

J. S. Papafloratos

The Fiume and the Corfu Incidents

The stability in Europe was seriously threatened in 1923. Firstly, a crisis had erupted at Ruhr, which the French had occupied following Germany's inability to pay reparations. Then, a dispute still raged over the status of Fiume, between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Italian government was also expected to announce the official annexation of the Dodecanese islands to its territory. Finally, the members of the Italian delegation for the delineation of the Greek-Albanian borders were murdered in the Greek soil and the Italians bombed and occupied the island of Corfu.

It was widely believed that Benito Mussolini (Premier and Foreign Minister of the Italian government, since October 1922) had taken his decisions following a common policy towards Athens and Belgrade. In fact, the incident of Corfu was supposed to be used by the fascist leader in order to pursue his new foreign policy. Moreover, it was widely regarded that Athens and Belgrade had often seen themselves as strategic partners in the Balkans. This article will examine both crisis in Fiume and in Corfu from these points of view and it intends to answer to the following major questions:

- What was the “Fiume problem” before fascism rose into power?
- What were the first steps of Mussolini as foreign minister?
- What happened in Corfu in August - September 1923? and
- Was there any real strategic partnership between Athens and Belgrade in order to face the aggressive fascist foreign policy as this was pursued in Fiume and in Corfu?

Fiume had been the only port of the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, since 1914. To its south laid the “Croatian coast”, as contrasted with Dalmatia proper, which was under Austrian rule. Italy had entered the First World War a few weeks after the signing of the secret Treaty of London, on April 26th, 1915. According to this treaty, most

part of Dalmatia was promised to Italy but Fiume was left to Croatia, the status of which had not been fully considered. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Italian representatives asked for Fiume together with southern Dalmatia. This claim was going beyond the point at which any of the Allies could support it¹. The Serbian government strongly objected to this and advanced a counterclaim on ethnical grounds to the peninsula of Istria, which had a partly Slovene, partly Croatian population, the Italians being definitely in the minority. The Serbian point of view was supported openly by the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson.

In May 1919, the Italian delegates left the Conference ceremonially as an action of protest against the attempt to put President Wilson's famous "fourteen points" into effect, which would have involved the award of Fiume to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. At Fiume, while discussions went on, the Italian troops who had landed there after the armistice, encouraged their local supporters, while the French and the Serbs, who had been part of the Allied army in the Balkans, did the same. Violent incidents between their troops soon strained the relations between France and Italy even more. On September 12th, 1919, the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio arrived at Fiume with a few supporters to claim the port for Italy. The Italian commander on the spot accepted his demand and allowed him to take possession of the city. In the following year, he proclaimed the independence of the city under his government, which he called the "Reggenza del Carnaro".

In the meanwhile, the new Italian government under the leadership of Giovanni Giolitti had shown a more conciliatory spirit: direct negotiations with Belgrade were opened and finally an agreement was reached on November 12th, 1920 (Treaty of Rapallo). Italy received Istria, the Dalmatian city of Zara and four islands but renounced nearly all its claims to southern Dalmatia. Fiume was to be an independent city, following the example of Danzig. The frontiers of the Free State of Fiume were then described, the crucial point being that the suburb of Susak and the port of Baros (the latter was the modern port of Fiume) were separated from the town of Fiume and were definitely assigned to the Slovene sovereignty. D'Annunzio refused to accept this treaty on

1. J. M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945*, London, Longman, 1967, p. 326.

the grounds that he should have been consulted but finally he gave in.

After a few months, fighting was taking place in Fiume between the supporters of the autonomy (“autonomists”) and pro-Italian citizens of the city, who were helped by the local fascists. The latter also attacked on Slovene villages in Istria. However, the supporters of the autonomist movement won the elections with a vast majority. Their opponents reacted and they occupied the Town Hall. Finally, the autonomists’ leader Riccardo Zanella was left to form a government and to try to create an independent state. He remained in power until March 1922, when a fascist coup d’état took place. The crisis was very serious and the Great Powers intervened. A conference was held in May at Santa Margherita, a village next to Rapallo.

On October 23rd, 1922, three conventions were signed. In regard to Fiume, it was stipulated that the Italian troops should evacuate Susak within five days from ratification. Moreover, a mixed commission of Italians and Serbs was established in order to delimitate the frontiers between Slovenia and the Free State of Fiume, according to the provisions of the Rapallo Treaty. This commission should also organize the technical and administrative services of the port and the functioning of the Free State of Fiume. The commission had to complete its task within one month from its first meeting, although this deadline could be extended by common agreement. Divergences, which might arise on these matters, would be submitted to the arbitration of the President of the Swiss Confederation². The signing of this treaty was the last international action, which was signed by an Italian democratic government for the next twenty years. Five days afterwards, the “march on Rome” took place and Benito Mussolini came to power. The fascist leader was against almost every post-war settlement concerning Italy. In fact, those settlements were already unpopular in Italy and they were presented as part of a process of national retreat.

A few days before the signing of Santa Margherita Treaty, speaking at Udine, Mussolini inflamed Italian opinion by protesting that Italy should be listened to by the nations of the world. He had also agreed openly with his supporters’ cries of “Fiume Italiana” and “Dalmatia

2. M. H. H. Macartney - P. Cremona, *Italy's Foreign and Colonial Policy 1914-1937*, London, Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 92.

Italiana". So, when Belgrade declared its intention to register with the Secretary-General of the League of Nations both the Treaties of Rapallo and Santa Margherita, Mussolini replied that he would regard that registration as a hostile act³. However, on October 31st, 1922, he ordered the fascists of Fiume to keep quiet and to create no complications⁴. Moreover, on November 16th, the new Italian Prime Minister made a speech in the Italian Senate, in which he said that the Peace Treaties would be carried out, whether they were good or bad⁵. He also announced that the motto of his foreign policy would be "niente per niente" (i.e. nothing for nothing), which meant that he was determined to vindicate at least Italy's equality with any other Great Power.

The first indication of his intentions was the invitation that he sent to the British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon and his French colleague Raymond Poincaré. Both foreign ministers accepted the invitation and they met their host in Territet, a small village almost twenty miles away from Lausanne. The fascist leader had great expectations from this meeting but the whole incident turned against him, as he could get no specific and written promises from his two experienced colleagues⁶. On the reparations' question, Mussolini had always contented himself with the policy of demanding the cancellation of Italian debts to Great Britain and the United States as a condition and as a proportionate measure of concessions to Germany. That was the underlying principle of the memorandum presented by him to the London Conference of December 1922. During the crisis of the French occupation of the Ruhr, the Italian leader had shown himself at a loss of constructive ideas. While he let it be understood that he disapproved of military measures, he sent Italian engineers to Ruhr as a demonstration of his moral support to France. He also flirted with the idea of a Franco-Italian deal over Ruhr's coal but he abandoned the idea after a while. Finally, recent research proved that he was organizing an official ceremony in order to announce

3. F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, London, Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 255.

4. R. Guariglia, *Ricordi 1922-1946*, Napoli i Scientifiche Italiane, 1950, p. 12.

5. Ratification of these two conventions was exchanged on February 26th, 1923.

6. More details about the Italian foreign policy in the area can be found in: B. Kondis, *Greece and Albania 1908-1914*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies, 1976; J. S. Papafloratos, *The Greek-Italian crisis of 1923*, Thessaloniki, Institute for Balkan Studies.

the annexation of the Dodecanese islands to the Kingdom of Italy.

In Fiume, the situation was deteriorating rapidly. The mixed Italo-Serbian commission made little progress and finally stopped its work. The deadlock was complete and the economy of the Free State was ruined. Its factories were closed down and its port was empty. Only subsidies from Italy saved its inhabitants from starvation⁷. In July, Mussolini suggested the incorporation of Fiume in Italy, in exchange for the cession to Slovenia of port Baros, the Delta, the railway line up to the mole and the quay itself. If Belgrade refused the proposal, he would declare the annexation of Fiume to Italy. The government in Belgrade tried to negotiate and it proposed Zara or the island of Lagosta as compensation. But, the Italian leader rejected this proposal. On August 24th, Mussolini publicly set August 31st as the time limit for concluding the work of the mixed commission. In fact, it was an ultimatum that ignored the stipulations of the Treaty of Rapallo. According to article E of this treaty, any dispute between the members of the mixed commission, which could not be settled, should be referred to the arbitration of the President of the Swiss Confederation. To sum up, Mussolini's nine months of foreign policy had nothing to do with his past declarations. There was no dramatic change in the traditional foreign policy followed by his predecessors. So, he was still searching for a case to show to the rest of the world, and mostly to the Italians, the results of his new foreign policy. It was at that moment that the Corfu incident erupted.

By tradition, the Greek-Italian relations were good, as long as the Sultan of Constantinople was considered as their common enemy. Since 1912, Italy and Greece had found themselves in the position of regional antagonists over issues such as the future of Northern Epirus (1913-1919). Italy's wider ambitions to Central Albania (this had much to do with Rome's desire to secure the strategic entrance to the Adriatic), as well as the future of the Dodecanese islands (in the southeastern Aegean Sea) that were inhabited by a Greek majority but under Italian control since 1912, confronted with the Greek rights. By the summer of 1920, the Italian government denounced the Tittoni - Venizelos agreement of 1919, according to which most of the Dodecanese islands were given to

7. M. Currey, *Italian Foreign Policy 1918-1932*, London, Nicholson and Watson, 1932, p. 113.

Greece. Two months earlier, the Senate of the United States had adopted unanimously the resolution 324 (of May 17th, 1920), according to which Northern Epirus "should be awarded by the Peace Conference to Greece and become incorporated in the Kingdom of Greece". A few days afterwards, Albania and Greece reached to an agreement (Kapestitsa convention). Then, the Albanian guerilla groups managed to defeat the Italian forces, which were staying in a few areas. In December, Albania became member of the League of Nations.

Soon, the Albanian government took advantage of its membership and it appealed twice to the League of Nations against the occupation of its soil by Greek and Serbian troops. The truth was that the Greek army had left the area since the summer of 1920. The British government decided to intervene and proposed the whole case to be handled by the Conference of Ambassadors. That Conference was simply a gathering of the British, Italian, Japanese (and sometimes Belgian) ambassadors in Paris to discuss international problems with the French Foreign Minister. Decisions were taken in the name of the Allied powers, for the Conference occupied itself mainly with questions, which hang over from the First World War and the Peace Treaties. In fact, it had no special juridical status and it had all the powers that it assumed into itself⁸. The Conference of Ambassadors recognized the independence of Albania and it established an international committee to delimit the borders of this state.

On August 27th, 1923, the members of the international commission for the delineation of the Greek-Albanian borders started out in automobiles to do their work once again. The Italian car was last in the line and three officers, an interpreter and a driver were riding in it. In the 54th km, near Zepi (inside the Greek territory), unknown persons ambushed and killed General Enrico Tellini and the other members of the Italian delegation. The murderers then evidently crossed the border and escaped in Albania. The name and the nationality of the murderers are still unknown⁹. In Italy, there was a perfect flare-up of national pride

8. More details about the Conference of Ambassadors can be found especially in G. Pink, "The Conference of Ambassadors", *Geneva Studies*, vol. XII, nos 4-5, February 1942.

9. A scientific research was made recently and its results are presented in the above-mentioned book *The Greek-Italian crisis of 1923*.

and patriotic sentiment¹⁰. Mussolini at once drew up and sent out an ultimatum to the Greek government (on August 29th). He assumed, without a proof, that the responsibility for the murder belonged to the Greeks. The demands made in the ultimatum were extremely severe and the Greek government, by common consent outside of Italian circles, could not accept them¹¹. The comparison with the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum sent to Serbia in July 1914 was inevitable¹². The isolated Greek government¹³ accepted the ultimatum partially, because the Greek responsibility for the crime had not been proved. The resent research proved that Mussolini did not wait for the official reply of the Greek government and he had ordered a fleet of more than fifteen battleships to occupy the island of Corfu, on August 31st.

Although the Italian leader did not authorize the use of force against a demilitarized island, the Italian commander Admiral Solari ordered the bombardment of the two castles of the island relating to the Middle Ages. These castles were full of refugees from Asia Minor. As a result, fifteen women and children were killed. This incident aggravated the diplomatic position of Italy. On September 1st, the Greek government appealed to the League of Nations without making any reference at the bombardment and the innocent victims in Corfu. Fiume and Corfu were already connected as aspects of Italy's Balkan policy. But, the Greek recourse to the League of Nations made their interaction even stronger.

10. The reaction of the Italian people was described by a few telegrams, which the French ambassador in Rome Charles-Roux sent to Quai d'Orsay (e.g. *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères*, série E, 1918-1929, Italie, 128, nos 20 and 24, 29/8/1923). Also the Greek consuls in many Italian cities had sent a lot of really revealing telegrams to Athens.

11. The severest of them demanded an indemnity of fifty million lire to be paid within five days of the presentation of the Italian note and the saluting of the Italian fleet, flying the Italian flag.

12. E. Bovet, "L'Italie et la Société des Nations", *Wissen Und Leben*, XII Band (10/1923-12/1924); P. Lasturel, *L'affaire Gréco-Italienne de 1923*, Paris, L'île de France, 1925, pp. 9, 190; St. Nicoglou, *L'affaire de Corfu et la Société des Nations*, Dijon, Librairie Général Felix Ray, 1925, p. IX; A. Toynebee, *Survey of International Affairs (1920-1923)*, London, Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 349. The same opinion was written in a few Serbian newspapers, too.

13. At that period, Greece was governed by a military junta, under the leadership of Colonel Plastiras. The regime was isolated and it had not been recognized by other countries because of the execution of the former PM Gounaris, four members of the legitimate government and a general.

Mussolini tried to postpone the discussion in the General Assembly, in which the representatives of the so-called “small countries” (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes being prominent among them) had the majority. At the same time, the Italian Prime Minister decided to extend the time-limit of his ultimatum towards Belgrade to September 15th. This was the first sign of Mussolini’s uneasiness.

It is important to mention that the problem of Fiume troubled the Italian leader in such a degree that he had made a long speech upon it in the Cabinet even on August 31st (the day of the bombardment of Corfu)¹⁴. Today, it is widely accepted that both the British and the French governments knew perfectly well that there was a serious connection between the bombardment and the occupation of Corfu by the Italians with the complication in the case of Fiume¹⁵. The Greek Press had also referred to this connection and to the deterioration of the Italo-Serbian relations from the beginning of the Corfu crisis. A Greek newspaper reported that the Cabinet in Belgrade discussed the Italian action in Corfu and that all the Serb officers, who were servicing abroad, were ordered to return in Belgrade¹⁶. Furthermore, the Serb Chargé d’Affaires in Athens Ducić was on record declaring that “Corfu is the key to open the door of the Adriatic Sea according to my governments’ opinion. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes feels safe only if Corfu belongs to Greece!”¹⁷. However, this declaration was disclaimed by the Serbian embassy in Athens the next day. Moreover, the Serbian Press was full of articles against the Italian foreign policy due to the bombardment of Corfu¹⁸. Finally, the government in Belgrade denounced the actions of Bulgarian guerilla groups in Serbian and Greek Macedonia. The Serbian government believed that these groups were helped in many ways by Rome¹⁹.

It is true that the Greek government was almost shocked by the Italian reaction and the bombardment of Corfu. Athens had not

14. M. Currey, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

15. This complication was also referred in the Serbian Press, too. See *Eleftheron Vima*, 4/9/1923, p. 3; *Kathimerini*, 3/9/1923, p. 4.

16. *Eleftheron Vima*, 2/9/1923, p. 2.

17. *Kathimerini*, 3/9/1923, p. 4.

18. See *Novi List*, 1/9/1923; *Novosti*, 1/9/1923; *Preporod*, 2/9/1923.

19. *Eleftheron Vima*, 9/9/1923, pp. 1,4 – 10/9/1923, p. 4.

estimated correctly the Italian ultimatum and it was paralyzed during the first crucial days after the bombardment. On the other hand, the Serbian government²⁰ and especially the Slovenes²¹ felt really angry for the Italian coup in Corfu. Prime Minister Pašić said in the Greek newspaper *Estia* that his country would offer its assistance to the Greek people, without giving more details. In Belgrade, a lot of members of the Serbian Cabinet believed that the bombardment of Corfu was the proof of the aggressive Italian Balkan policy and it was used to press Belgrade to retreat in Fiume. This was the opinion of the majority of the members of the Serbian government and it was written in the British Press a few days later, too²². In Athens, the Serb ambassador Baluchtsić said that the bombardment of Corfu was a forced action²³. It was also mentioned that a Serb diplomat stated that in case of Italian mobilization, his country would do the same²⁴. It is important to mention that all those statements made by several important Serb officials remained without a reply by the Greek government²⁵! It was a serious mistake and when it was realized the Serbs were no more eager to provide Greeks with any help.

The Serb representative in the League of Nations was among the protagonists in favour of the Greek affair. To become more specific, the representatives of the so-called “small countries” were trying to bring the case against Italy in the General Assembly. Italians were opposed to such an action because of the vast majority formed by the representatives of the “small countries” in the General Assembly. Since September 2nd, the representatives of Czechoslovakia, Norway, Poland and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were met and they were pre-

20. *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, série Europe – Z, Italie 1918-1929* [A.A.E., E (1918-1929): Italie, 129], telegrams (93-95) Clement - Simon (Belgrade), 1/9/1923.

21. *Eleftheron Vima*, 3/9/1923, p. 1.

22. *The Times*, 12/9/1923, p. 8.

23. *Eleftheron Vima*, 2/9/1923, p. 3; *Kathimerini*, 2/9/1923, p. 3.

24. J. Barros, *The Corfu Incident of 1923*, Princeton University Press, 1965.

25. However, the Greek people paid a lot of attention to position of Belgrade. On September 2nd, there was huge manifestation in the main streets of Athens, after the mass in commemoration of the innocent victims in Corfu, in which the people acclaimed United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. F.O., PRO 286/867, report written by Bentinck to Lord Curzon, 17/9/1923.

paring their actions²⁶. Moreover, the Serb Foreign Minister identified the Italian ultimatum towards the Greeks with the Austrian one towards the Serbs after the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in Serajevo by Serb nationalists in a dialogue with the French ambassador Clement-Simon²⁷. The same identification was written in the Serbian newspaper *Balkan*²⁸. Finally, the permanent Foreign Under-Secretary of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes tried to contact with the British government in order to ask about a strong reaction towards Rome, without success²⁹.

The tension between Belgrade and Rome was increasing as the expiration of the Italian ultimatum for Fiume was approaching. As a result, the Serbs intensified their efforts in Geneva in order to isolate the Italian government in the League of Nations. Unfortunately, the Greek government did not realize the opportunity to combine its efforts with Belgrade against Mussolini's aggression. Greek Chargé d'Affaires in Belgrade Mavroudis had only a few unofficial discussions with some Serb diplomats and he gave a diplomatic dispatch containing the aspect of the Greek government upon Tellini case to the Serbian government³⁰. The Greek Press was having a closer eye on the situation in Belgrade. On September 6th, the Serb representative in the League of Nations supported the competence of the League to handle the crisis in a common statement with the representatives of other "small countries"³¹. On September 7th, the moderate Venizelist newspaper *Eleftheron Vima* wrote in the main article of its first page that Nikola Pašić returned urgently in Belgrade due to the crisis in Corfu. Moreover, it was alleged that the Italo-Serbian negotiations for the future status of Fiume had been interrupted and a few Italian newspapers threatened with annexation of the city to Italy³². At the same date, it was mentioned that the crisis in

26. A.A.E., E (1918-1929), Italie, 129, telegrams (133-134) Hanotaux (Geneva), 2/9/1923.

27. A.A.E., E (1918-1929), Italie, 129, telegrams (93-95) Clement - Simon (Belgrade), 1/9/1923.

28. *Eleftheron Vima*, 5/9/1923, p. 1.

29. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, v. XXIV, pp. 980-981, telegram Howe (Belgrade) to Lord Curzon, 5/9/1923.

30. *Eleftheron Vima*, 7/9/1923, p. 1.

31. *Kathimerini*, 7/9/1923, p. 4.

32. *Ibid.*

Fiume was more serious than the crisis in Corfu and that the Serbs were much more hostile to Italians than were the Greeks³³.

It is important to mention that Greece was never accepted as a member of "Little Entente", which was composed by Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. This alliance was formed under the French pressure and it was well known that Belgrade was found under the protection of Paris. So, a lot of Serbian officials were discussing the case with French diplomats in Belgrade since the beginning of the crisis. It is widely believed that the French advised the Serbs to follow a moderate policy towards Mussolini³⁴. This happened partially after September 5th, when the Serbian Press stopped to support the Greeks, obeying the orders of the government in Belgrade³⁵. Moreover, Pašić visited the French PM Poincaré in Paris. The former described the difficult position of Belgrade and its interest in the Italo-Greek dispute³⁶. Pašić asked for the French intervention to Rome³⁷, without success. The French politicians did not want to dissatisfy Mussolini, who had helped Paris decisively in the Ruhr crisis. The French government pressed the Serbian one and the latter was forced to follow a less anti-Italian policy, since September 6th³⁸. Pašić denounced the French policy³⁹, although he ordered the representative of its government in Geneva to reject the proposal made by his Scandinavian colleagues for a common withdrawal from the League in case that the latter would not accept its competence to the Corfu case. However, Momčilo Ninčić, then Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, did not hesitate to say that the Tellini case was the first of many problems that Mussolini would cause to international community⁴⁰.

The degree of the French influence in Belgrade is not well known but

33. *Kathimerini*, 7/9/1923, p. 4.

34. J. Barros, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

35. A.A.E., E (1918-1929), Italie, 129, telegram (168) Clement-Simon (Belgrade), 3/9/1923.

36. *Eleftheron Vima*, 8/9/1923, p. 1. It was also written that Pašić asked from Poincaré to change the French policy and to adopt the ideas of the Little Entente.

37. *Kathimerini*, 9/9/1923, p. 4.

38. J. Barros, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

39. *Eleftheron Vima*, 8/9/1923, p. 4.

40. *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, vol. XXIV, pp. 1017-1018, telegraph London to Lord Curzon, 11/9/1923.

it is indisputable that the Serbian government had decided to register with the Secretary-General of the League of Nations the Treaties of Rapallo and Santa Margherita⁴¹. Moreover, Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were sending troops in their common borders⁴², although the rumor of 100.000 Italian soldiers proved to be untrue⁴³. However, Mussolini realizing the Serbian anger for his policy, decided to make a conciliatory proposal to Belgrade. He also sent a letter to Pašić declaring that he could not make further compromises. At the same time, Di Revel, then Italian Naval Minister, prepared a plan of facing the possible common action of the combined naval forces of Great Britain-Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes by the Italian fleet⁴⁴. It became clear to the Serb PM that the annexation of Fiume could be prevented only by war. Pašić knew perfectly well that he could not enter in a war without allies. Paris had no intention to join Belgrade and Athens had not responded to the continuous Serbian actions in Geneva. In addition, most Serbs disinterested for a dispute, which did not involve Serbian land. King Alexander, in particular, brought all his influence to bear on his Cabinet. However, Croats and Slovenes were deeply involved in the case and they did not want any retreat of the central government in Belgrade. Unfortunately, their access in Belgrade was limited. The possible change in the Serbian attitude was mentioned in the Greek Press⁴⁵ and it did not satisfy the Greeks. This change became obvious when the Italian Press, trying to underestimate the significance of the whole affair, reported that the case of Fiume was not so important as the British Press had suggested⁴⁶.

On September 17th, De Poli, President of the government in Fiume resigned. Then, Mussolini sent General Giardino to Fiume to take charge of the administration as governor in the name of the Italian government⁴⁷. This was a thinly disguised annexation and apprehensive foreign

41. *Kathimerini*, 7/9/1923, p. 4.

42. *Kathimerini*, 12/9/1923, p. 1.

43. *Eleftheron Vima*, 21/9/1923, p. 4.

44. *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, vol. II, n. 347, plan of Admiral Di Revel sent to Mussolini, 13/9/1923.

45. *Eleftheron Vima*, 13/9/1923, p. 1 – 14/9/1923, p. 1.

46. *Eleftheron Vima*, 16/9/1923, p. 1.

47. Sir Iv. Kirkpatrick, *Mussolini*, Milano, Editore dall'Oglio, p. 197.

governments expected Athens and Belgrade to combine in joint resistance to Rome. This was almost impossible to happen because the Greek government had already accepted the intervention of the Conference of Ambassadors, in which it was extremely difficult for the rights of a small state to prevail. Moreover, there was no preparation for a joint resistance between the two governments. This was mainly a fault of the Greek one, which had based its policy in London. Mussolini was very happy to see that there was no agreement between Athens and Belgrade. Momcilo Ninčić, was keen to reconcile with Italy and he said that his government would send no troops in the area⁴⁸. A day earlier, Lord Curzon, then Foreign Minister of the British government, had accepted the French plan for the evacuation of Corfu. According to this, the Greek government was found guilty for the murder of the members of the Italian delegation. The Greek government should compensate the Italian one without receiving any satisfaction for the murdered refugees from Asia Minor, who were killed by the Italian bombs. On September 27th, the Greek government was obliged to accept the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors in order to liberate Corfu. Mussolini's new foreign policy appeared to be effective.

As long as the Fiume case was concerned, on January 27th, 1924, the Treaty of Rome was signed. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes formally recognized Italy's full and entire sovereignty over the city and the port of Fiume. The rest of the Free State together with port Baros was ceded to Slovenia in conformity with the pledges given by Count Sforza. To this agreement was added, at Belgrade's request, a general treaty of friendship, which bound both countries to preserve the peace settlement. Italy ratified the Fiume agreement on February 22nd. On the same day, a Royal Decree annexing Fiume to the Kingdom of Italy appeared in the Official Gazette⁴⁹. Mussolini was rewarded with the Collar of the Annunziata Order, the highest distinction, which the King could bestow on him⁵⁰.

He totally deserved it because he followed a very clever policy in order to achieve his goal. Mussolini succeeded in receiving a compensa-

48. *Kathimerini*, 27/9/1923, p. 4.

49. M. H. H. Macartney - P. Cremona, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

50. Sir Iv. Kirkpatrick, *op.cit.*, p. 198.

tion for the murder of the members of the Italian delegation in Kakavia and he was capable to avoid to loose face in the League of Nations. Moreover, he managed to annex Fiume to Italy. He used the French uneasiness in Ruhr in order to secure Paris' assistance as long as Belgrade was concerned. It is true that the French government used all its influence in Belgrade in order to persuade it to compensate and not to form a Balkan bloc with Athens. In addition, the Italian PM took advantage of the internal decline and the division among the nations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the external isolation of the Greek government. He also realized the effect of the use of force upon a weak and unstable government such as the Greek one of that time. It is doubtful if he could persuade the Serbs to retreat without the bombardment of Corfu, which proved his will to adopt any possible measure. On the other hand, the League of Nations acted in a very insufficient way in order to fulfill mainly the interests of the Great Powers. The well-known tendency of the Balkan history to separate the states according to the will of the Great Powers was also proved. Viewed in retrospect, this bombardment was the key to unlock Fiume's door.