular aspect of the first mentioned reasons. The only access to Fiume by land is across hundreds of kilometres of Yugoslav territory; from the sea side across straits and channels, extending about a hundred kilometres among islands which also are Yugoslav. Fiume is a town situated actually in Yugoslav territory. The Italian or Italianised part of its population cannot change its natural rôle.

From this capital fact cannot the régime be decided upon which is in accordance with it? That is, the régime which under the new international law and international guarantees, will be applied to recognized minorities. A special law will assure to the Italian population the free use of its language in all domains and complete equality of political rights. Have the Yugoslavs ever shown the smallest intention of encroaching on the legitimate rights of their Italian compatriots? The one thing which they refuse is to sacrifice their own people. This danger removed, and a good understanding arrived at between the two peoples inhabiting Fiume and its territory, there is no longer any complication to fear in that quarter.

A Yugoslav Fiume, with full guarantees for the Italian part of its population, is the only satisfactory solution of the Fiume problem, the only one possible if we would reconcile, with the rights and interests of Fiume, the vital needs of Jugoslavia and regard to the harmony and peace of Europe.



Fiume consists of the town proper and the communes of Drenova, Kozala and Plase. In these communes (the same as in the suburb of Susak), the inhabitants are pure Jugoslavs, whereas in the town you find Italians and an even larger population of Italianised Jugoslavs (Italianisanti).

We append the four last census returns for Fiume. These returns were compiled by the municipality and on behalf of the Hungarian Government. For obvious political reasons, it was to the interest of both these authorities to make the language spoken by the Jugoslav population appear less important, and to swell the apparent importance of Italian and Magyar in proportion.

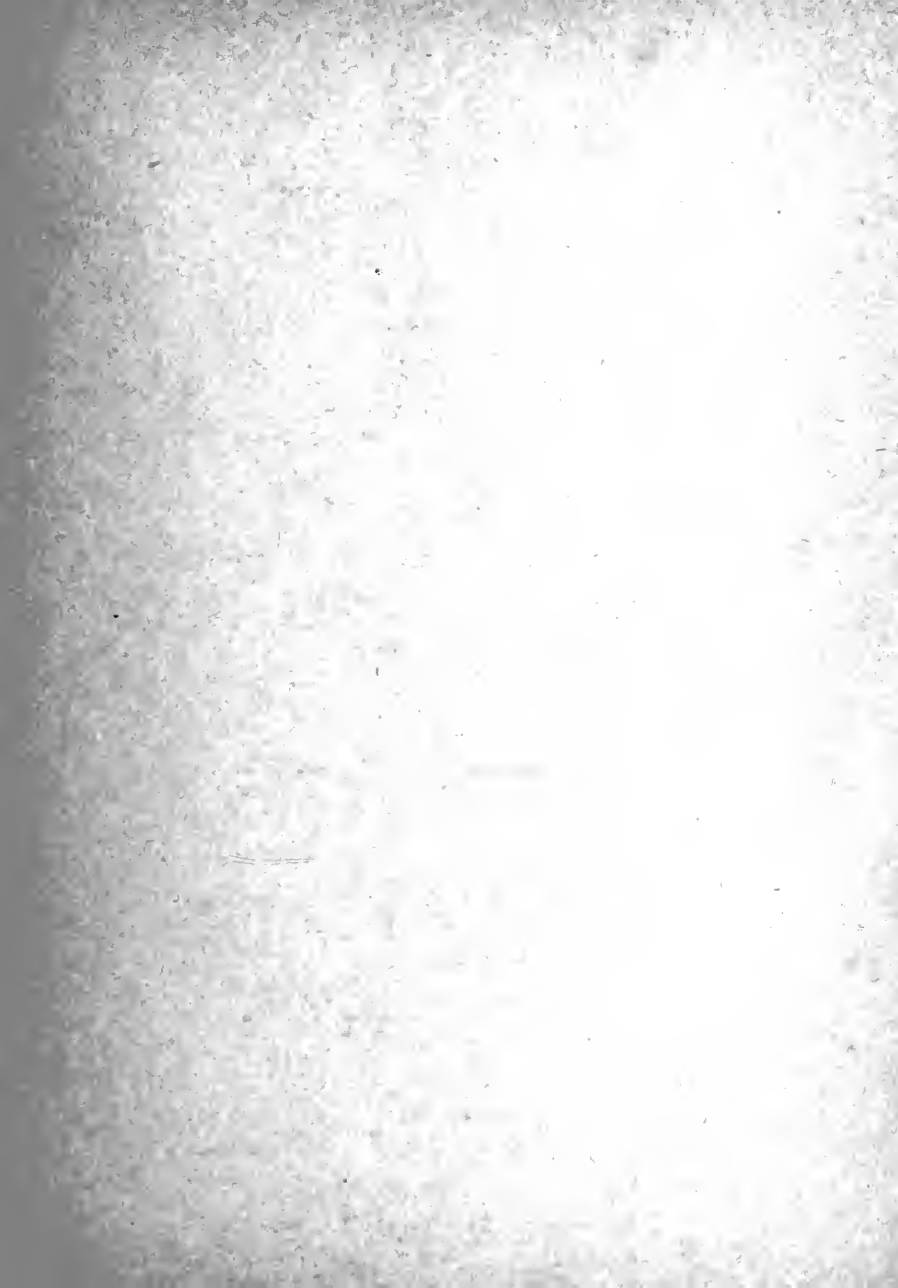
All the same, even these statistics give a relative majority of Jugoslavs over Italians as late as in 1890.

Date	Totals	Jugoslavs	Italians	Magyars
1880	20,981	10,227 or 49 %	9,237 or 44 %	—
1890	29,494	13,478 or 46 %	13,012 or 44 %	—
1900	38,955	16,180 or 42 %	17,354 or 45 %	2,842 or 7 %
1910	49,806	15,687 or 32 %	24,212 or 49 %	6,493 or 14 %

We append the latest census returns for Susak :

1910	13,214	11,706 or 89 %	658 or 5 %	363 or 3 %
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