**YUGOSLAVIA IMMEDIATELY UPON ITS EMERGENCE:**

**NIKOLA PAŠIĆ AND THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER DAVID LLOYD GEORGE ON THE FUTURE YUGOSLAV STATE ON 15 OCTOBER 1918[[1]](#footnote-1)**

*(Translation In Extenso)*

Abstract: The paper analyses the meeting between the Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George in London on 15 October 1918. On this occasion, the two statesmen gave their opinions regarding the situation on the territory where the Yugoslav state was expected to be formed. Pašić’s attitude made it clear that it was Serbia who was supposed to have played the deciding part in the process of unifying the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Lloyd George, however, emphasised another important element concerning the future unification – the opinion of the local Yugoslav population on the territory of Austria-Hungary. The complex political situation and the Austria-Hungary disintegration process left very little space for either the realisation of Nikola Pašić’s aspirations or expressing the attitudes of the local inhabitants which Lloyd George spoke about.

Key words: The First World War, Yugoslav state, unification, Nikola Pašić, David Lloyd George.

The aftermath of the First World War raised not only the issue of the disintegration of the formerly great European and world countries, first of all Austria-Hungary and the German and the Russian empires, but also the creation of new states, which were founded precisely on these countries’ territories. Within the frames of that second group of possible new countries was the Yugoslav state, whose specific state contours were not defined until the very end of the war, or immediately after 1918. The emergence of the Yugoslav state, or the way it was originally called – the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was a very complex process, which took place in an even more complex period of time. It depended on numerous factors and it was happening under the influence of what had occurred during the First World War. Parallelly with the situation on the battle fields, where the Serbian army offered its contribution to the Entente Powers, a huge diplomatic conflict was taking place, which required a game of tactics, planning and also some compromises, which were, especially for the leading allied forces, necessary in their quest for gaining more allies.

Among the allies who showed interest in the occurrences in the Balkans, it was Great Britain which surely had an important role. Over time, its war politics changed from a relatively pacifist government of Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith to David Lloyd George’s cabinet, who in December of 1916 advocated a total war until final victory (Mandić, 1956, pp. 27–28; Price, 2006, pp. 199–200). Welsh by birth, Lloyd George was one of the most important people in the British Liberal Party, who without a doubt left a deep trace in the British politics during the First World War and the years after its end (Constantine, 1992, pp. 50–67; Morgan, 1978, pp. 68–95). From the moment he became Prime Minister of Great Britain in December 1916, until the beginning of 1918, Lloyd George was trying to reverse the situation in favour of the Allies through more peaceful channels, such as convincing Austria-Hungary that it would gain some privileges if it surrendered voluntarily. This had to do with its further survival as a state, having in mind that the nations on its territory would be granted autonomy (Mandić, 1956, p. 66).

In one of his speeches, held on 5 January 1918, Lloyd George claimed that for Britain the focus in the war was not the redistribution of Austria-Hungary (Archives of Serbia /further on AS/, Belgrade, fund: Ministry of External Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbia 1871–1918, Political Department /further on MID–Po/, microfilm, roll 534, file III, no. 474–706, England, III/366, III/372; Dragnich, 1974, p. 127; Janković & Krizman, 1964, p. 14). Only a few days later, The American president Woodrow Wilson emphasised something very similar in his fourteen speech points (Djokić, 2010, pp. 50–51; Mandić, 1956, pp. 28, 64). However, in his speech, Lloyd George, among other things, presented his views on the Yugoslav nations, or, in other words, as he accentuated at the time, what he saw was Serbia and Montenegro’s restoration (AS, fund: MID–Po, microfilm, roll 534, file III, no. 474–706, England, III/370; Janković & Krizman, 1964, p. 13). Although his speech did not directly mention the Slavic nations in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but achieving autonomy for the nations of Austria-Hungary, Lloyd George’s words attracted a lot of attention in the two most important institutions of the diplomatic struggle for the emergence of the Yugoslav state during the First World War – the Government of the Kingdom of Serbia led by Nikola Pašić and the Yugoslav Committee with Ante Trumbić. The comments of these institutions’ representatives, connected to the above mentioned speech by Lloyd George, were mostly negative (Dragnich, 1974, p. 128; Janković & Krizman, 1964, pp. 16, 19–20, 37–40, 50–52, 71–72; Živojinović, 2011, pp. 449–450).[[2]](#footnote-2) The restoration of Serbia, as well as Montenegro, along with the autonomy of the other nations within Austria-Hungary, seemed insufficient both to the Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee with regard to the resolution of the Yugoslav issue at the beginning of 1918. They saw it, before anything else, through liberation and, finally, a unification based on the principle of self-determination.[[3]](#footnote-3) Only after the German offensive along the Western Front in March 1918 (Gilbert, 1999, pp. 406–411), it became entirely clear to the British Government that Austria-Hungary as a state could no longer figure on the political map of Europe (Ekmečić, 1989, pp. 807–808; Mandić, 1956, pp. 28–29).

At the beginning of April 1918, Pašić wrote to the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, saying that negotiations are taking place between Serbia’s allies concerning the recognition of freedom and independence for the nationalities in Austria-Hungary. According to the Serbian Prime Minister, this was supposed to lead towards empowering the tendencies on the Austro-Hungarian territory, which would ignite the idea of self-determination and, at the same time, a military dissolution of the country itself (AS, fund: MID–PsL, 1918, F I, p 1238/1918, Telegram of N. Pašić for the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, Corfu, 2 April 1918). As Pašić saw it, such a proposal was worth supporting. Already at the beginning of May of the same year, Pašić expected the employees of the London Mission to contact the British authorities, so as to include the regulations on the nations which strove for independence in the Allies’ future general declarations about the liberation of the nations inside Austria-Hungary. As Pašić emphasised on this occasion, the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes from the Austria-Hungarian territory should unite with Serbia, the Romanians with Romania, the Italians with Italy, while the other nations, such as the Czechs and the Slovaks on the one hand, and the Poles on the other, should form their own independent states (AS, fund: MID–PsL, 1918, F I, p 1238/1918, Telegram of N. Pašić for the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, Corfu, 6 May 1918).

In his further correspondence with the London Mission, at the beginning of July of the same year, Pašić already expressed his concern regarding the Allied forces’ treatment of, as he previously mentioned, the aspirations of the Yugoslav peoples, but also those of the Czechs and the Slovaks. As opposed to the situation with the Poles, who the Allies were supposed to help with the establishment of Poland and their exit to the North Sea, Pašić believed that the Allies expressed merely the feelings of sympathy for the other nations, that is, the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Czechs and Slovaks (AS, fund: MID–PsL, 1918, F I, p 1238/1918, Telegram of N. Pašić for the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, Corfu, 3 July 1918). In this entire case he saw a disunited attitude of the Allies towards the Austro-Hungarian nations, who expected to, or could have hoped to join some of the future states. Moreover, in that moment, the emergence of a free Czechoslovakian and Yugoslav state could for the Serbian Prime Minister have been more realistic, as he said, than Poland’s exit to the North Sea, which was in his view not possible before Germany was entirely defeated (AS, fund: MID–PsL, 1918, F I, p 1238/1918, Telegram of N. Pašić for the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, Corfu, 3 July 1918).

Even during the war, the differences in opinion regarding the Yugoslav issue between Pašić’s government on the one hand, and the Yugoslav Committee on the other, were rather evident. The origin of these two important institutions’ confrontation regarding the process of the establishment of the Yugoslav state had its genesis in the form of understanding the idea of Yugoslavia, but also in their view of how the future state should be organised. In the autumn of 1918, both the Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee emphasised the importance of the Corfu declaration from July 1917, but each in their own way.[[4]](#footnote-4) The idea of the Serbian Government, which reminded of the success and the casualties of the Serbian army after the breakthrough at the Salonica Front, and previous battles from the beginning of the First World War, and which stressed its role as the pivot of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’ future unification, clashed with the concepts of the Yugoslav Committee, which in the nations’ self-determination saw the principle of the same unification but with an accent on the protection of all ethnic Serb communities located across the Danube, Drina and Sava rivers, in Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia who were in danger of finding themselves inside some other states, and outside of the future Yugoslavia (Mandić, 1956, pp. 34–35). For the Serbian Government, however, any larger emphasis on the political importance of the Yugoslav Committee, as the representative of the Yugoslav nations in Austria-Hungary, could also have led to their own reduced significance in the future unification process (Stanković, 1984, p. 223).

In October 1918, both representatives of these institutions, Pašić and Trumbić, met in London, where on separate occasions they talked with the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour. However, Pašić was not pleased with the results of the talks with him, since Balfour, among other things, insisted on the Serbian Government’s cooperation with the Yugoslav Committee (Stanković, 1984, p. 234). Nevertheless, Pašić expressed his firm attitude to the British press, saying that “The day has come and the longed-for moment when the free Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is on the eve of creation”, (AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, The Morning Post, 10 October 1918, New Serbo-Croat-Slovene Kingdom. M. Pachitch’s Declaration). In his statements, Pašić seemed to have left an impression of a statesman convinced in the full unification of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes with Serbia.[[5]](#footnote-5) In that period, however, it appeared that not even the Allies were entirely certain about the future plans for the organisation of the Central and Southeast Europe, including the Yugoslav state (Stanković, 1984, p. 234). At the same time, in one of the many discussions which took place between the representatives of the Serbian Government and the Allies, primarily Nikola Pašić, it was evident how complex the interstate and international relations really were. Pašić was engaged in one such conversation with the British Prime Minister Lloyd George on 15 October 1918 in London.

Among other things, during the First World War, Lloyd George could have been considered as a statesman who showed a fair amount of goodwill towards the Serbian people and their country (Antić, 2012, pp. 23–24), which was to some extent confirmed in his speech on 9 August 1917 in London, when he met with Pašić on a ceremony held in honour of Serbia, as organised by the Serbian Society in England (Stanković, 2007, pp. 183–188). However, Lloyd George had formerly expressed some different views on Serbia; in June of 1917 he mentioned the possibility of joining Serbia to Austra-Hungary (Antić, 2012, p. 429).

By mid-October 1918 the political situation was entirely different. At the time when Lloyd George and Nikola Pašić met again, Austria-Hungary was practically on the brink of complete collapse (Stanković, 1984, p. 243), and, furthermore, what the future Europe would look like had not yet been precisely defined. These circumstances could surely have affected the incumbent Serbian Prime Minister and his optimism regarding the emergence of the Yugoslav state, as well as leave him with a dose of anxiety when it came to the manner in which the unification would be executed, and Serbia’s role in the whole process.

The conversation between Pašić and Lloyd George was at the time mentioned in the works of the American politologist of Yugoslav origins Alex N. Dragnich (Dragnich, 1974), as well as historian and Professor at the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy Đorđe Đ. Stanković (Stanković, 1984). In his book on Pašić, Dragnich refers to the memorandum of the talk between Pašić and Lloyd George (Pašić Toronto Papers), while Stanković, regarding this conversation, primarily relied on the results obtained by Dragnich. Upon presenting the meeting between these two high officials, Dragnich and Stanković expressed mostly Pašić‘s attitude towards a possible development of the situation on the Yugoslav territory, as well as Lloyd George’s view on this issue. According to Pašić, there were three options: the first – Yugoslavia would emerge under Austria-Hungary’s sovereignty, but without Serbian participation; the second – Yugoslavia would emerge with the help of the Allies but, mistakenly, again without Serbia, that is, outside its borders; and finally, the third option – as Pašić put it, the option “our people would want”, which understood absolute freedom from Austria-Hungary and the unification with Serbia (Dragnich, 1974, p. 131). Pašić advocated precisely this third possibility and this was why he asked Lloyd George for help, “otherwise Serbia has shed her blood in vain”, he said (Dragnich, 1974, p. 131).

Lloyd George’s reply was not at all calming, as Dragnich saw it (Dragnich, 1974, p. 131), either was it clear or honest, as Stanković concluded (Stanković, 1984, p. 239). This is what Lloyd George said on the occasion: “Everything depends on events. If the war continues, and you move into those parts (Bosnia, Herzegovina, Banat, etc.), then your wishes will be fulfilled. But if the war ends soon, then discussion must take place. Everything depends on the wishes of those people. If the creation of that or this Yugoslavia could stop the world blood-letting, then it would be created in the form in which that would be possible. The main thing is to stop the world blood-letting. And for you the main thing is the wish of those people. In case it comes to discussions only that will be valid. Again, I tell you, everything will depend on events. The question before us is: will your army enter those regions, or will it come to discussions.” (Dragnich, 1974, p. 131; Stanković, 1984, p. 239). In British Prime Minister’s view, the main role could only have been taken by the situation at the very end of the war.

In relation to the already emphasised details of the conversation between Pašić and Lloyd George, there is another shorter note taken on 15 October 1918, which also recorded the views of the two statesmen about the possible emergence of the Yugoslav state. It was composed by a priest or a person from the church, who went by the name of Nicholas.[[6]](#footnote-6) Today, this note is conserved in the National Records of Scotland (The National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh /further NRS/, fund: GD40 – Papers of the Kerr Family, Marquesses of Lothian /Lothian Muniments/, Reference: GD40/17/925, Note of interview between the Prime Minister and M. Pachitch on the future of Serbia, and of Yugoslavia, 15 October 1918).[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to this short note, Lloyd George first congratulated Pašić on the splendid and decisive victory, which, as he emphasised, Serbia had just achieved, to which Pašić replied, that the victory was the result of the heroic sacrifices made by the Allies (NRS, GD40/17/925). It is possible to assume that Lloyd George’s words referred to the breakthrough on the Salonica Front in September 1918, in which the Serbian Army also took part. Although the author of this note did not give a detailed account of the conversation between Lloyd George and Pašić concerning the army’s further advancements, he mentioned the British Prime Minister’s question regarding, as it was emphasised in writing, the “Yugo-Slav population” and its possible revolt against the Austro-Hungarian Army, once the Serbian army enters Bosnia and Herzegovina. Pašić was optimistic about this matter (NRS, GD40/17/925).

One of the last questions Lloyd George addressed to Pašić referred to the closeness of the then Yugoslav nations that is the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which Dragnich also mentioned in his book on Pašić (Dragnich, 1974, p. 131). The question of the similarity between the languages, as well as the issue of religion in the Balkans, which was also mentioned by Lloyd George, could have been very complicated to a common British person at the time. The most nations and languages on the Yugoslav territory, which were also very close, could have caused confusion when presented in Britain. The same could be said for religion (Evans, 2008, pp. 39–40, 52–56). Surely, as Prime Minister, Lloyd George could have had a broader view on the situation on the Balkan Peninsula. Looking from a greater temporal distance, Pašić’s replies to such questions might have even seemed witty to an extent. So, the Serbian Prime Minister said during the conversation that the Serbs and the Croats spoke the same language, although in the text the word *Croats* was written in brackets and was followed by a question mark. As for the Slovenes, Pašić mentioned that they spoke a dialect of the same language, whose name he did not say when talking to Lloyd George. He described the clergy as united with regard to accepting the unification in the form of Yugoslavia, having in mind that he emphasised that there were “a few who were waiting to see which way the cat jumped” (NRS, GD40/17/925). Pašić described the attitude of the population towards the future unification as positive, with the exception of, as he mentioned, “the aristocrats whose authority depended on Vienna or Budapest” (NRS, GD40/17/925).

After these several questions posed by Lloyd George, there were a few Pašić’s comments connected to the negative attitude of the Italian Government towards the future unification of Yugoslavia, especially coming from the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Baron Sonnino, who Pašić claimed was an adversary of the Land of the South Slavs (NRS, GD40/17/925). Furthermore, Pašić mentioned the rumours according to which there would be a district on the territory of Austria-Hungary, inhabited by the South Slavs, which would in that case not be a part of the future Yugoslav state. For Lloyd George, whose excuse was that he had not heard of such proposals among the Allies, the deciding factor could have been the opinion of the local population towards the progress of the Serbian Army and joining into one Yugoslav state.

Pašić also referred to the rumour that Bulgaria, regardless of the fact that it was on the side which was largely losing the war, might from the Allies be given some territories which had once belonged to Serbia. Lloyd George had not heard of this possibility either and he left the question of Bulgarian borders open for the peace conference after the war (NRS, GD40/17/925), which was, by the way, something the Allies mentioned back in 1916 when there was a chance Bulgaria might suffer a military breakdown (Stanković, 1985, pp. 195–196).

The given conversation between Lloyd George and Pašić could have shown, among other things, the complexity of the political situation at the time, but it could have also, to some extent, presented the two statesmen’s way of thinking, who, each for their own country, wanted as much gain at the end of the war. Lloyd George did not want to, or perhaps could not, make any promises to Pašić concerning his support for the emergence of Yugoslavia, at least not in the way Pašić had expected him to, since it was still unclear how and when the war would end. The given conversation also shows that the many issues to do with the organisation of some European countries, and those which might emerge at the end of the First World War, were left to be resolved at the expected peace conference. However, an important detail emphasised particularly by Lloyd George referred also to the actual moment of the end of the war, that is, what would be the reaction of the local Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian population, which inhabited parts of Austria-Hungary, precisely when the Serbian army arrived in those parts (NRS, GD40/17/925). On Pašić’s side, perhaps there was some anxiety regarding this issue – would all those nations be liberated by the Serbian or the Allied forces, or would they liberate themselves when Austria-Hungary finally fell apart at the end of the war (Sforca, 1937, p. 353).

The events in October and November 1918, when the National Council was formed in Zagreb, as a new factor in the unification process, the signing of the Geneva Declaration between the representatives of the Serbian Government, the Yugoslav Committee and the mentioned council, concerning the unification of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes into a state unit, and the declaration of national assemblies in Vojvodina and Montenegro regrading joining Serbia and further unification, were just examples which showed further development of a very complex political struggle. Lloyd George’s words concerning the deciding factor in the possible unification process – the attitude of the local population – could only have partially influenced the entire process. In the same way, Nikola Pašić’s wishes concerning Serbia’s leading role in the formation of Yugoslavia could not have been fully realised in the way Pašić expected them to. Still, we could say that the importance, after all, fell on the moment and the very complex circumstances in which Austria-Hungary as a state could no longer function, while the Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian population linked their chance of further survival to the newly created Yugoslav state, which was facing a long period of political struggle and vindication.

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2. A large number of documents referring to the negative reactions of the representatives of the Serbian Government and the Yugoslav Committee with regard to the above mentioned speech by Lloyd George have been preserved in the Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb, as well as the Archive of Serbia in Belgrade. See: Archive of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb (further AHAZU), fund: Yugoslav Committee – Paris, London 1915–1919 (further JO), box (b.) 3544, no number, London, 10 January 1918; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 3544, no number, Trumbić’s Dispatch to the Heir of the Throne and to the President of the Ministries, 12 January 1918; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 3544, no number, Pašić’s Letter to the Yugoslav Committee, 18 January 1918; AS, fund: Ministry of Foreign Affairs – The Royal Serbian Mission in London 1883–1919 (further MID–PsL), 1918, F II, p 1297/1918, Telegram of N. Pašić for the Mission of the Kingdom of Serbia in London, Thessaloniki, 4 January 1918 [*the telegram was probably dated incorrectly – remark by M. S.*]. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Compare some of Pašić’s and Trumbić’s points of view: AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 3544, no number, London, 10 January 1918; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 3544, no number, Trumbić’s Dispatch to the Heir of the Throne and to the President of the Ministries, 12 January 1918; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 3544, no number, Pašić’s Letter to the Yugoslav Committee, 18 January 1918. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See various statements made by Pašić and Trumbić concerning this issue in October 1918: AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 2, number (no.) 2/30, Memorandum regarding Yugoslav recognition by Dr. Trumbić, President of the Yugoslav Committee, London, 7 October 1918; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, The Morning Post, 10 October 1918, New Serbo-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, Mr. Pachitch’s Declaration; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, The Daily Chronicle, 12 October 1918, Stanley Naylor, Serbians Marching Home. Prime Minister Pachitch on the new Era by Stanley Naylor; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, translation from The Morning Post, 17 October 1918, The Yugo-Slav Nation. Serbian Premier’s Declaration. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Compare Pašić’s statements given to the British press in the first half of October 1918: AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, The Morning Post, 10 October 1918, New Serbo-Croat-Slovene Kingdom. M. Pachitch’s Declaration; AHAZU, fund: JO, b. 10, no. 10/26, The Daily Chronicle, 12. 10. 1918, Stanley Naylor, Serbians Marching Home. Prime Minister Pachitch on the new Era by Stanley Naylor. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The name on the document was written by hand and is illegible, while the document itself is in English, written on a typewriter and consists of three pages. There is a possibility that the author was the archimandrite Nikolaj Velimirović, who during the war lived mostly in the United Kingdom, where he was a writer and a lecturer. See (Evans, 2008, pp. 67, 83). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Besides this document from the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh, no other information exists concerning the Pašić and Lloyd George conversation, or any other information about how the document got to this archive. However, since it is conserved in the Kerr Family fund, it is possible to assume Lloyd George’s close colleague and secretary, Philip Henry Kerr (later 11th Marquess of Lothian), was also connected to the mentioned meeting, or that he perhaps took part in it too. According to the information found in the National Archives, Kew, London, there is one more note about the conversation between these two statesmen in the Lloyd George fund at the Parliamentary Archives (Parliamentary Archives, London, fund: LG – The Lloyd George Papers, Reference: LG/F/204/4/1). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)