**The case of Montenegro in the period 1878-1921 as an element of interest in Balkan politics, through the analysis of Italian-Montenegrin and Serbian-Montenegrin relations.**

**1. Status questionis**

The research project intends, through the analysis of unpublished documents, of a military nature, from the Archive of the Historical Office of the Army General Staff (AUSSME), to elaborate the diplomatic relations and the points of contact between the official Montenegrin government, then in exile, and the Kingdom of Italy, in the time frame between the Congress of Berlin and 1921, the year of the death of Nikola Petrović-Njegoš, sovereign of Montenegro.

Through the documentation, various moments will be analyzed, during which relations between the Kingdom of Italy and Montenegro developed, relationships strengthened also as a result of the marriage, in 1896, between the future king of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III and Elena, daughter of Montenegrin sovereign Nikola Petrović.

A crucial point of the research will be the analysis of the period of the First World War with Montenegro allied with the Entente and Serbia and the subsequent annexationist aims of the Karadordević dynasty to include the Montenegrin territory in the newborn Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (S.H.S.); a will in conflict with Italian expectations to contain the power of Belgrade.

It will be interesting to understand how the image of a clear dichotomy between a Belgrade, that had only annexationist aims, and a Rome, that intended to protect Montenegrin freedom, is the result of a narrative built and fueled, after 1919, by fringes of the Army and the Association Italian nationalist.

In particular, the research will focus on the internal conflict in Montenegro, on the clash between the faction of the "green", separatist, against the "white", unionist.

The first one was headed by Jovan Plamenac and was supported, more or less officially, by the Royal Army present in the area and by the Italian government itself, up to and beyond the "Christmas Rebellion" (1919).

On this phase, the AUSSME documents will make it possible to clarify the Italian contribution to the independence cause, the resources (men and means) used, while the Italian Kingdom was still trying not to lose the support of the allied forces.

The second component is that of the "whites", that succeeded in deposing the sovereign Nikola Petrović, to unite Montenegro to the S.H.S. kingdom, through the Montenegrin Committee for the National Union, headed by the former Prime Minister Andrija Radović, and which were supported by allied troops.

The research will focus on several points: on the Podgoritza Assembly’s legitimacy, on the official endorsement of the French General Franchet d'Esperey, commander of the *Armée d'Orient*, and on the difficult relations between Italian and allied troops, in particular French.

After the failure of the internal revolts, in January 1919, the process of emigration of the Montenegrin dissidents to the Kingdom of Italy began and the subsequent creation, in February of the same year, in Gaeta of its own legion, which gave asylum to the irregular formations. For the restoration of the Montenegrin state, the rulers in exile conducted "a stubborn propaganda campaign" thanks to the Italian Committee for the Independence of Montenegro, that the documentation will cover.

A dynamic that intensified relations with the Kingdom of Italy, until the Nitti government took over, that determined the end of Rome's support for Montenegrin independence.

At this stage, having lost the official support of the Kingdom of Italy, Plamenac, now Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Montenegro in exile, turned to Gabriele d'Annunzio, intent on the occupation of Fiume. With further research in the Archive of the Vittoriale Foundation, I will analyze the relationships between these two protagonists of the territorial claims of the time and I will try to understand the reasons that led some soldiers, of different ranks, to abandon the official position of their army to follow the independence cause.

D'Annunzio's operation was not an isolate case, but an example of the under-the-table politics experienced by some fringes of the Army, and the will of the poet was not in total opposition to the institutions, but at their side to promote a civil war in the kingdom S.H.S.

The project aims to enhance unpublished archival documentary resources, to investigate some of the issues addressed, but not resolved, by the Peace Conference, such as that of the Adriatic question, and was conceived in the course of my previous research work. This focuses attention on the contribution of the Royal Army, in terms of numbers and importance of the figures involved, to the Rijeka occupation, based on the " Relazione sui fatti di Fiume del Generale dell’Esercito Pecori Giraldi. Osservazioni e proposte disciplinari al Ministro della Guerra».

**2. Research objectives and hypotheses**

1. Investigate the situation in the Adriatic principality, Italian-Montenegrin relations and the organization of the Montenegrin Army (documentation from the military attaché for Montenegro, the Eastern and Western Exchequer Office, the Colonial Office and the of the General Staff).
2. Investigate the Italian and Montenegrin positions during the Great War (papers of the Command Offices of the General Staff and of the Ministry of War).
3. Investigate the role of Italian troops fallen Nikola Petrović, the union of Montenegro to Serbia and the role of Italian soldiers between the "greens" and the "whites".
4. Deepening the period of Montenegrin independence and S.H.S. (documents of the Supreme Command and of the Military Expedition of the Italian delegation at the Peace Conference).
5. Study the military convention signed in Rome with the Montenegrin government in exile in April 1919.
6. Investigate the contacts of d'Annunzio and some Fiuman collaborators with the Yugoslav separatist movements to break up the S.H.S. kingdom, on the agreement between the Vate and Plamenac, in May 1920.

**3. Methodology**

The research will use a methodology based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources:

1. on the study of an extensive bibliography on the Adriatic question, on the Rijeka’s occupation, on the birth of the S.H.S. kingdom, on the union of Montenegro with Serbia and on the Montenegrin legion.
2. On archival research at the AUSSME, on largely unpublished collections, already made available by the head of the Historical Office Archive C.te Emilio Tirone and by the chief archivist dott. Alessandro Gionfrida (both Phd in History of Europe), through the chair of prof. Antonello Folco Biagini.

The funds identified can be divided into three phases.

1. From the Congress of Berlin to the Great War (1878-1914).
2. The First World War (1914-1918).
3. Montenegro and S.H.S. kingdom.
4. The contextualization and historical feedback will take place with the consultation of the documentation on the subject published by the Historical Institute of Montenegro, contacted and available through prof. Slavko Burzanović, and international published literature and documentation.

Archival documents published (DDI) and not from the diplomatic (ASDMAE), political (ACS, Presidency of the Council of Ministers) and Regia Marina (US SMM) points of view will be consulted.

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