

# **Serbian/Yugoslav-Romanian Relations and Interactions in the 20th Century**

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## Yugoslav-Romanian Relations in Bilateral and Multilateral Context 1925–1927\*

**Abstract:** In this chapter we shall address the topic chronologically, beginning with the negotiations among the Great Powers for the Locarno Pact and concluding with the signing of the Treaty of Defensive Alliance between Italy and Albania (the so-called Second Tirana Pact). This period started with development of new security infrastructure in the Western Europe and opening of the issue of national and regional security in the Eastern Europe. Consequently, the question of utilizing similar model in the latter region was raised in late 1925. For the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS) the most important dilemma remained Italy's Foreign Policy towards the Balkans and the Danubian region. The Second Tirana Pact marked creation of the Italian bridgehead in the first of two regions. In this context we shall examine relations between the Kingdom of SCS and the Kingdom of Romania in bilateral and multilateral context.

**Keywords:** Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Romania, Little Entente, Italy, Locarno Pact, Balkan policy, Great Powers

After the Great War relations between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and (SCS) and Romania were developing gradually, but without predominant impediments. Serbs and Romanians shared positive historical experiences from the late Habsburg period, as well as from the wars of 1913 and 1914–1918. The border and minority issues were raised during the Peace Conference in Paris, yet they were gradually overcome or put aside. Bilateral relations were strengthened by the forging of the Little Entente between the Kingdom of SCS, Romania and Czechoslovakia, in 1920–1921, and by the dynastic marriage between the King Aleksandar and the Princess

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Maria (Mărioara), in 1922. The main obstacle in the tripartite alliance was the member states' reluctance to guarantee the security of the other two allies in the case of war with neighbouring Great Powers. For the Kingdom of SCS this menace was Italy, and for the Kingdom of Romania it was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).<sup>1</sup>

During this particular period there were several outlines that determined bilateral relations. Both kingdoms were members of the Little Entente, which had at the time prominent anti-Hungarian character. In 1924 it was evident that Belgrade and Bucharest had different views on policies towards Italy and the USSR.<sup>2</sup> With the supervision of King Aleksandar, the Foreign Minister Momčilo Ninčić was seeking a way for either alignment or confrontation with Italy's imperialistic intentions.<sup>3</sup> He was either for bilateral understanding or for postponement until "more discerning people come to power in Italy".<sup>4</sup> In January 1924, the Military attaché, General Vojin Čolak-Antić, was dissatisfied with the insincerity of the Romanian military authorities, particularly the General Staff, because he could not get any information of interest for the Yugoslav Army.<sup>5</sup> During the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente in Belgrade, in the same month, Ninčić categorically refused Edvard Beneš's suggestion to recognise the Soviet regime in Russia.<sup>6</sup> The fi-

<sup>1</sup> For further reading: Ivo Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris peace conference: a study in frontier-making*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Eliza Campus, *Mica Întelegere*, (București: Editura Științifică, 1968); Milan Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, (Titovo Užice: IP „Dimitrije Tucović”, 1969); Andrej Mitrović, *Jugoslavija na konferenciji mira 1919–1920*, (Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika SR Srbije, 1969); Eliza Campus, *The Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance*, (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania, 1978); Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941*, (Novi Sad: Institut za istoriju, 1984); Eugen Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, (Boulder: East European Monographs, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Zdeněk Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938: Její hospodářské, politické a vojenské komponenty*, (Praha: Karolinum, 2000) [Serbian edition: Zdeněk Sládek, *Mala antantna: њене привредне, политичке и војне компоненте*, (Beograd: Службени гласник, 2019)]; Александар Ђ. Маринковић, *Женидба краља Александра Карађорђевића*, second supplemented edition, (Beograd: Vajart, 2004); Milan Vanku, *Sprsko-jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi kroz vekove*, (Beograd, 2005); Андреј Митровић, *Разграничење Југославије са Мађарском и Румунијом 1919–1920*, second edition, (Нови Сад: ИК Прометеј; Београд: Радио-телевизија Србије, 2019); Bogdan Catana, *România, Serbia și diferendul privind împărțirea Banatului (1914–1920)*, (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2021), 79–165.

<sup>2</sup> G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 57, 58; Srđan Mičić, „Vojislav Marinković and Italy, 1927–1932”, *Quaestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea*, N.ro 1, L'Italia e la Jugoslavia tra le due guerre, a cura di Stefano Santoro, Anno XLIX, Giugno 2021, 194.

<sup>3</sup> Enes Milak, „Kraljevina Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca i Rimski sporazum (1922–1924)”, *Istorija XX veka*. Zbornik radova XIV–XV, odgovorni urednik dr Živko Avramovski, (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju – IRO „Narodna knjiga“, 1982), 144–146, 153–166. Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia] (AJ), Fond 388, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Francuskoj – Pariz, Viši, box 10, folder 25, (hereafter 388-10-25), folios 395, 396.

<sup>5</sup> E. Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> AJ, 388-12-30, folios 381, 382.

nal conclusion was that each member state should individually recognize and establish diplomatic relations with Moscow.<sup>7</sup> Romania was still holding a defensive stance towards the USSR and searching for ways to reinforce national security and territorial integrity.<sup>8</sup> According to the Plenipotentiary Minister in Bucharest, Boško Čolak-Antić, the government and political circles were dissatisfied with the absence of Belgrade's support in this matter.<sup>9</sup> Ion Brătianu's Cabinet asked the Quai d'Orsay to assist their case in Belgrade and Prague.<sup>10</sup> The Yugoslav government rejected the French proposal for the tripartite convention with Romania for the defence of Bessarabia, in April.<sup>11</sup> It seems that Ninčić and Beneš refused to guarantee any active support to Romania in the case of war with the USSR, at the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente in Prague in July.<sup>12</sup> The short-term Foreign Minister Vojislav Marinković – in Ljubomir Davidović government – had the idea of mutual recognition and establishing bilateral relations with the USSR, but he did not want to blunder in the face of possible opposition from King Aleksandar.<sup>13</sup> He signed, with the Plenipotentiary Minister in Belgrade, Theodor Emandi, a bilateral military convention in January 1923,<sup>14</sup> but refused to sign a new bilateral agreement with similar obligations from the new Romanian-Czechoslovak treaty on the mobilisation of the Army towards Hungary in the case of a Romanian-Soviet conflict. After the downfall of Davidović's Cabinet, Pašić and Ninčić gave consent in December 1924.<sup>15</sup> In the ranks of the Little Entente, Belgrade had closer and more sincere cooperation with Prague than with Bucharest.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> M. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, 26; E. Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> Emilian Bold, Răzvan Ovidiu Locovei, *Relații româno-sovietice (1918–1941)*, (Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2008), 107–113; Vasile Buga, „Evoluția relațiilor româno-sovietice (1918–1991)”, *Politica externă și diplomația României pe parcursul unui secol de la înfăptuirea României Mari*, Volumul II, România, factor active în viața international, Coordinator Ion M. Anghel, (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2018), 136.

<sup>9</sup> AJ, 388-12-30, folios 362, 363.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 366.

<sup>11</sup> Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1971), 268; E. Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 117.

<sup>12</sup> E. Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 119, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Vuk Vinaver, „Jugoslovensko-sovjetski odnosi 1919–1929. Pitanje priznanja SSSR-a i uspostavljanje jugoslovensko-sovjetskih diplomatskih odnosa”, *Istorija XX veka*, tom VII, odgovorni urednik Dragoslav Janković, (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1965), 135, 160; Srđan Mičić, „Shifting in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy from Regional Alliance to Neutrality”, *On the Fault Lines of European and World Politics: Yugoslavia between Alliances and Neutrality/Non-Alignment*, Editors Srđan Mičić, Jovan Čavoški, (Belgrade: Institute for Recent History of Serbia, 2022), 67.

<sup>14</sup> E. Boia, *Romania's Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 122.

<sup>15</sup> G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> For further reading: E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*; M. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*; E. Campus, *The Little Entente and the Balkan Alliance*; Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938*.

These outlines led Romania's government to believe that the Kingdom of SCS and Czechoslovakia were planning to outplay them, and transform the Little Entente into a wider Slavic alliance via recognition of the USSR.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was predicting that Berlin could exploit internal differences in the ranks of the Little Entente and take advantage of close relations with Moscow to win over Bucharest to their side.<sup>18</sup> In late 1924, relations between the Kingdom of SCS and Czechoslovakia were gloomy due to the Prague's attitude towards Serbo-Croatian internal disputes, and rapidly improved – in early 1925 – after agreement between the Court, the PM (and leader of the strongest Serbian party – the People's Radical Party) Nikola Pašić and the leader of the strongest Croatian party (until then in opposition), Stjepan Radić.<sup>19</sup> This event had the opposite effect on bilateral relations between Belgrade and Bucharest. Radić had a non-friendly attitude towards Romania, and his viewpoint on the Little Entente was only gradually changing. During the sessions of the League of Nations, in September 1925, he stated his change of position to the Romanian delegation.<sup>20</sup>

In May 1925, the three Foreign Ministers, Ninčić, Edvard Beneš and Ion Gheorghe Duca, had cordial views on the on-going negotiations between the Great Powers about the future Locarno Pact. They were displeased with the actions of Great Britain, France and Germany, because the final outcome would be division between states with and without international guarantees of their borders. They concluded that the Little Entente should work on strengthening the territorial *status quo* in Europe.<sup>21</sup> It was palpable that Ninčić was more interested in the Balkans than in Central European issues.<sup>22</sup> At the Ministerial conference in Geneva in September, three Foreign Ministers discussed the idea of the so-called Eastern security treaty for the Central European states.<sup>23</sup> Beneš was reviving the idea from 1924 on the tripartite pact between Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of SCS and Italy.<sup>24</sup> After the Great

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<sup>17</sup> Poland supported Romania in this matter (Piotr S. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies 1919–1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno*, (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 318; Władysław Stępnik, *Dyplomacja polska na Bałkanach (1918–1926)*, (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 1998), 237–239).

<sup>18</sup> AJ, 388-12-30, folio 383.

<sup>19</sup> Jindřich Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš: Politická biografie českého demokrata*, Část první: Revolucionář a diplomat (1884–1935), (Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2006), 395.

<sup>20</sup> G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 66, 67.

<sup>21</sup> E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, 71; J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš*, Část první, 395.

<sup>22</sup> Andrzej Essen, *Polska a Mała ententa 1920–1934*, (Warszawa–Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 164; Radko Břach, *Československo a Evropa v polovině dvacátých let*, (Praha a Litomyšl: Nakladatelství Paseka, 1996), 200, 205, 206; S. Mičić, „Shifting in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy from Regional Alliance to Neutrality”, 71.

<sup>23</sup> Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938*, 68, 69.

<sup>24</sup> *I Documenti Diplomatici Italiani*, Settima Serie: 1922–1935, Vol. IV (15 maggio 1925–6 febbraio 1927), (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1962), No. 124, p. 94.

Powers initiated the signing of the Locarno pact in October, Ninčić took the initiative to discuss with Beneš all the implications for Central Europe and the Balkans. They agreed on the necessity of the so-called Central European Locarno, and received Duca's consent a day later.<sup>25</sup> After Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain rejected their proposal for the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay to lead the initiative, Beneš advised Ninčić to revert to the original plan - namely, for the Little Entente to assume the initiative and ensure the reorganization of regional security on its own terms, thereby safeguarding both the alliance's survival and its strategic position towards Hungary.<sup>26</sup> But they were separately discussing the terms of potential utilization of the model for the region, since autumn 1925. Beneš was interested in rapprochement with Austria,<sup>27</sup> Duca was inclined towards closer cooperation with Poland,<sup>28</sup> and Ninčić preserved hitherto focus on the Balkan issues.<sup>29</sup> After Mussolini presented to the Foreign Office and the Quai d'Orsay plan for the *Locarno danubiano-balcanica* in October 1925, and officially introduced it in February 1926,<sup>30</sup> Ninčić was comfortable only with plans which included France.<sup>31</sup> He revived the idea of the tripartite pact with Italy and France against Germany.<sup>32</sup> Pašić was urging Ninčić to avoid accepting excessive allied obligations against Berlin, because he asserted that Germans would play a significant role in Europe in the future.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that Beneš raised the issue of loyalty of Romania to other two members of the Little Entente in the case of a Yugoslav-Italian military conflict. It seems that Yugoslav side was sharing his concerns.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>25</sup> S. Mičić, „Shifting in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy from Regional Alliance to Neutrality”, 68, 69.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> J. Dejmek, *Edvard Beneš*, Část první, 408, 409.

<sup>28</sup> E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, 73, 74.

<sup>29</sup> S. Mičić, „Shifting in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy from Regional Alliance to Neutrality”, 70–72.

<sup>30</sup> Matteo Luigi Napolitano, *Mussolini e la Conferenza di Locarno (1925): Il problema della sicurezza nella politica estera italiana*, (Urbino: Montefeltro, 1996), 230, 231; H. James Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in Interwar Period, 1918–1940*, (Westport-London: Praeger, 1997), 36–40; Massimo Bucarelli, *Mussolini e la Jugoslavia (1922–1939)*, (Bari: B. A. Graphis, 2006), 42, 43; Luciano Monzali, *Il sogno dell'egemonia: l'Italia, la questione jugoslava e l'Europa centrale (1918–1941)*, (Firenze: Le lettere, 2010), 40, 41.

<sup>31</sup> V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, 301, 302.

Arhiv Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti [The Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts] (ASANU), Zbirka 14.387, Papers of Milan Antić, item no. 10443, Записи Сећања-Људи и догађаји-Југославија-Finis Jugoslaviae, 20–22; Vuk Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Francuska između dva svetska rata (Da li je Jugoslavija bila francuski „satelit“)*, (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1985), 82, 90–96; Stanislav Sretenović, „Le poids grandissant de l'Italie dans les relations entre la France et le Royaume des Serbes, Croates et Slovènes 1924–1927”, *Istorija 20. veka*, Issue no. 2, 2007, 25–28.

<sup>33</sup> Zoran Janjetović, Mičić Srđan, „Österreich in den Augen der jugoslawischen Diplomatie 1918–1938”, *Nečakov zbornik: Procesi, teme in dogodki iz 19. in 20. stoletja*, Ur. Kornelija Ajlec, Vojan Vakovec, Vožo Repe, (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2018), 487.

<sup>34</sup> Миле Бјелајац, *Дипломаџија и војска: Србија и Југославија 1901–1999*, (Београд: Медија центар “Одбрана” – Академија за дипломатију и безбедност, 2010), 131–133.

Bilateral relations between Yugoslavia and Romania were hampered by opposing interests in their relations with their mutual neighbour, Bulgaria. They had shared the goal to prevent Bulgarian revisionism, yet they were mutually suspicious of each other's initiatives for rapprochement with their neighbour. This was evident from period of Aleksandar Stambolijski's government. When Ninčić was devising a plan for a Balkans Customs Union in the late 1925 – as a countermeasure against the Great Powers' initiatives for the implementation of the Locarno model in the region – he was considering only Bulgaria, Greece and Albania as future members. He assigned an important role to Sofia in this project, since his plan was to use economy to surmount political problems.<sup>35</sup> After it was clear that Andrey Lyapchev's government was unwilling to accept Belgrade's terms in the spring of 1926,<sup>36</sup> Ninčić changed his concept during the summer and offered to Athens and Bucharest to form a tripartite Balkan alliance with a clear anti-Bulgarian orientation.<sup>37</sup> At first, it seemed that Foreign Minister Ion Mitilineu accepted this idea.<sup>38</sup> Bucharest changed its position in late 1926 and early 1927.

An additional factor in bilateral relations was their respective ties with Poland. Since 1924, Ninčić had been playing on Romania's and Poland's card to compel Greece to concessions regarding transition via Thessaloniki.<sup>39</sup> During 1925, Belgrade was cautious in the ongoing negotiations among the three members of the Little Entente, and between the Kingdom of SCS, Romania, and Poland about the transit of military equipment via the Port of Thessaloniki. Since January 1925, Warsaw was seeking closer ties with Slavic states and rejected the Romanian initiative to forge an anti-Soviet bloc with the Baltic States, due to the improvement of international status of the Weimar Republic.<sup>40</sup> Its main goal was to secure the transit of war materials from France via the Serbian Free Trade Zone (FTZ) in Thessaloniki, the Kingdom of SCS and Romania.<sup>41</sup> The Yugoslav MFA was cognisant of the Polish intentions to learn more about opportunities to implement their plan. Close relations between Poland and Romania swayed Ninčić to consult with Duca, in Fe-

<sup>35</sup> Srđan Mičić, „Yugoslav Diplomacy and the ideas of the Balkan unity, 1925–1930”, *Balkanica Posnaniensia: Acta et studia*, vol. XXIX, 2022, 219–223; Srđan Mihić, Ivan Ristić, „Александар Цинцар-Марковић о југословенско-бугарском царинском савезу и балканској царинској унији, децембра 1925 – јануара 1926”, *Архив: Часопис Архива Југославије*, Бр. 1–2, 2022, 149–171.

<sup>36</sup> Иван Ристић, „Између старих и нових изазова – Бугарска у политици Краљевине СХС 1926. године”, *Токови историје*, Бр. 2, 2013, 80–85.

<sup>37</sup> S. Mičić, „Shifting in the Yugoslav Foreign Policy from Regional Alliance to Neutrality”, 77.

<sup>38</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, item no. 9791.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, item no. 9092.

<sup>40</sup> P. Wandycz, *France and her Eastern Allies 1919–1925*, 323, 324.

<sup>41</sup> Piotr Wandycz, *Polish Foreign Policy 1914–1945: Aims and Achievements: A Lecture*, (London: Orbis Books, 1988), 18; W. Stepniak, *Dyplomacja polska na Bałkanach (1918–1926)*, 253, 295–298.

bruary.<sup>42</sup> The Yugoslav Foreign Minister was seeking support from Warsaw, Bucharest and Sofia to compel Athens to accept his intentions regarding the railway between the Yugoslav-Greek border and Thessaloniki.<sup>43</sup> Later, Emandi persuaded the Greek Plenipotentiary Minister in Belgrade, Spiridon Polychroniades, that Romania would never support Ninčić to pressure Greece.<sup>44</sup> During March and April, Čolak-Antić was scrutinizing the initiative of Duca and Constantin Langa-Rășcanu regarding the tripartite alliance between Romania, the Kingdom of SCS and Greece. He concluded they were examining details regarding bilateral negotiation between Belgrade and Athens in order to prevent the reestablishment of the Balkan Alliance or Greek membership in the Little Entente.<sup>45</sup> The Yugoslav plenipotentiary minister in Warsaw, Jevrem Simić, was certain about changes in the Polish Foreign Policy only in April,<sup>46</sup> after successful Beneš's visit to Warsaw.<sup>47</sup> According to Simić, Poland was distancing from Romania regarding the USSR so it could pursue rapprochement with the Kingdom of SCS and Czechoslovakia.<sup>48</sup> The Yugoslav delegations on railway and military-railway conferences in Warsaw that same month tried to separate the issues of transits of military transports via the Kingdom of SCS for Romania, and for Poland. After Duca's intervention, the Yugoslav MFA accepted simultaneous negotiations with both parties.<sup>49</sup> But the Romanian MFA hindered the conclusion of military conventions and asked for a separate convention to be signed with the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>50</sup>

A new dissonant between Belgrade and Bucharest was the question whether military and trade transports should be discussed separately or jointly. Although the two states were allies, instead of direct railway traffic<sup>51</sup> transports were sent via Hungary. Therefore, the issue of direct railway traffic for commercial purposes was raised in 1924.<sup>52</sup> Ninčić and Duca were discussing the main features at the Little Entente's Ministerial

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<sup>42</sup> AJ, Fond 395, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Rumuniji – Bukurešt, box 1, folder 2, folio 52.

<sup>43</sup> AJ, 395-13-127, folio 387.

<sup>44</sup> G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> AJ, 395-13-127, folios 386, 388, 389, and 392.

<sup>46</sup> According to Simić, the PM Władysław Grabski accepted the idea of the Slavs' cooperation – particularly between Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of SCS as a core for wider collaboration with the USSR – only under the influence of changed German Foreign Policy (AJ, r. 395, b. 14, f. 136, folios 142–145).

<sup>47</sup> Beneš signed treaties on regulating territorial disputes, arbitration and trade (B. B. Марьяна, *Второй президент Чехословакии: Эдвард Бенеш: йолийик и человек 1884–1948*, (Москва: Российская Академия Наук Институт Славяноведения, 2013), 90).

<sup>48</sup> AJ, 395-14-136, folios 142–145.

<sup>49</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 79–81.

<sup>50</sup> Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 83, 84 and 87.

<sup>52</sup> Direct railway traffic via Jimbolia was terminated after the Kingdom of SCS exchanged this town with Romania for some Serbian settlements, in 1924 (G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 241, 242).

conference in early May.<sup>53</sup> Later that same month, at the Transportation Conference of the three allied states in Belgrade, the Romanian delegation attempted to steer the discussion solely toward military matters.<sup>54</sup> Since Poland sent observers, Beneš was pronouncedly against the quadruple convention and insisted on the distinction between the conventions of the Little Entente and one with Poland.<sup>55</sup> Ninčić and Duca accepted his proposition, and bilateral conventions on military traffic between three member states were initialled in late May.<sup>56</sup> Only after Ninčić's intervention in Bucharest regarding civil transport did the Romanian side agree to send civilian experts, and conferences for railway international and mutual traffic in Belgrade could start its work in late May.<sup>57</sup> In the case of military conventions, Ninčić favoured cooperation with Czechoslovakia over Poland. During July, he was trying to persuade Duca to prioritize agreement with Prague. The Romanian Foreign Minister rejected this, and finally Beneš was swayed to accept a tripartite convention on military transports, as a precondition for Belgrade to work on a similar convention with Bucharest and Warsaw. A further discussion on this issue was held in

<sup>53</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folio 87. Simultaneously, they decided to resolve question of traffic and trade exploitation of the River Danube („Pregovori o Đerdapu”, *Politika*, 5 June 1925, 3). This issue was discussed on the Conference in Belgrade, in early June, and two sides have reached an agreement (Милан Гулић, *Краљевина Југославија и Дунав. Дунавска пољитика југословенске краљевине 1918–1944*, (Београд: Институт за савремену историју, 2014), 101).

<sup>54</sup> The Yugoslav side was surprised by Romanian decision to send only military delegation, and not a civilian one (AJ, 395-1-2, folio 87; „Diplomatske posete”, *Vreme*, 22 May 1925, 2; „Posete rumunskih oficira”, *Politika*, 22 May 1925, 4).

<sup>55</sup> The transportation conference in Belgrade was opportunity for Yugoslav-Polish rapprochement. Beneš was warning Ninčić on the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente, earlier that month, that he should put more effort in that direction (Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938*, 70, 77).

<sup>56</sup> „Vojno-saobraćajne konvencije”, *Politika*, 30 May 1295, 3.

<sup>57</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 87, 88; „Saobraćaj sa Rumunijom”, *Politika*, 29 May 1925, 2; „Regulisanje železničkog saobraćaja između naše Kraljevine i Rumunije”, *Vreme*, 29 May 1925, 1; „Pred železničkom konvencijom sa Rumunijom i Čehoslovačkom”, *Vreme*, 30 May 1925, 1. The General convention on the regulation of international and mutual traffic and the Convention on the opening of railways for international and mutual traffic were signed *ad referendum* with intention to establish railway traffic until 15 July, yet Romanian delegation did not have authority to discuss Convention of joint railway stations („Saobraćajne konvencije sa Rumunijom”, *Politika*, 4 June 1925, 2; „Pregovori sa Rumunijom završeni su”, *Vreme*, 4 June 1925, 3). Direct transports of goods between two states was re-established via Jimbolia on 10 June („Direktan saobraćaj robe sa Rumunijom”, *Vreme*, 10 June 1925, 2; „Saobraćaj sa Rumunijom”, *Vreme*, 17 June 1925, 2), and in August Romanian side was urging the start of mutual exports even before national assemblies ratified convention („Za izvoz granici Rumunije”, *Vreme*, 7 August 1925, 3; „Transport preko Žombolja”, *Politika*, 7 August 1925, 5; „Pitanje g. Emandia”, *Pravda*, 9 August 1925, 9). After Emandia had signed the Convention, the Yugoslav government authorised the general director of the state railways Mihailo Ilić to sign it on 20 August („Saobraćajna konvencija sa Rumunijom”, *Pravda*, 21 August 1295, 1).

Geneva, in August.<sup>58</sup> Ninčić, Beneš and Duca could not reach understanding on the membership of Poland in their tripartite alliance,<sup>59</sup> but they agreed to sign the Little Entente's Convention on military transportations, as a precondition for continuation of negotiations between the Kingdom of SCS, Romania and Poland on the same issue.<sup>60</sup> The direct railway transportation between the Kingdom of SCS and Poland was raised again in August.<sup>61</sup>

The final conference between the four states was held in Bucharest. Negotiations within the Little Entente were held on 12 and 13 November, and between Yugoslav, Romanian and Polish delegations on 14 and 15 November.<sup>62</sup> Same as with the anti-German tripartite agreements, Pašić was more cautious than Ninčić. The PM gave instructions to the delegate Svetislav Milosavljević – Colonel and head of the Transportation Department of the General Staff – that he should „offer and give as little as possible, and ask for as much as possible”. Pašić was unwilling to make any concessions to Romania, which had thus far failed in negotiations to define precise compensations for the Kingdom of SCS. He was convinced that multilateral conventions were more beneficial for other parties. Ninčić was inclined to make concessions to other states and to conclude long-lasting discussions.<sup>63</sup> In late November, the tripartite conventions on transportations of all war materials via Adriatic ports and the FTZs in Aegean ports were signed between the Kingdom of SCS, Czechoslovakia and Romania, and between the Kingdom of SCS, Romania and Poland. The Kingdom of SCS ratified them in late December 1925.<sup>64</sup> From Article 1 of Annexes I to those two conventions, it was evident that main transportation line was projected via the FTZ in Thessaloniki.<sup>65</sup> As General Emilio Belić clarified to colonel Kurcysz Tadeusz, Annex II did not mentioned the construction of the Adriatic railways which were under construction by virtue of a law passed by the National Assembly of the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>66</sup> In December 1925, Beneš send a message to king Aleksandar through the

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<sup>58</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 95–104. During preparation for the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente, Polish, Czechoslovak and Romanian plenipotentiary ministers Zdzisław Okęcki, Jan Šeba and Theodor Emandi visited Bled – where King had summer residence – at the same time with Ninčić („Okenski na Bledu”, *Pravda*, 7 August 1925, 5).

<sup>59</sup> Z. Sládek, *Malá dohoda 1919–1938*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 105 and 106.

<sup>61</sup> „Direktan saobraćaj sa Poljskom”, *Pravda*, 12 August 1925, 4; „G. Okenski kod Ministra Saobraćaja”, *Vreme*, 23 August 1925, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Vojni arhiv [Military archives, Belgrade] (VA), Popisnik br. 17, Arhiva Vojske Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca/Jugoslavije 1920–1941, box 104, folder 1, item no. 1, folios 31, 34, 67, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Светислав Тиса Милосављевић, *Мемоари: минисџровање, приредили Небојша Радмановић, Верица М. Стошић, Зоран С. Мачкић*, (Бања Лука: Удружење архивских радника Републике Српске, 2005), 37–42.

<sup>64</sup> AJ, 395-1-2, folios 111 and 112; VA, Popisnik br. 17, b. 104, f. 1, item no. 1, folios 35, 36, 40, 70, 77; E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegere*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> VA, Popisnik br. 17, b. 104, f. 1, item no. 1, folios 59 and 60.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, folio 33.

Military Attaché in Prague general Mihailo Nenadović, that two states should resolve the issue of transportation via Romania for the Czechoslovak military aid to the Kingdom of SCS in the case of military conflict with Italy, which seemed possible at the time.<sup>67</sup> Since all the conventions of the Little Entente came into effect only in the event of war with Hungary, the two states needed to determine whether Romania was willing to support them, and to what extent, in the event of a conflict with Italy, or whether Bucharest would refuse under some pretext.<sup>68</sup>

The four states have broadened collaboration on the ground of mutual protection from intentions of the Great Powers. During the Third Congress of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) held in Brussels, in late June 1925, their delegations agreed on future close cooperation. Since they were part of the French collective security system – and Paris was weaker party to London and Washington in the ICC – the four states wanted to prevent imposition of Anglo-Saxons' unfavourable conclusions.<sup>69</sup> The additional stimulant for further rapprochement between the Little Entente and Poland was the initiative for the Locarno Pact, in October 1925. The political circles in all four states were certain that European Powers' agreement would threaten the existence of national states.<sup>70</sup> France signed treaties of mutual guarantees with Czechoslovakia and Poland on 16 October 1925, as a security measure for the eastern German borders.<sup>71</sup> In late 1925 and early 1926, Yugoslav statesmen were planning to establish diplomatic relations with Moscow as a countermeasure to the Italian-British cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>72</sup> In the spring of 1926, Niničić was displeased with rapprochement between the Weimar Republic and the Soviet Union which he assessed as the reaction to the Romanian-Polish alliance. He was tactfully avoiding initiatives for closer cooperation between the Little Entente and the Romanian-Polish alliance on the anti-Soviet basis during the first half of 1926. At the beginning of May he was hoping that the Soviet-German reaction would mollify, allowing the Little Entente harmonisation with Poland.<sup>73</sup> Jozef Piłsudski's *coup d'état* in May 1926 changed Polish foreign policy. Warsaw's relations with the Little Entente weakened due to serious doubts about the internal stability of its three member states.<sup>74</sup> Niničić adopted a more ca-

<sup>67</sup> M. Бјелајац, *Дипломашија и војска*, 132.

<sup>68</sup> VA, Popisnik br. 17, b. 95e, f. 3, item no. 5, folios 1–4.

<sup>69</sup> „Kongres Međunarodne Trgovačke Komore u Brislu”, *Vreme*, 9 July 1925, 4.

<sup>70</sup> E. Campus, *Mica Întelegere*, 72.

<sup>71</sup> В. В. Марьина, *Второй президент Чехословакии*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> Срђан Б. Мићић, *Балкански и јодунавски концепти југословенске спољне политике (1925–1938)*, (докторска дисертација, Универзитет у Београду, Филозофски факултет, Одељење за историју, 2018), 396, 397, 543–545.

<sup>73</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, items no. 8272, 8273; A. Essen, *Polska a Mała ententa 1920–1934*, 191, 192.

<sup>74</sup> S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliance 1926–1936*, passim; A. Essen, *Polska a Mała ententa 1920–1934*, 188, 189.

utious approach toward Poland,<sup>75</sup> which had diminished in importance within the context of relations between the Kingdom of SCS and Romania.

The greatest challenge for the bilateral relations and cohesion of the Little Entente was General Alexandru Averescu's Cabinet during 1926 and 1927. After the dynastic crisis in Romania in late 1925 and early 1926 – when the abdication of the Crown Prince Carol was accepted and the Regency was formed – the inability of the Yugoslav Diplomatic Service to assess the long-term impacts of internal changes on the Foreign Policy had increased.<sup>76</sup> Čolak-Antić was displeased with conduct of the major political figures in Romania.<sup>77</sup> In early January 1926 he was informing Belgrade that Romanian government had not welcomed Radić's public statements on the unification of all South Slavs into one state.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, the Little Entente reached an agreement on close collaboration in the sphere of public security in order to paralyze suspected Soviet propaganda.<sup>79</sup> After the first phase of negotiations with Italy and France on the tripartite pact, Ninčić was convinced that Mussolini would continue to undermine relations between the three member states, and between Belgrade and Bucharest.<sup>80</sup>

Hitherto discrepancies in Yugoslavia's and Romania's foreign policies towards the Great Powers – particularly Italy and the USSR – were amplified. Doubts were arising regarding Averescu's tendencies for rapprochement with Mussolini. The MFA suspected policy and diplomatic actions from the start. The opening of the Romanian Consulate in the Bulgarian town of Vidin, near the Yugoslav border, was interpreted as an intelligence operation targeting the local Vlach population.<sup>81</sup> These suspicions stemmed not only from Mussolini's hostility toward the Kingdom of SCS, but also from conflicting interests of Belgrade and Bucharest in their relations with Sofia. Čolak-Antić's first impressions in May were not unfavourable. Statements on plans for closer collaboration with the other two members of the Little Entente, faster

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<sup>75</sup> Državni arhiv Srbije [The State Archives of Serbia] (DAS), Zbirka Pokloni i otkupi (PO), item no. PO-149, document no. 122, the deputy Foreign Minister Jovant T. Marković to Nikola Pašić, strictly confidential report, 30 December 1926.

<sup>76</sup> Srđan Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, *New Cultural and Political Perspectives on Serbian-Romanian Relations*, Edited by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, Jovana Kolundžija, Mircea Măran, Otilia Hedeşan, and Christene D' Anca, (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2023), 92, 93.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>78</sup> AJ, 395-1-3, folios 129 and 130.

<sup>79</sup> The conference was held in Bucharest in early February 1926, some adjustments of the Protocols were made in late March and they were signed during April (AJ, Fond 372, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Vatikanu, b. 6, Circular of Vukašin Životić, the chief of the Intelligence Department of the MFA, Romania No. 5 from 11 February 1926; AJ, 395-15-158, folios 42, 361, 363–368, 372).

<sup>80</sup> Constantin Iordan, „La Roumanie et la Yugoslavie face à l'Italie fasciste (1926–1928): une solidarité défaillante?”, *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, 2, tome XXII–1984, (Avril–Juin), 162.

<sup>81</sup> AJ, 372-6, Circular of Vukašin Životić, Romania No. 11 from 8 April 1926.

pace in bilateral negotiations on border issues, and Romanian interest for the visit of the Yugoslav chief of the General Staff were good omens for the future.<sup>82</sup> Ninčić and Beneš put much effort to win over Mitilineu, during the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente in mid-June 1926. In a three-hour meeting, they informed him about the alliance's past activities.<sup>83</sup> Ninčić was elaborating a plan for anti-Bulgarian alliance with Greece, to which Mitilineu reacted favourably. Mitilineu was prepared to leverage the reputation of Constantin Langa-Rășcanu, the plenipotentiary minister in Athens, to help overcome obstacles in Yugoslav-Greek relations.<sup>84</sup> The Yugoslav side even engaged Queen Maria during this ministerial meeting,<sup>85</sup> probably as a means to win over Mitilineu. During the Second session of the Press Little Entente, on 18 and 19 June, Ninčić, Beneš and Mitilineu confirmed the importance of the political work of the press and their influence on the public in the three member states.<sup>86</sup> National committees were discussing the means of preventing mutual attacks in the press.<sup>87</sup> At first, Čolak-Antić observed widespread Romanian public approval of the Little Entente's meeting and its cordial policies toward France, Italy, and Bulgaria.<sup>88</sup> Yet, he was becoming aware of the impending change of the Romanian foreign policy. From the end of May until the first days of July, he was trying to grasp the full implications of the Italian financial loan for the rapprochement and cordial Italian-Romanian foreign policy in the Balkans. He concluded that Bucharest would have to make many concessions in the political sphere.<sup>89</sup>

The first sign of discord in bilateral relations was the change of Mitilineu's stance towards Bulgaria in late July and early August. Firstly, he initiated and then withdrew from the initiative for a joint Yugoslav-Romanian-Greek diplomatic action in Sofia against guerrilla actions in Macedonia, Dobruja and Thrace. Čolak-Antić concluded that this was the result of a changing policy toward Bulgaria. He was convinced that Averescu influenced Mitilineu to change the tune,<sup>90</sup> as his government wanted to exploit Bulgarian

<sup>82</sup> AJ, 395-1-4, folio 193; AJ, 395-14-142, folios 326–334.

<sup>83</sup> Андра Милосављевић, „Конференција Мале Антанте на Бледу”, *Полиџика*, 18 June 1926, 5.

<sup>84</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, item no. 9791.

<sup>85</sup> Станислав Краков, „Министри Мале Антанте дочекују Краљицу”, *Време*, 19 June 1926, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Станислав Краков, „Састанак Мале Антанте закључен”, *Време*, 19 June 1926, 1; Андра Милосављевић, „Крај Конференције Мале Антанте”, *Полиџика*, 19 June 1926, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Three major topics on the agenda of the Press Little Entente were: exchange of press information, means to prevent mutual press attacks and free railway tickets for journalists (Nicolae Dascălu, „Press co-operation of the Little Entente and Balkan Alliance states (1922–1939)”, *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, tome XX, no. 1 Janvier–Mars, 1982, 34).

<sup>88</sup> AJ, 395-14-142, folios 335–336.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, folios 326–334, 337–339, 416.

<sup>90</sup> Иван Ристић, *Балкански Каин и Авељ: Бујарска у југословенској ђолиџици (1919–1929)*, (Београд: Институт за новију историју Србије – НераEdu, 2023), 318–320.

unwillingness for rapprochement with the Kingdom of SCS and to support Sofia against Belgrade as a means to prevent cooperation between two South Slavic states.<sup>91</sup> This did not mean only a change in Romanian policy toward its Slavic neighbours, but also a rejection of Ninčić's initiative for forging anti-Bulgarian tripartite alliance.

According to the plenipotentiary minister at the Holy See, Jeverm Simić, the Romanian-Italian rapprochement had a positive impact on the preparation of the Concordat with more favourable provisions than those offered to the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>92</sup> The official visit of King Ferdinand and General Averescu to Rome and signing of the Romanian-Italian Agreement of Friendship, in August and September,<sup>93</sup> was clear signs for the Yugoslav diplomatic service that the worst-case scenario was activated. The MFA assessed it as an Italian attempt to disrupt the Little Entente as part of a broader initiative to encircle Yugoslavia in the Danube region and the Balkans,<sup>94</sup> although it was aware that the Bessarabia question was Mussolini's trump card.<sup>95</sup> Radić had a private meeting with Averescu in Geneva, in mid-September,<sup>96</sup> but it seems there were no particular results. Another sign of disrupted relations were public manifestations during the official visit of the Duke of Spoleto and Chief of the General Staff Marshal Pietro Badoglio to Romania and inspection in Bessarabia, in November. Romanian officials tried to persuade Čolak-Antić they would not support any aggressive Italian policy. He and the MFA were not reluctant to trust their statements.<sup>97</sup> When crisis in the Yugoslav-Italian relations was at its peak over the so-called First Tirana Treaty, in December 1926 and January 1927, it seemed that Averescu's pro-Italian policy gained support from the opposition and public. Čolak-Antić was convinced that the final outcome of this policy depended on Mussolini's willingness to give adequate guarantees for Bessarabia.<sup>98</sup> The Romanian press once again raised an outcry against the alleged „Slavisation” of the Little Entente,<sup>99</sup> and claimed that Pašić's death was allowing Radić to accomplish Yugoslav-Soviet rapprochement.<sup>100</sup> Čolak-Antić informed the MFA that King Ferdinand's ill health had revealed the Regency's lack of

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<sup>91</sup> AJ, 395-1-4, folios 216–223.

<sup>92</sup> AJ, 395-14-143, folio 439.

<sup>93</sup> G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 69; C. Jordan, „La Roumanie et la Yugoslavie face à l'Italie fasciste (1926–1928)”, 166.

<sup>94</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, item no. 8779.

<sup>95</sup> DAS, PO, item no. PO-149, document no. 122, the deputy Foreign Minister Jovant T. Marković to Nikola Pašić, strictly confidential report, 30 December 1926.

<sup>96</sup> *Korespodencija Stjepana Radića, 1919–1928*, tom 2, priredio Bogdan Krizman, (Zagreb: Institut za hrvatsku povijest Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1973), 476, 477.

<sup>97</sup> AJ, 395-14-142, folios 342–350; DAS, PO, item no. PO-149, document no. 122, the deputy Foreign Minister Jovant T. Marković to Nikola Pašić, strictly confidential report, 30 December 1926.

<sup>98</sup> AJ, 395-14-142, folios 371–375, 385–389; AJ, 395-14-143, folio 466; AJ, 395-16-168, folio 1.

<sup>99</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, item no. 8804.

<sup>100</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folio 8.

authority over internal affairs.<sup>101</sup> The clear implication was that Averescu's state policy could not be challenged from above. After the resignation of Ninčić, in late December 1926, MFA officials concluded that Italian-Romanian rapprochement was a direct consequence of his failure to reach an agreement with Mussolini.<sup>102</sup> The only bright spot on the gloomy horizon was Mitilineu's scepticism towards Hungarian plans for the restitution of the Monarchy and the restoration of Habsburgs.<sup>103</sup>

Čolak-Antić was also warning the MFA that Averescu's policy of collaboration between two „Latin sisters” could endanger the existence of the Little Entente.<sup>104</sup> The Press Attaché in Bucharest, Vladimir Bogdanović, estimated that the propaganda for the „Latin” policy was a result of Romanian dissatisfaction with the dominant position and role of the Yugoslav state in the Balkans and Danube region. Bucharest sought to diminish Belgrade's significance in European affairs and to portray Romania as the „Latin guard” against the USSR.<sup>105</sup> The political leaders in Slovenia and Croatia had assessed the situation more unfavourably. Anton Korošec claimed that collaboration with Romania was difficult in the past, and in the new situation he believed Belgrade could hardly define its policy towards Bucharest, which was cooperating both with France and Italy. Radić was more radical in his statement. He considered that the Little Entente had ceased to exist due to Averescu's foreign policy. Radić was convinced the final outcome would be the Kingdom of Romania's reduction to the status of Italian colony.<sup>106</sup>

At the beginning of 1927, the situation was not improving. In reaction to the formation of an Italian bridgehead in Albania, two of the King's confidants among Yugoslav diplomats offered differing proposals on how to counter Mussolini's ambitions. The plenipotentiary minister in Paris, Miroslav Spalajković, was advising the new Foreign Minister Ninko Perić to seize the moment for the rapprochement with Great Britain.<sup>107</sup> The plenipotentiary minister in Rome, Živojin Balugdžić, advocated seeking support of the USSR in order to force the Foreign Office to terminate further support to the Palazzo Chigi.<sup>108</sup> Beneš was pursuing the same direction. He tried to convince the

<sup>101</sup> S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 93.

<sup>102</sup> DAS, PO, item no. PO-149, document no. 122, the deputy Foreign Minister Jovant T. Marković to Nikola Pašić, strictly confidential report, 30 December 1926.

<sup>103</sup> AJ, 395-1-4, folio 355, 356.

<sup>104</sup> S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 99, 100.

<sup>105</sup> AJ, Fond 38, Centralni Presburo Predsedništva Ministarskog saveta Kraljevine Jugoslavije, box 25, folder 68, (hereafter 38-25-68), Correspondent of the Central Press Bureau at the Legation in Brussels Vladimir P. Bogdanović to the Central Press Bureau, Press No. 108 from 25 August 1930.

<sup>106</sup> „Izjave naših političara o italo-albanskom paktu”, *Vreme*, 1 January 1927, 5; „G. Radić o Albaniji”, *Politika*, 1 January 1927, 5.

<sup>107</sup> DAS, Lični fond Miroslav Spalajković (MS), item no. MS-130, folios 1–5; AJ, 388-10, folios 547 and 548.

<sup>108</sup> V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, 339.

plenipotentiary minister in Prague, Branko Lazarević, there was possibility of rapprochement with the USSR for the Little Entente and the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>109</sup> The situation was further aggravated by a shift in Polish foreign policy. Although Warsaw was pursuing close collaboration with Belgrade and Ankara in South Eastern Europe in the spring of 1927,<sup>110</sup> the charge d'affaires Milovan Prodanović informed the MFA on verified reports that Pilsudski was secretly working on rapprochement with Italy. He could not estimate the new direction of the Polish foreign policy due to the PM's adventurous spirit.<sup>111</sup> This was not just a threat to this regional alliance, but to the whole structure of the French system of the collective security as it implied formation of a greater Italian bloc in the Eastern Europe.

In January 1927, Averescu and Mitilineu were trying to convince Čolak-Antić that Yugoslav diplomatic and military services were exaggerating the Italian threat. The Romanian Foreign Minister and press expressed suspicions of a perceived Slavic threat in Central Europe and the Balkans, on the basis of the alleged Beneš's pan-Slavic foreign policy and the Yugoslav-Soviet rapprochement. After a month of scrutinizing the problem, Čolak-Antić was able to report significant shifts in Bucharest's stance towards Belgrade and Prague. He was convinced that press propaganda was inspired by external factors, but he could not identify the source. Čolak-Antić was emphasizing the fact that Beneš's criticism of Romanian disloyalty towards the Little Entente in the case of the Yugoslav-Italian crisis over Albania was a trigger for the press to start vigorous attacks against Prague and Belgrade, to defend Rome and Tirana, and to level the Kingdom of SCS and Czechoslovakia with the USSR in an alleged Slavic threat.<sup>112</sup> Since tensions continued to rise and criticism of Belgrade became more related to the bilateral relations, in late January Čolak-Antić advised Perić that future press campaign should focus on the Romanian public and exclude the government. His argument was that officials in Bucharest were striving to convince Belgrade of their loyalty to the Little Entente, so it was not in the interest of the Kingdom of SCS to point out bluntly they did not believe them.<sup>113</sup> His suggestion was clearly appropriate, because even the Italian plenipotentiary minister in Bucharest Carlo Durazzo was aware that the Yugoslav government did not trust Averescu's foreign policy.<sup>114</sup>

The Romanian policy had influenced the Yugoslav stance on the Little Entente. After Lazar Marković's unofficial mission in Budapest in February

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<sup>109</sup> AJ, Fond 341, Poslanstvo Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Velikoj Britaniji – London, box 31, folder 80, (hereafter 341-31-80), the General Political Director of the MFA Božidar Purić to the Legation in London, Conf. No. 2187 from 20 March 1927; AJ, 388-15-35, folios 37–39.

<sup>110</sup> A. Essen, *Polska a Mała ententa 1920–1934*, 197, 199–201.

<sup>111</sup> AJ, 388-10-26, folio 657; V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, 346.

<sup>112</sup> AJ, 395-14-142, folios 385–389; AJ, 396-16-168, folios 2–7, 9, 11.

<sup>113</sup> AJ, 396-16-168, folios 12–16; S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 100.

<sup>114</sup> C. Jordan, „La Roumanie et la Yugoslavie face à l'Italie fasciste (1926–1928)”, 167.

1927 – during the last phase of the Yugoslav-Hungarian rapprochement<sup>115</sup> – the Romanian press accused Belgrade for disrupting the Little Entente.<sup>116</sup> Mitileneu was forced to convince Čolak-Antić and the public of his confidence in Yugoslav foreign policy.<sup>117</sup> Perić excluded Bucharest from consultations on his decisions regarding the rapprochement with Budapest. He was consulting only Beneš, and left to his colleague to inform the third member of the Little Entente on the on-going process.<sup>118</sup> Perić acted similarly in the case of the probable restoration of the Habsburgs in Hungary. The MFA officials were certain in January 1927 that Bethlen was prepared to restore the Monarchy.<sup>119</sup> Perić initiated consultation with Beneš on the action of the Little Entente against proclamation of Otto von Habsburg for the King, on 11 February. The Czechoslovak Foreign Minister accepted the proposition, on 18 February. The MFA informed Bucharest only on 15 April, after the change of the Romanian foreign policy.<sup>120</sup> During February Perić and Mitileneu had only direct consultation on the Little Entente's action before the League of Nations regarding the Hungarian Loan for reconstruction and before the Ambassadors' Council regarding termination of operations of the Inter-Allied Military Control in Hungary.<sup>121</sup>

The improvement in King Ferdinand's health in mid-February provided an opportunity for King Aleksandar and Queen Maria to announce their planned visit to Romania in March.<sup>122</sup> This was probably a good occasion for the two monarchs to discuss bilateral relations. Perić replied to the editorial question on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *L'Indépendance roumaine*, that the Little Entente was the corner-stone of the Yugoslavia's foreign policy. He dismissed rumours on the alliance's dissolution, and emphasised that foreign policies of the three member states were mutually complemented, but he did not exclude separate initiatives and individualities.<sup>123</sup> However, the course of events took a different direction. The day before the Italian parliament ratified the Convention on Bessarabia, King Aleksandar and Queen Maria de-

<sup>115</sup> Vuk Vinaver, „Engleska i italijansko 'zaokruživanje Jugoslavije' 1926–1928.”, in: *Istorija XX veka*, zbornik radova, tom VIII, glavni urednik Dragoslav Janković, (Beograd: Institut za društvene nauke, 1966), 122; idem, „O neuspelom jugoslovensko-mađarskom zbliženju 1924–1926. godine”, *Istorija XX veka*, zbornik radova, tom IX, glavni urednici Dragoslav Janković, Bogumil Hrabak, (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1968), 239; Árpád Hornyák, *Hungarian-Yugoslav relations 1918–1927*, (Boulder: Social Science Monographs; Wayne: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc., 2013), 275.

<sup>116</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folios 44, 45.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, folios 47, 48.

<sup>118</sup> ASANU, Zbirka 14.387, items no. 10.037, 10.038, and 10.039.

<sup>119</sup> AJ, 388-11-28, folios 920, 927; AJ, 395-16-173, folio 551.

<sup>120</sup> AJ, 395-16-173, folio 559.

<sup>121</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folios 167, 168; AJ, 395-16-173, folios 555, 557, 558.

<sup>122</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folio 42.

<sup>123</sup> „Изјаве г. др. Нинка Перића”, *Политика*, 9 March 1927, 2; „Министар Иностранних Дела г. др. Нинко Перић о нашој спољној политици и значају Мале Антанте”, *Време*, 10 March 1927, 2.

parted for Romania.<sup>124</sup> Mussolini's decision instigated great enthusiasm in the Romanian public and the public praise of Rome was not concealed even from the Royal guests.<sup>125</sup> It caused great anxiety in Belgrade. The question was raised if Averescu would finally turn away from France and choose Italy as the guarantor among the Great Powers.<sup>126</sup> One of the first reactions was the refusal of the Yugoslav government to allow the transit of Italian ammunition for the Romanian Army. The decision was changed only after Emandi's request.<sup>127</sup> Radić publicly suggested that Yugoslav foreign policy should establish appropriate relations with the USSR.<sup>128</sup> A few days later he gave the lecture on the Soviet Union before his party members.<sup>129</sup> In the leading article, the Belgrade newspaper *Politika* had underlined Mussolini's plan to detach Romania from the Little Entente, exploit it for his Balkan policy, and asked whether the Latin alliance had a defensive or offensive character.<sup>130</sup> *L'Indépendance roumaine* had to publicly alleviate concerns of the Yugoslav public and reiterate allegiance to the existing alliance with the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>131</sup> On 20 March, Perić denied in the National Assembly rumours that the Little Entente was declining, and insisted on friendly and cordial relations between the member states. On the next day, Ninčić supported this view and emphasized trustworthy relations with Romania.<sup>132</sup> On 22 March, Mitilineu informed Čolak-Antić that he and Averescu had discarded Durazzo's claims that the Kingdom of SCS was preparing to attack Albania as unfounded.<sup>133</sup>

The shift in momentum came from an unexpected direction. The signing of the Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship, on 5 April 1927, was part of Mussolini's grand plan. Nevertheless, it had a significant impact on the Romanian public, prompting a sudden change of tune. In a matter of days, Čolak-Antić could clearly identify the willingness of the opposition and their press for closer cooperation within the framework of the Little Entente, and a changed perception of the First Tirana Treaty.<sup>134</sup> In his last report to Perić, he could note that finally both the government and the opposition realized the value of the Little Entente as a pivot of the *status quo*.<sup>135</sup> The Cabinet of

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<sup>124</sup> „Краљ и Краљица отпутовали су синоћ за Букурешт”, *Време*, 10 March 1927, 1; „Краљ је отпутовао у Букурешт”, *Полиџика*, 10 March 1925, 2.

<sup>125</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folios 46, 49.

<sup>126</sup> AJ, 395-16-176, folios 601, 602.

<sup>127</sup> AJ, 395-16-169, folios 277, 278.

<sup>128</sup> „Г. С. Радић тврди да је нова влада са Х. С. С. стварно ту и да је њено образовање само једна формалност”, *Време*, 13 March 1927, 1.

<sup>129</sup> „Предавање Г. Радића о Русији”, *Полиџика*, 17 March 1927, 2; „Предавање г. Радића о Совјетској Русији”, *Време*, 17 March 1927, 7.

<sup>130</sup> М., „Бесарабија”, *Полиџика*, 13 March 1927, 1.

<sup>131</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folio 52.

<sup>132</sup> М. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, 44, 45.

<sup>133</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folios 54–56.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, folios 69–75, 78–81.

<sup>135</sup> S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 100.

Velimir Vukićević, with Vojislav Marinković serving as Foreign Minister, was portrayed in the Romanian press as a “concentration government” formed in response to the deterioration of the Yugoslav-Italian relations.<sup>136</sup> Yet, some old suspicions prevailed. Part of the Romanian press expressed scepticism towards Foreign Minister’s earlier plans for close collaboration between the Kingdom of SCS and Bulgaria.<sup>137</sup> In the first account for Marinković – sent before the Ministerial conference of the Little Entente in Jáchymov – Čolak-Antić concluded that Averescu’s sympathies towards Italy could neither outweigh the Romanian public’s confidence in France nor the Romanian Foreign Ministry’s realistic assessment that the Little Entente offered a more reliable safeguard against Hungarian revisionism than Mussolini’s deceptive friendship. Therefore, the idea of a tripartite alliance continued to gain strength within Romanian public opinion.<sup>138</sup>

During the Ministerial meeting of the Little Entente, in May 1927, Mitileneu plainly presented the Romanian position towards Hungarian-Italian Treaty of Friendship.<sup>139</sup> The three member states confirmed their cordial stance towards Hungary.<sup>140</sup> Mitileneu view was that both Romania and the Kingdom of SCS managed to improve their relations with Bulgaria.<sup>141</sup> He advised Marinković to take a moderate stance towards Mussolini, and not to give him any reason to unleash aggressive actions against the Kingdom of SCS. He was hoping that other Great Powers would assist in finding a solution for problems in relations between Belgrade and Rome. Beneš was reluctant to involve the Little Entente in Yugoslav-Italian quarrels.<sup>142</sup> It seemed that Marinković and Beneš agreed with Mitileneu they would not establish diplomatic relations with the USSR in the near future.<sup>143</sup> Reports of an imminent collapse of the alliance were finally denied,<sup>144</sup> and future reorganisation was agreed. Mitileneu and the General Secretary of the MFA Nicolae Filodor had concluded that the Little Entente was strengthened during the conference.<sup>145</sup> For King Aleksandar and Marinković, further rapprochement with Hungary was off the agenda.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> AJ, 395-16-170, folio 462.

<sup>137</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folio 88.

<sup>138</sup> S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 101.

<sup>139</sup> C. Jordan, „La Roumanie et la Yougoslavie face à l’Italie fasciste (1926–1928)”, 163, 167.

<sup>140</sup> M. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, 41.

<sup>141</sup> E. Boia, *Romania’s Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 134.

<sup>142</sup> V. Vinaver, „Engleska i italijansko ‘zaokruživanje’ Jugoslavije 1926–1928”, 122, 123; E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegeră*, 77.

<sup>143</sup> E. Boia, *Romania’s Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 134.

<sup>144</sup> Kosta St. Pavlović, *Vojislav Marinković i njegovo doba (1876–1935)*, knjiga treća, (London: Williams, Lea & Co., 1957), 83–85; M. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, 45; E. Boia, *Romania’s Diplomatic Relations with Yugoslavia in the Interwar Period 1919–1941*, 133.

<sup>145</sup> E. Campus, *Mica Înțelegeră*, 78.

<sup>146</sup> V. Vinaver, *Jugoslavija i Mađarska 1918–1933*, 353; Dragan Bakić, „‘Must Will Peace’: British Brokering of ‘Central European’ and ‘Balkan Locarno’, 1925–9”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (2012), 35.

Following Averescu's resignation in early June, an interim government led by Prince Barbu Alexandru Știrbey took office, which was later succeeded by a government under Ion Brătianu, with Nicolae Titulescu appointed as the new Foreign Minister. Čolak-Antić asserted that the policy of destabilisation of the Little Entente and Romanian participation in the Italian encirclement of Yugoslavia were removed from the agenda.<sup>147</sup> Marinković was convinced that Bucharest was reverting to the foreign policy orientation that had preceded Averescu's government.<sup>148</sup> King Aleksandar paid a royal visit to Romania for the burial processions of the late King Ferdinand,<sup>149</sup> in order to learn personally about new foreign policy. Old suspicions towards Italian actions in the region had prevailed in the MFA, particularly after the so-called Second Tirana Treaty was signed, and not even Titulescu was excluded until the end of 1927.<sup>150</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania were facing different Great Powers' threats. For Yugoslavia the greatest menace was Italy, and for Romania it was the USSR. These factors were shaping the main outlines of their foreign policies, making it difficult to align them in a common direction. This was evident in the first phase of the so-called Locarno period, when Belgrade and Prague were mostly concerned with security against Germany and Italy. They were not only neglecting the Soviet threat to Romania, but even considered Moscow as potential deterrence against Berlin or Rome. On the other side, Bucharest sought to address the Eastern European security gap through closer collaboration with Poland against the USSR. Moreover, the Kingdom of SCS and Romania could not fully align their foreign policies within the Little Entente towards Bulgaria. These differences were evident in the case of the Pašić-Radić coalition cabinet. Bucharest gravely perceived the participation of Croats in the government, due to the known views of their leader on Romania, Bulgaria and the USSR.

The greatest challenge for bilateral relations in this particular period was the formation of Alexandru Averescu's government. His initiative for the Romanian-Italian rapprochement alerted Yugoslav statesmen and diplomats for several reasons. Firstly, he was playing along with Mussolini's plan for the encirclement of the Kingdom of SCS. Secondly, it was endangering the Little Entente and the French system of collective security, and supporting Italian efforts to forge their bloc in Eastern Europe. Thirdly, it was paralyzing Nin-

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<sup>147</sup> S. Mičić, „Boško Čolak-Antić and Yugoslav-Romanian Relations”, 101.

<sup>148</sup> AJ, 388-14-34, folios 205–209.

<sup>149</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folio 144; AJ, 395-16-177, folio 642.

<sup>150</sup> AJ, 395-16-168, folios 252–262; M. Vanku, *Mala antanta 1920–1938*, 46; G. Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941.*, 75–77.

čić's initiative for an anti-Bulgarian regional alliance in the Balkans. After Ninčić's resignation, the new Foreign Ministers Perić and Marinković did not show any sympathy towards the pro-Italian policy of Bucharest. Nevertheless, they were careful not to take any steps which could endanger the existence of the Little Entente. The depth of this crisis was evident in the slow pace of re-establishing mutual trust in bilateral relations following Averescu's resignation.

### Summary

This chapter address the issues of bilateral and multilateral relations between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Romania from 1925 until 1927. The main features were the participation of the two states in the Little Entente, their relations with the Great Powers, but also their relations with some East European countries. The chapter also examines the impacts of Stjepan Radić's participation in the coalition government with Nikola Pašić, and forming of General Alexandru Averescu's Cabinet on the relations between the two kingdoms.

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