

## GREAT BRITAIN, THE LITTLE ENTENTE AND THE GENOA CONFERENCE OF 1922

**ABSTRACT:** *This article examines the British policy towards the Little Entente alliance comprised of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania in connexion with the preparation and proceedings of the Genoa Conference of 1922. In doing so the paper challenges the usual perception of the Little Entente's attitude towards the conference as completely pro-French and thus obstructive, and suggests that British policy-makers to a large extent misinterpreted the inclinations and intentions of the three smaller powers and failed to pursue a more positive and effective policy. The reasons for this failure are to be found in the mixture of prejudiced views regarding the alliance and misperceptions of Lloyd George.*

**Key words:** Great Britain, the Little Entente, the Genoa Conference, Lloyd George, Edvard Beneš

The Genoa conference, its origins and the aftermath is thoroughly studied in Carole Fink's work.<sup>1</sup> She also edited together with Axel Frohn and Jürgen Heideking thirteen essays covering different aspects of the conference.<sup>2</sup> Stephen White examines the subject in a wider scope of the Soviet-Western exchanges in the early 1920's.<sup>3</sup> There are a few articles which discuss the Genoa gathering from the perspective of individual participating countries.<sup>4</sup> A number of speeches and other documentary sources in connexion with the conference were published in the contemporary account by John Saxon Mills which is in its commentary strongly biased in its praise of the role of the British Prime Minister Lloyd George.<sup>5</sup> This paper aims at exploring a particular facet of British foreign policy in

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<sup>1</sup> Carole Fink, *The Genoa Conference: European Diplomacy, 1921–1922* (Chapel Hill, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Carole Fink, Axel Frohn, and Jürgen Heideking (eds), *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922* (Washington D. C.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Stephen White, *The Origins of Détente: The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations, 1921–1922* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Anne Orde, 'France and the Genoa Conference of 1922', *Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Staatsarchivis*, 37 (1984), 325–361; Carole Fink, 'Italy and the Genoa Conference of 1922', *International History Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1986), 41–55; Alena Gajanová, 'La politique extérieure tchécoslovaque et la "question russe" à la Conférence de Gênes', *Historica-Prague* 8 (1964), 135–176.

<sup>5</sup> John Saxon Mills, *The Genoa Conference* (London, 1922).

preparation to and during the conference – namely policy towards the Little Entente, the alliance consisting of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania.

When Lloyd George decided to address the problem of European economic reconstruction at the end of 1921 it aroused many hopes and fears throughout Europe. The attainment of that ambitious goal was envisaged through the means of a spectacular conference which was to gather around the same table for the first time since the Great War victors and vanquished alike. Lloyd George's grand design should have primarily dealt with establishing economic relations with Soviet Russia. The economic program was inextricable from the far-reaching political implications. Commercial cooperation could not be contemplated were it not for some kind of settlement of the outstanding questions between Moscow and Western Powers.

The stumbling block of the prospective rapprochement was how to resolve the former debts of the previous Russian governments incurred before and during the war. To make the problem more difficult these debts were not only incurred due to inter-governmental loans but also to borrowing from private citizens whose properties were nationalised without any compensation. Furthermore, it seemed obvious that settlement of such complex issues would require the restoration of the regular and official channels of communication not likely to fall short of *de jure* recognition of the Soviet government.

The French did not share Lloyd George's enthusiasm as the conference appeared to them to have been imbued with serious risks. Somewhat broadly defined aims, as professed by the British Prime Minister, were likely to encroach on what the French considered to be beyond the scope of any discussion, namely the sanctity of the peace treaties and reparation sums. In addition, Paris took an unfavourable view of the rapprochement with the Soviets, and was particularly ill-disposed to *de jure* recognition of Lenin's adherents. Heretofore France had been pursuing exactly the opposite policy—effective isolation of the Bolsheviks whose downfall on the account of disastrous domestic situation was hoped and expected.

In order to prepare the ground for the conference the British premier had talks with his French counterpart Aristide Briand on the occasion of the Allied Supreme Council meeting from 4 to 11 January 1922 in the resort city of Cannes. The results of those exchanges were the six Cannes Resolutions adopted by the Supreme Council laying down basic principles and conditions for a rapprochement with the Bolshevik regime.<sup>6</sup> A central point in the resolutions was the request for recognition of all tsarist Russia's debts and financial, legal and juridical accommodation on the part of the Soviets to secure the property and rights of the prospective foreign investors.<sup>7</sup> The end of the illegal communist activities was

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<sup>6</sup> The text of the Cannes resolutions can be found in Fink, *The Genoa Conference*, 40.

<sup>7</sup> From the Soviet point of view the issue of debts recognition infringed on the principles of the revolution itself.

demanded by the undertaking 'to refrain from propaganda subversive of order and established political system in other countries'. The sixth resolution called for all countries to restrain from aggression against their neighbours. Soviet Russia was to be placated by the proclamation of every country's right to choose their system of ownership and government. Finally, the prospect of official recognition was dangled in front of the Bolsheviks subject to full acceptance of the Cannes stipulations.

Briand went out of his way to come to terms with Lloyd George but his good will was not reciprocated. He yielded in the Russian matters, accepted the idea of a non-aggression pact and even showed signs of readiness to agree to grant Germany a moratorium on impending reparations expecting in return to conclude a much coveted Anglo-French alliance treaty. But he was offered nothing more than a simple British guarantee against an unprovoked German invasion. Consequently, after having expounded his foreign policy in front of the disgruntled Chamber Briand resigned on 12 January and a new cabinet headed by the hardliner Raymond Poincaré came into office.

Making an effort to win over as many other states as possible to one's standpoint became an essential part of rallying support for the impending summit. In addition to five so-called inviting countries (Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium and Japan), Soviet Russia, Germany, the neutrals and the East European countries were to take part at the gathering as well. The Little Entente thus found itself in an awkward position in relation to the conflicting agendas of the Principal Allies. As the staunchest keepers of the *status quo* the successor states could be expected to observe the preservation of the peace treaties to their utmost. In that respect their stance entirely coincided with the French one. On the other hand, the prolonged wrangles between London and Paris could result in the rupture of the Entente and there was nothing that the Little Entente states dreaded more. If France and Britain had gone their separate ways the small successor states would have been faced with the unthankful decision of taking sides with one or the other, a contingency that spelled uncertain and dangerous prospects for the future.

Czechoslovak Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) Edvard Beneš played a prominent role during diplomatic preliminaries to the Genoa gathering. On 13 February 1922 he met with Poincaré in Paris. Although Beneš himself regarded any precipitated action for official recognition of Soviet Russia by dint of an international conference as a mistake,<sup>8</sup> he did try to influence the French premier to adopt a more moderate policy. In fact, Beneš communicated to Czecho-

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<sup>8</sup> Ch. Amort, A. H. Klevanskij, A. I. Nedorezov and J. Pivoluska (eds), *Dokumenty I materialy po istorii sovetsko-chechoslovatskikh otnoshenii* vol. I, (Moscow, 1973), No. 421, Beneš's telegram to the diplomatic mission at Bern; This is what Beneš believed to be the right approach to the problem: 'Right tactics-gradually proceed straightforward, enforce concessions to anti-bolshevist position and gradually give away political, diplomatic, legal and economic concessions to the current Russian regime.'

slovak President Thomas Masaryk that the French would modify their intransigent stand on Russian matters.<sup>9</sup>

When Beneš conferred with Lloyd George on 17 February in London, he pleaded for the agreement between Britain and France, deemed as crucial for the stability of Central Europe. Czechoslovak Prime Minister pressed for the settlement of the reparations question which he believed to be of the paramount importance in the reconstruction of Europe; on that note he pointed out that the aim should be to have an agreement which would result in Germany's paying money to France, but which would provide at the same time a moratorium to Germany so as to enable that country to improve its financial position. Such a policy would have the effect of raising the cost of production in Germany so that other countries would no longer be unable to compete with her. A reparation settlement on some such lines would clarify the position between France and Germany. If no such agreement was reached, he felt that Europe would fall to pieces.<sup>10</sup>

Lloyd George was not inclined to discuss reparations with Beneš. He conceded a postponement of the gathering until the end of March. As regards the participation of the East European states at the preliminary conference that was about to be held in London, as proposed by Poincaré, Lloyd George declined to concur. He contended that those countries were unprepared and agricultural, except for Czechoslovakia, and stressed the difficulty of excluding all other countries which could also request to be admitted at the London meeting. The most important decision reached during the conversation was to enlist Beneš's services to act as a mediator and visit Paris at once in order to procure a personal meeting between the British and French premiers so that all outstanding questions pertaining to the forthcoming conference could be finally cleared up.

Three days later the two Prime Ministers met for the second time and this conversation was primarily dedicated to the Russian matters.<sup>11</sup> Beneš had prepared an *aide memoire* for presentation to Poincaré enumerating eight basic principles on which France and Britain should agree as a basis for the proceedings at Genoa.<sup>12</sup> In respect of Soviet Russia the procedure to be adopted presupposed a long and complicated process by which economic issues were first to be resolved, and then political conditions should be laid down the realisation of which, through introduction of a certain delay that would secure evidence of a good faith on the part of the Russians, could eventually lead to *de jure* recognition. Such a proposition fell far away from what was expected in London and Lloyd George turned it down as unacceptable. The latter put forward all the arguments in favour

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<sup>9</sup> Frank Hadler, 'The European Policy of Czechoslovakia on the Eve of the Genoa Conference of 1922' in *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, 171–185 (179).

<sup>10</sup> TNA, Memorandum of a conversation between Lloyd George and Benes, 17 February 1922, C 2675/458/62, FO 371/7420.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, Memorandum of a meeting between Lloyd George and Benes, 20 February 1922, C 2739/458/62, FO 371/7420.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, the text of the *aide memoire* is attached.

of recognition and insisted on the alteration of the *aide memoire* along the lines of the Cannes decisions. Having been submitted to the Foreign Office Beneš's proposal for the progressive recognition of the Soviet government was, however, viewed differently by John Gregory of Northern Department who found it immensely advantageous for two reasons: a compromise on these lines would be acceptable to France and the smaller powers and, more importantly, it would secure a unity of front against Bolsheviks' tactics of playing for division in the capitalist camp.<sup>13</sup> This was a clear indication how some officials within the government did not see eye to eye with the Prime Minister as regards his conference plans.<sup>14</sup>

It has been alleged that Beneš's mediation was crucial in bringing about the meeting between Poincaré and Lloyd George at Boulogne-sur-Mer on 25 February.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the Welshman was negotiating with Poincaré using Lord Derby and the French Ambassador Saint Aulaire as intermediaries and going behind the back of his own Foreign Secretary while exploiting Beneš, in Alan Sharp's words, as a decoy.<sup>16</sup> The French premier was inclined to interpret the outcome of the Anglo-French exchanges as a 'mutual success' of France and Little Entente, though one of which it was better to keep quiet so as not to wound the susceptibilities of the English.<sup>17</sup> In the circumstances the sincerity of Poincaré's utterances appears to have been doubtful but the prestige of Beneš was certainly enhanced by his mediating role.

In the meanwhile, the Yugoslav Prime Minister, Nikola Pašić, and Foreign Minister, Momčilo Ninčić, visited Bucharest in connection with a royal betrothal and discussed the pending conference with their Romanian counterparts Ion Brătianu and Ion Duca respectively. In these talks they were joined by the Czechoslovak ambassador and Polish Minister for Foreign affairs, Konstany Skirmunt. The latter was trying, quite in line with his policy of rapprochement with Prague, to create a common front with the Little Entente, and they agreed on the principle of intangibility of the borders.<sup>18</sup> The decision was reached to summon an expert meeting at Belgrade, Polish delegates included, at the beginning of March to make final preparations for a joined stand at Genoa.<sup>19</sup> The Romanian

<sup>13</sup> TNA, Cabinet Offices to FO, 22 February 1922, C 2931/458/62, FO 371/7421; it contains the version of Beneš's *aide memoire* amended according to Lloyd George's remarks.

<sup>14</sup> For the opposition to Lloyd George's Russian policy see White, *The Origins of Détente*, 43–44.

<sup>15</sup> Magda Ádám, 'The Genoa Conference and the Little Entente' in *Genoa, Rapallo and European Reconstruction in 1922*, 187–199 (194).

<sup>16</sup> Alan Sharp, 'Lord Curzon and the Foreign Office' in Roger Bullen (ed) *The Foreign Office, 1782–1982* (Maryland, 1984), 66–84 (73); Ephraim Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1919–1926* (Brighton, 1994), 81.

<sup>17</sup> Léopold Marceilin, *Politique et politiciens d'après guerre*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1924), 333 quoted in Alla Jazkova, *Malaja Antanta v evropejskej politike, 1818–1925* (Moscow, 1974), 215.

<sup>18</sup> Piotr Wandycs, *France and her Eastern Allies, 1919–1925: French-Czechoslovak-Polish Relations from the Paris Peace Conference to Locarno* (Minneapolis, 1962), 259.

<sup>19</sup> TNA, Dering to FO, 24 February 1922, C 2822/458/62, FO 371/7420.

government had sounded out Rome as to the possibility of postponement of the gathering due to the general elections that were to be conducted in their country during the first half of March.

In relation to Russia both the Romanians and Yugoslavs were reserved and did not consider recognition opportune until the Soviet government had given ample evidence of their loyalty to other countries; each state should, it was believed, regulate its economic relations with the Soviets on its own terms.<sup>20</sup> The Romanians were always on their guard against the Soviets in the province of Bessarabia<sup>21</sup> which had recently been exposed to extensive communist propaganda, whereas the Yugoslavs suspected that plots were being organised in Russia with a view to assassinating their King. Nevertheless, Ninčić was at pains to stress the resolve of his cabinet not to get involved in the Russian internal matters and persisted in presenting the hospitality granted to a considerable number of Russian refugees, supporters of the old regime, as having sprung purely from humanitarian reasons.<sup>22</sup>

Having concluded his go-between task in Paris and London, Beneš could finally catch up with the preparations of his allies within the Little Entente. He conferred with Ninčić at Bratislava and, obviously influenced by Lloyd George's standpoint, pressed for signs of good will towards the Soviets – at least, the retraction of support to General Wrangel, commander-in-chief of the White Russians, and readiness to establish commercial relations – which was conceded by the Yugoslav.<sup>23</sup> A close association of Poland with the Little Entente pushed through by his allies at the previous meeting at Bucharest was distasteful to Beneš on account of his wish both to keep away from the entanglements of the Russo-Polish relations and to preserve his own political preponderance in the alliance. For these reasons he persisted in defining position of Poland towards Little Entente as 'closely associated rather than allied power'.<sup>24</sup> The accommodating spirit shown by Ninčić was reciprocated with regards to common policy towards Italy, always the main concern of Yugoslav foreign policy. It was decided to decline Italian meddling in any question concerning the succession states that did not involve direct interest of Rome.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, France took the initiative to align the Little Entente countries with its policy. In his report from Prague Sir George Clerk drew the attention of his superiors to an article, written by the prominent French author, which called on the Little Entente 'to take the role of arbitrator' in case 'there be direct

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<sup>20</sup> TNA, Dering to Curzon, 24 February 1922, C 3286/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>21</sup> The Soviets never recognised the union of December 1918 between Romania and Bessarabia which was formerly a part of the Russian Empire.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 2 March 1922, C 3263/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, Clerk to FO, 4 March 1922, C 3203/458/62, FO 371/7421; Gajanová, 'La politique extérieure tchécoslovaque et la "question russe" à la Conférence de Gênes', 154–155.

<sup>24</sup> TNA, Clerk to FO, 4 March 1922, C 3203/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

opposition between the points of view of England and France.<sup>26</sup> The report aroused considerable interest amongst the Foreign Office staff. Miles Lampson of Central Department remarked that it was traditional French policy to 'get as many of these small states as possible under her wing'.<sup>27</sup> On the practical side, John Gregory considered what could be done to hinder any substantial influence that 'the lesser Powers' might exert at the proceedings in Genoa: A skilful programme of procedure may go some way to prevent lesser Powers from obstructing and intriguing badly. It is at present proposed that not only the main Genoa Conference, but the Committees into which it will split up and the Subcommittees into which the Committees will in their turn split up, should each be controlled by a 'Bureau de Comité' (a management) which will be carefully constituted and act as a censor. Other measures of a less formal nature with the same object in view are also contemplated. This course would have a political as well as an administrative effect and should leave the guidance of the Conference more or less in the hands of the main Powers.<sup>28</sup>

The underlining assumption, in the context of previous comments, was that the impact that the Little Entente might have on the conference would doubtlessly be pro-French and thus detrimental for the British interests. It was such an attitude that accounted for the decision that the Little Entente and Polish delegates should not be invited to the preliminary session of 9 April. In turn, British efforts to marginalise the smaller allies could not fail to cause soreness especially at Bucharest and Belgrade.<sup>29</sup>

Lloyd George went even further and thought that the Little Entente attitude might adversely affect the French stand rather than the other way round. In his conversation with the Italian Foreign Minister, Carlo Schanzer, on the eve of the gathering he professed that the peril of the French breaking the united Allied front would depend upon the degree of the support they extracted for their negative attitude from the Little Entente and concluded: 'This was the crux of the conference.'<sup>30</sup> Consequently, he attached great importance to winning over the alliance to the support of British and Italian policy and encouraged Schanzer to get into personal contact with the Romanian premier Bratiano.

However, the attitude of the smaller allies appears to have been somewhat different and more complex as presented in the reports from the British legations in Belgrade, Prague and Bucharest and memoranda produced in Whitehall on the basis of such reports. After conversations in Bucharest and Bratislava held

<sup>26</sup> TNA, Clerk to Curzon, 11 March 1922, C 4109/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>27</sup> TNA, Minutes by Lampson, 22 March 1922, *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> TNA, Minutes by Gregory, 23 March 1922, *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> TNA, Clerk to Curzon, 4 March 1922, C 3203/458/62 and Young to Curzon, 2 March 1922, C 3263/458/62 in FO 371/7421.

<sup>30</sup> W. N. Medlicott, D. Dakin and M. E. Lambert (eds) *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, series I, vol. 19 [hereafter cited as DBFP, I, 19] (London: HMSO, 1974), No. 63, Note of a Conversation at the Villa d'Albertis, 8 April 1922.

on the highest level the last stage of preparatory work on presenting the common policy of the 'Quadruple Entente' took place at the expert meeting at Belgrade on 5 March 1922. Their concerns were manifold. Typical of the successor states' jealousy of their economic independence, the Yugoslav press constantly feared that smaller countries would be taken in tow by mighty international corporations and thus degenerate into colonies.<sup>31</sup> British Minister in Belgrade, Sir Alban Young, provided his chiefs with the most comprehensive picture of the background and meaning of such fears as confirmed at the experts' meeting. In respect of the economic plans the delegates were determined to stand ground firmly against any attempts of the Greater Powers to impose in the prosecution of their remedial measures any sort of control or other obligation lessening the sovereign rights of the small States, or at any rate lessening them in a measure not applicable to all Powers alike, e. g. any control over international communications, over currencies, over banking operations. It has been feared that it may be proposed to afford financial credits through the instrumentality of the Banks in Vienna and Budapest. I have never ceased to report since my arrival here that this country resists to the utmost any financial or commercial schemes which centered in either of those two capitals would seek to operate on a scale of any magnitude in this country, and if I am not misinformed this spirit has found new force in the recent meetings of the delegates of the Succession States.<sup>32</sup>

The unswerving refusal to establish links with the banks situated in the former enemy countries originated from the conviction that economic penetration would be the thin edge of the wedge for accomplishing the ultimate restoration of Austria-Hungary. In such circumstances Young passed the following judgment: 'The problem therefore will be to reconcile schemes of financial betterment and the securities necessary thereto with these susceptibilities of the beneficiaries.'<sup>33</sup> As for the extent of the expert contribution that the delegates gathered at Belgrade could provide, he was quite skeptical and wondered 'what sort of profitable expert advice the Poles, the Serbs and the Roumanians will be able to afford each other.'<sup>34</sup>

In fact, the Little Entente's susceptibilities were mostly unfounded given the actual frame of mind of the policy-makers in both Paris and London. The French inter-departmental committee unequivocally stated in its report of 8 March that it 'did not think it necessary to insist on re-establishing links among the Danubian states nor to stress the role of Vienna.'<sup>35</sup> The committee took this view on entirely political ground as it found it obvious that any action to the contrary would deepen the succession countries' fear of the revision of the Austrian

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<sup>31</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 23 February 1922, C 2896/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>32</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 16 March 1922, C 4078/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 2 March 1922, C 3263/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>35</sup> Orde, 'France and the Genoa Conference of 1922', 339.

and Hungarian peace treaties at their expense. The British, on the other hand, did not prepare any concrete programme of economic reconstruction either for Russia or for the other states of East Central Europe. From a purely financial point of view Yugoslav Minister of Finance Kosta Kumanudi sneered at the possibilities of obtaining benefit from the Genoa Conference and the projected international corporation that appeared to be asking for money from the countries in need instead of distributing it to them.<sup>36</sup>

The attitude of the Little Entente regarding the crucial Russian question was particularly intriguing. All the members had in common the repulsion to bolshevist propaganda. Each country viewed the rapprochement with the Soviets in relation to its own distinctive circumstances. Naturally, the Romanians could be counted on to display the most intransigence due to the territorial dispute over Bessarabia. The third secretary at the Central Department, John Troutbeck, argued that Yugoslavia was in the long run eager to establish friendly relations with any government that emerged victorious in Russia, and resume the traditional policy by which 'Russia will again take her place in the politics of Europe and protect her Slav brethren from the encroachments of the Teuton and the Latin.'<sup>37</sup> Faced with the uncertainty of the turn of events, Belgrade was vacillating between its old anti-bolshevist tendency and the more practical need to establish at least commercial relations with the Soviets. After the conversations Beneš had had with Lloyd George the Yugoslavs seemed to have also shifted towards more lenient stand on the Russian issue. Young accurately summarised the attitude of the whole group when he predicted that it would be one of expectancy.<sup>38</sup> Overall, such a stance was not discouraging from the British point of view. There was no love lost for Lloyd George's designs indeed, but at least the Little Entente states were not disposed to put obstacles in the way of pursuing a *modus vivendi* with the Soviets.

Interestingly, Young was under the impression that most was expected from clearing up of the reparations question so that the precise amount of liquid money available could be finally known.<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that the Little Entente's standpoint was close to Britain's insofar as it did not take too seriously the assurances given to Poincaré as to the exclusion of reparations from the agenda at Genoa. 'No two person seem agreed as to how far the question of reparations is excluded from the purview of the conference since all admit that the problem of European reconstruction in the main turns on reparations in one aspect or another', Young reported and humorously added that, 'any economic discussion which ignores that pivot seems like playing Hamlet without the title role.'<sup>40</sup> Ninčić even expressed his personal opinion to the British envoy that 'the ruthless

<sup>36</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 16 March 1922, C 4078/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>37</sup> TNA, Note by Troutbeck, 20 March 1922, C 4208/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 16 March 1922, C 4078/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>40</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 9 March 1922, C 3742/458/62, FO 371/7422.

exaction of German reparations was incompatible with the restoration of a normal Europe.<sup>41</sup>

The one point on which Little Entente was bound to close ranks with the French was an absolute refusal to allow the slightest revision of the peace treaties. It was not only the rectification of one or the other frontier line that was at stake for the successor states, but rather the danger of stirring up internal troubles by giving the ear of the conference to all the discontent elements within their borders. Ninčić complained to Young about the Italian intrigues in the province of Montenegro and a memorandum made by the Croatian opposition, all of which had been triggered off by the announcement of international summit.<sup>42</sup> The successor states were not mistaken in anticipating that their former enemies would try to avail themselves of the conference as a great stage for putting forward their grievances against the post-war order. The Hungarian government approached the British in respect to subjects it wanted to discuss at Genoa: the elaboration of articles dealing with treatment of minorities, reparations and restrictions of the neighbouring countries' armies.<sup>43</sup> Nor was Bulgaria any less eager to debate the territorial, military and financial clauses of the Treaty of Neuilly.<sup>44</sup> The whole position was aptly summarised in Ninčić's words 'that this country [Yugoslavia] could not do otherwise than follow the French lead in regard to the subjects to be excluded from the scope of the Conference, and the precise specification of the programme' but would leave France and Britain to settle relations with the Soviet government and the German reparations question.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the representatives of thirty-four nations convened at Genoa from 10 April to 19 May. The full account of proceedings does not fall within the purview of this work but several moments were significant for the reassessment of diplomatic intercourse between Britain and the Little Entente. When the agreement between Russian and German delegation was concluded in Rapallo on 16 April on the basis of mutual renunciation of all financial claims and the restoration of full diplomatic relations it looked as if the whole summit was about to be wrecked. The united front of capitalist countries vis-à-vis the Soviets was broken and even worse the formidable bloc of the two outcast nations was taking shape. Challenged by the Rapallo Treaty and striving for the way out that would not give the impression of France being completely isolated from the rest of the Allies, the head of the French delegation, Luis Barthou, insisted on the inclusion of all the Little Entente states and Poland in the decision-making concerning the Russo-German agreement.<sup>46</sup> The latter thus all co-signed with the inviting Powers the

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<sup>41</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 2 March 1922, C 3263/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, Hohler to Curzon, 8 March 1922, C 3525/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, Erskine to Curzon, 8 March 1922, C 3737/458/62, FO 371/7422.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, Young to Curzon, 2 March 1922, C 3263/458/62, FO 371/7421.

<sup>46</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 75, British Secretary's Notes of an Informal Conversation held at the Villa Raggi, 17 April 1922.

protest note to German delegation as drafted by Lloyd George. Beneš and Skirmunt even seconded Schanzer in his insistence on moderating some phrases of the note so as to make it more acceptable to the Germans.<sup>47</sup> The influence of the 'Quadruple Entente' tended to mitigate the French position rather than prod its intransigence. The final evidence of that moderating influence was given when Beneš refused the unofficial French proposal for the Little Entente to follow the French lead in abandoning the conference as directed against the British interests.<sup>48</sup> He had to overcome the resistance of Poland and Romania which had initially intended to demonstrate their solidarity with France by leaving further deliberations.<sup>49</sup> Beneš's decisive stance seems to have had a profound effect in Paris. In his speech to the Chamber in June 1922 Poincaré admitted that had France walked out of Genoa after the conclusion of the Russo-German agreement she would have had to do it alone.<sup>50</sup>

The shifting towards some sort of arrangement with the Soviets that had already been discernible before Genoa summit continued during the course of the conference. Beneš had established regular contacts with Chicherin and started negotiations which would result in conclusion of the trade agreement between the two states on 5 June, shortly after the end of the conference.<sup>51</sup> Ninčić gave assurance to the latter to the effect that Yugoslavia would not be supporting an anti-Soviet policy.<sup>52</sup> When the negotiations with the Bolsheviks reached their peak in May it seemed that it was about time for the Little Entente definitely to come out in the open as to whether it should throw its lot with the British or the French. Beneš made up his mind: 'I think I shall join Lloyd George if his negotiations concerning the Russian matters come to some kind of closure. At the same time I will not in any case publicly express myself against France.'; as for the position of the member states of the Quadruple Entente he communicated to Prague: 'Our basic principal position as before will be to preserve at any cost the unity of the Little Entente irrespectively of different tendencies of the particular states.' Those tendencies, in Beneš's words, meant that Czechoslovakia and Poland 'were wary of siding openly with France... Romania is decisively for France for its hostility towards the Soviets... Ninčić is hesitating...'<sup>53</sup> The col-

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<sup>47</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 76, British Secretary's Notes of a Meeting held at the Villa Raggi, 18 April 1922.

<sup>48</sup> Jazkova, *Malaja Antanta v evropejskej politike*, 223.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, Memorandum by George Clerk, 19 July 1922, N 9694/646/38, FO 371/8198.

<sup>50</sup> Jazkova, *Malaja Antanta v evropejskej politike*, 223.

<sup>51</sup> Ádám, 'The Genoa Conference and the Little Entente', 198 claims that this agreement 'virtually meant the recognition of Soviet Russia'.

<sup>52</sup> Vuk Vinaver, O jugoslovensko-sovjetskoj trgovini izmedju dva rata, *Pregled*, 12 (1957), 96.

<sup>53</sup> Jazkova, *Malaja Antanta v evropejskej politike*, 224; two weeks into the conference Czechoslovak President Masaryk wrote to Beneš that it would be possible to reach an agreement with the Bolsheviks without negotiating about *de jure* recognition. See *Dokumenty I materially po istorii sovetsko-chechoslovatskikh otnoshenii*, 1, No. 440.

lapse of the summit, however, saved the Little Entente statesmen from taking painful decisions.

As could have been predicted from the outset, the real strain on the relations between Britain and the Little Entente threatened rather from the thrashing out of minor but vitally important questions for the stability of the successor countries than from the main issues on the conference agenda. At the start of the conference Count István Bethlen, Hungarian Prime Minister, tried to impose the subject of national minorities into the discussion but was frustrated by Beneš.<sup>54</sup> The Hungarian maneuver gave rise to suspicion among the Little Entente countries as to the possible involvement of Lloyd George in the matter. According to Ninčić a prevalent belief was created that the Prime Minister had promised the Hungarians his backing. If British support for Count Bethlen had proved real, the Foreign Minister intimated to Gregory, he and his allies would have certainly followed France had she decided to leave the conference.<sup>55</sup> There is no proof of such an undertaking on the part of Lloyd George but the suspicion might have been provoked due to the Prime Minister's attempt to discuss the territorial settlement of Wilno and Eastern Galicia which had been rebuffed by joint effort of Poland, Little Entente and France.<sup>56</sup> The resistance offered by Quadruple Entente proved highly effective and all the questions pertaining to territorial disputes and national minorities were referred to the League of Nations.<sup>57</sup>

To fully understand Lloyd George's position in respect to problems arising from the peace treaties it is necessary to bear in mind that he viewed them in conjunction with the Russian question. In his opinion a successful outcome of economic and legal negotiations with the Soviets would have to be supplemented with a comprehensive political agreement that would establish the peace of Europe on a firm basis. To that end the Prime Minister devised the instrument of a non-aggression pact. His draft of a non-aggression pact<sup>58</sup> was lukewarm and did not provide for a single sanction. In fact, Soviet Russia's signature, implying the approval and sanctioning of the existing order, would be its sole value as that country stayed out of the League of Nations, along with Germany, and thus was not bound by the peacekeeping clauses of its Covenant. In order to clear the ground for conclusion of such a treaty all territorial feuds had to be dealt with and particularly those on the Russian border. Lloyd George was prepared to engage himself as a go-between in settling the vexed frontiers of East Central Europe but the moment it became obvious there was no

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<sup>54</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 68, Meeting of the First Session of the First (Political) Commission held on 11 April 1922.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, Gregory to FO, 21 May 1921, C 7443/458/62, FO 371/7433.

<sup>56</sup> Wandycs, *France and her Eastern Allies*, 260.

<sup>57</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 135, Meeting of the Inviting Powers to the Genoa Conference held at the Palazzo Reale on 16 May 1922.

<sup>58</sup> DBFP, I, 19, Appendix to No. 95, Draft of the Non-Agression Pact, 23 April 1922.

hope for an understanding with the Bolsheviks he completely lost interest in the matter.<sup>59</sup>

For the same reason Lloyd George did not take into consideration the draft of a non-aggression pact proposed by Beneš on behalf of all his allies. The Czechoslovak premier suggested a far-reaching agreement with precise stipulations providing for the inviolability of the peace treaties, sanctions in case of its breach and the conclusion of special arrangements among certain states to that effect.<sup>60</sup> By means of the last provision Beneš strove to reinforce the position of the Little Entente within the larger framework of non-aggression treaty. He carefully took the opportunity to impress upon Lloyd George his view of the Little Entente as an entity capable of guaranteeing peace 'in the regions south of Germany and south of Carpathians, but not on the eastern frontiers of Poland and Romania' and pointed out that it 'could not take the place in French policy which Russia had formerly occupied' that is to say 'create a barrier on the eastern side of Germany'.<sup>61</sup> Though his exposition could have hardly been more designed for the British consumption it did correspond to his true views as to the role that the Little Entente should undertake in the post-war European settlement. Nonetheless, Beneš's draft was unpalatable to the British. 'Were they adopted in their entirety, Dr. Beneš's proposals would doubtless be a great coup for the French, and incidentally for the Little Entente and Poland', Ralph Wigram, the second secretary at the Central Department, mused.<sup>62</sup> The peace treaties would, Wigram went on, be specifically confirmed by both vanquished and neutrals for the benefit of the victors who would also retain the right to take coercive measures, France against Germany and the Little Entente against Hungary. He propounded an opinion held by many Britons when he deplored such a course of action which he believed had nothing to recommend itself either to former enemies or to Europe at large.

Closer examination of the course of preparation for and the proceedings of the Genoa Conference indicates that the usual perception of the Little Entente's attitude as obstructive and therefore, among the other reasons emanating from the Anglo-French differences, partly responsible for the final failure of Lloyd George's over ambitious scheme is rather one-sided. Far from being irreconcilable with British plans, the Little Entente countries took the middle ground between London and Paris, and were mostly concerned with the possibility of

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<sup>59</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 112, Note of a Conversation at the Villa d' Albertis, 5 May 1922; No. 113, Note of a Conversation at the Villa d' Albertis, 5 May 1922 (between British and Yugoslav representatives); No. 125, Note of a Conversation at the Villa d' Albertis, 12 May 1922.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, Memorandum of Dr. Beneš to Mr. Lloyd George, 26 April 1922, C 8025/458/62, FO 371/7433 with the attached text of the pact proposed by Beneš.

<sup>61</sup> DBFP, I, 19, No. 95, Notes of a Conversation between Mr. Lloyd George and Dr. Beneš at the Villa d' Albertis, 26 April 1922.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, footnote 14, Memorandum by Wigram, 1 May 1922.

rupture between the two Principal Allies. In their endeavour to facilitate a common allied policy they went a long way to meet British requests for a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks in spite of their own reservations. The shift towards the British position was gradual and mostly due to the mediating efforts of Beneš. In the process the unity of the Little Entente and her association with Poland were put to test. Nevertheless, the conciliatory tendency represented by Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia prevailed in the Quadruple Entente. Moreover, this moderate attitude forced France not to show herself as irreconcilable to British policy towards both Russia and Germany and presumably prevented her from leaving the conference.

However, the perception of the Little Entente's policy formed by Lloyd George was a very different one. To his mind the alliance was too close to France and he disliked its having an important role at Genoa as something bound to augment the difficulties of his endeavour. Shortly after the conference it was said that Lloyd George 'became firmly convinced about half way through the Conference that M. Benes was playing a double game and inciting the Bolsheviks to resist any proposals in order to leave the ground clear for the separate agreement between his Government and them.'<sup>63</sup> Lloyd George appears to have placed his faith in certain 'quite independent and reliable' sources<sup>64</sup> that misled him into erroneous political calculations. The Foreign Office staff disagreed with his interpretation of Czechoslovakian bad faith. Alexander Leeper, the second secretary, wrote to the Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Sir Eyre Crowe: 'Nothing has annoyed me more than the lies disseminated about Benes & his alleged 'disloyalty' at Genoa. I have little doubt that the stories were spread by the Italians & the Vatican both of whom are anxious to discredit Czechoslovakia & break up the Little Entente.'<sup>65</sup> Crowe entirely shared his opinion. This was but another example of the Foreign Office's opinion being bypassed and ignored by a Prime Minister prone to conduct private and secretive diplomacy to which a few people belonging to his immediate entourage were privy.<sup>66</sup> Thus, professional diplomats were unable to remedy the misconceptions of their chief. There was also a more prosaic reason for the Prime Minister's resentment for the Czech. As confirmed by his private secretary Edward Grigg, Lloyd George had a grievance against Beneš because of the latter's 'constant communication' with Wickham Steed, the editor of *The Times* and a

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<sup>63</sup> TNA, Clerk to FO, 19 July 1922, N 9694/646/38, FO 371/8198.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, Secret Intelligence Service Report, 5 May 1922, N 4378/242/38, FO 371/8178 transmits the information about a secret treaty concluded between Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia on account of which Beneš was to support the Soviets at the conference.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, Clerk to Vansittart, 4 June 1922, C 8282/390/12, FO 371/7386.

<sup>66</sup> For another examples in connexion with the Genoa Conference see Maisel, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy*, 72, 81–82, 117, 120.

fierce critic of the British Prime Minister.<sup>67</sup> In any case, British policy missed an opportunity to take the chances offered to it by the accommodating spirit of the Little Entente that could have otherwise allowed it to make more headway in pursuing its goals.

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<sup>67</sup> TNA, Grigg to Vansittart, 15 June 1922, C 8282/390/12, FO 371/7386.

Dragan Bakić

## VELIKA BRITANIJA, MALA ANTANTA I ĐENOVSKA KONFERENCIJA 1922.

### *Rezime*

U članku se razmatra britanska politika prema Maloj Antanti u kontekstu priprema za Đenovsku konferenciju 1922. godine i u toku same konferencije. Savez Male Antante i njegov pokretački duh, kao i čehoslovački premijer i ministar spoljnih poslova Edvard Beneš imali su potencijalno bitnu ulogu u okviru konferencije, jer su svojom podrškom ili opstrukcijom mogli da pomognu Lojdu Džordžu ili francuskoj delegaciji predvođenoj Lujem Bartuom da lakše nametnu svoja rešenja. U situaciji kada su britanska i francuska delegacija imale različite poglede na osnovna pitanja kojom se konferencija bavila, podrška ostalih učesnika mogla je da bude od velikog značaja. Članak pokazuje kako je britanska politika, pre svega Lojd Džordž, nastojala da minimizira ulogu Male Antante polazeći od pretpostavke da će ona neminovno i potpuno stati na stranu Francuske. Zemlje-članice Male Antante, na drugoj strani, bile su rešene da se po svaku cenu odupru upotrebi Đenovske konferencije kao platforme sa koje bi se, pod plaštom ekonomske rekonstrukcije, pokrenula diskusija o reviziji posleratnih granica i usvojile mere koje bi narušile njihov politički suverenitet. U ključnim političkim pitanjima sa kojima je Lojd Džordž želeo da se uhvati u koštac, kao što su reparacije i uspostavljanje diplomatskih odnosa sa Sovjetskom Rusijom, Mala Antanta nije bila protivna britanskim koncepcijama ili je ispoljavala spremnost da se značajno približi britanskom gledištu. Lojd Džordž nije prepoznao ovu ponešto stidljivu, ali ipak uočljivu tendenciju Male Antante da drži ravnotežu između Londona i Pariza strahujući od otvorenog rascepa između svojih velikih ratnih saveznika. Njegov negativan stav prema Maloj Antanti koji je, po svoj prilici, u velikoj meri bio diktiran iskrivljenom percepcijom Benešove politike tokom same konferencije, nije bio od pomoći u ostvarivanju njegovih vlastitih ambicioznih ciljeva u Đenovi.