

Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period

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Abstract

KŠIŇAN, Michal – BABJÁK, Juraj. Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period.

The collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918 led to a rupture in Central-European geopolitics and in the aftermath, having a hand in the establishment of Czechoslovakia became an important source of political capital, which individual actors utilized to increase their influence and reputation. In this paper, we discuss two dimensions of the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation in 1918–1919 that contributed to the creation and stabilisation of Czechoslovakia: one pertaining to ceremonies and the formal aspects of remembrance, and the other centred on the effects of international politics—specifically the often-turbulent Italian-Czechoslovak relations—on commemorative practices. Italy sought to limit these ceremonies to only a military dimension, though both countries emphasized the “glorious” aspects and persons of their military cooperation, leaving out “unsuccessful” symbols of the time. Special attention was paid to executed Czechoslovak soldiers, who were remembered as both heroes and martyrs at the same time.

Keywords: Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation (1918–1919), official historical memory, military monuments and cemeteries, public commemorations, General Graziani, Czechoslovak military traditions, Italian-Czechoslovak relations

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.1.8>

The collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918 led to a rupture in Central-European geopolitics, the likes of which were effectively unimaginable a mere four years earlier. Having a hand in the establishment of Czechoslovakia became an important source of political capital, which individual actors used to increase their influence and prestige on both the international stage and at home. In this paper, we discuss two dimensions of the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation in 1918–1919: one pertaining to ceremonies and the formal aspects of remembrance, and the other centred on the effects of international politics—specifically, the often-turbulent Italian-Czechoslovak relations—on commemorative practices. The main aim of the public commemorations of historical events was to strengthen and unite Czechoslovak society by providing some definite markers on which to build a national identity.¹ In view of space constraints, this paper should be understood as a typological overview of the most significant methods and manifestations of official historical remembrance concerning the given era rather than a complete and exhaustive summary.

This paper came about as part of the VEGA 2/0087/20 and APVV 17-0399 projects. The authors would like to thank PhDr. Jakub Štofanič, PhD. for his help in researching documents in Czech periodicals.

- 1 For the theoretical and methodological background, see MANNOVÁ, Elena. *Minulosť ako supermarket? Spôsoby reprezentácie a aktualizácie dejín*. Bratislava : Veda; Historický ústav SAV, 2019; HÁJKOVÁ, Dagmar – HORÁK, Pavel – KESSLER, Vojtěch – MICHELA, Miroslav (eds.) *Sláva republice! Oficiální svátky a oslavy v meziválečném Československu*. Praha : Academia; Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2018.

The emergence and early days of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation, 1918–1919

The Czechoslovak movement abroad led by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, and Edvard Beneš, attempted to enlist support of the United States and the Entente powers for creation of the state of Czechoslovakia. Their most successful tools in these efforts were propaganda and the Czechoslovak Army Abroad (the Legion), which was mostly comprised of former Austro-Hungarian POWs in Russia, France and Italy. Establishment of the Legion was probably most difficult in Italy, whose territorial ambitions in the Adriatic conflicted with those of Yugoslavia, causing Rome to be suspicious of the exile political movements of Austro-Hungarian nations as a whole. Such worries were partly dispelled by Štefánik, whose successful diplomatic mission to the Apennine Peninsula in the spring of 1918 culminated in the signing of a treaty on the creation of a Czechoslovak Legion in Italy on 21 April, and subsequently the handover of a battle flag to the Legion on 24 May during a ceremony held on the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war at the Vittoriano (the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II) in Rome.² The Legion in Italy entered the fray in the summer of 1918 under the command of General Andrea Graziani with their most important deployment being at the Battle of Doss Alto. Because the legionnaires had been originally sworn to the Austro-Hungarian monarch, as soon as they fell into enemy captivity, they were executed. Forty-six of them in total met this fate.

Czechoslovakia officially came into existence on 28 October 1918, but securing its borders—or in the case of Slovakia, demarcating them—was still a significant challenge. Legionnaires in Russia had no way of returning to their homeland so Beneš, as minister of foreign affairs, petitioned the French and Italian governments to send soldiers stationed in their countries back to Czechoslovakia. Rome was far prompter and more accommodating in its response, dispatching around 20 thousand men to the newly founded state led by an Italian military mission headed by General Luigi Piccione, who had replaced General Graziani. The Italians not only equipped and arranged the redeployment of Czechoslovak legionnaires from France (around 10 thousand men) to their homeland, they also organized groups of Czechoslovak POWs in their own country into so-called civil defence units (eventually these would be around 80 000 strong).³ The first phase of securing Slovak territory under Piccione's command proceeded without serious impediments and was completed in January 1919. Moreover, the legionnaires from Italy also joined the fight against Poland for Tešín (Cieszyn) Silesia.

However, because Beneš and the French were dismayed to see Italy's increasing influence in Czechoslovakia, they agreed to dispatch a French military mission led by General Maurice Pellé to the country. Pellé became Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army and a deputy to Marshall Ferdinand Foch. Tensions between the two foreign generals escalated into an open conflict, which was only resolved by a compromise specifying exact terms for

2 As early as in 1917, several Czech and Slovak prisoners were interspersed among various Italian units, serving as translators, propagandists, or scouts.

3 A distinction should be made between the legionnaires, who voluntarily joined the Legion before the official creation of Czechoslovakia on 28 October 1918, and the civil defence units, who entered the Czechoslovak military after this date.

the end of the Italian military mission in Czechoslovakia. It was negotiated by Minister of War Štefánik, who was far more sympathetic towards Italy than Beneš.

At the same time, Italy's image in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating. While the Italians considered themselves neutral peace-makers—and acted as such in ethnically diverse territories—the Czechs viewed their approach as effectively “pro-Hungarian”. Also, Czechoslovakia's support for Yugoslavia's demands at the Peace Conference did not help relations between the two countries. This, along with failures in Slovakia, had a decisive impact on the formation of the historical memory concerning the Italian military mission. In April 1919, when General Piccione was ordered to advance to the new demarcation line (the existence of which remains a source of controversy to this day), he could not proceed on account of the Czechoslovak army's limited combat capacity.⁴ A subsequent attack by the Hungarian Soviet Republic compelled the troops to fall back. The fact that the French military mission⁵ had by this time assumed full command of the Czechoslovak forces had little bearing on such developments. The Hungarians only retreated behind the demarcation line following an intervention by the Peace Conference. Despite that, in Czechoslovakia an image persisted of the Italians as those who had “failed” and the French as those who had successfully “saved” Slovakia.⁶

Italian-Czechoslovak relations in the interwar period

Throughout the early 1920s, both countries were attempting to resolve the initial friction of their mutual relations with varying degrees of success. The ascent to power of Benito Mussolini in 1922 initially had a positive impact on Italian-Czechoslovak relations, which may seem paradoxical in light of later events. Mussolini was in charge of Italian foreign policy and until September 1929, he was also “interim” head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His goal was to “mould Italy into a mighty and formidable nation that its foreign partners would finally take seriously and would play a leading role on the global stage”.⁷ With the exception of Romania, Czechoslovakia was surrounded by countries staking territorial claims against it, and so it had an eminent interest in maintaining the international status quo and supporting the principle of collective security, guaranteed by the League of Nations. In 1924, after the resolution of the Rijeka (Fiume) Question and the resumption of Italy's relations with Yugoslavia, Italy and Czechoslovakia even signed a treaty of friendship, but it remained mostly on paper.⁸

4 For more on this and related events, see KŠIŇAN, Michal. *Milan Rastislav Štefánik. The Slovak National Hero and Co-Founder of Czechoslovakia*. Abingdon; New York : Routledge, 2021, pp. 151–201. For more bibliography on this matter, see the paper in this issue of Forum Historiae: CACCAMO, Francesco. Italy, the Paris Peace Conference and the Shaping of Czechoslovakia. In Forum Historiae, 2021, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 7–22. ISSN 1337-6861. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.1.2>

5 The Italian military mission relinquished command of the Czechoslovak troops on 1 June 1919.

6 There is not sufficient space in this paper for a detailed analysis of the military aspects of the Italian and French commands. For more, see HELANĚ, Pavel. Československo-italské vztahy od první světové války do začátku dvacátých let. In RAUCHOVÁ, Jitka – JIROUŠEK, Bohumil et al. *Věda, kultura a politika v československo-italských vztazích 1918-1951*. České Budějovice : Jihočeské muzeum v Českých Budějovicích, 2012, p. 33; PROKŠ, Petr. Soupeření italské a francouzské vojenské mise v Československu v r. 1919. In *Slovanský přehled*, 1988, Vol. 74, No. 5, pp. 374–384.

7 MILZA, Pierre. *Mussolini*. Praha : Volvox Globator, 2013 (1st edition 1999), p. 390.

8 CACCAMO, Francesco. Promarněná příležitost ve střední Evropě. Itálie a Československo mezi dvěma světovými válkami. In RAUCHOVÁ – JIROUŠEK 2012, p. 80. See also: CACCAMO, Francesco. Un'occasione mancata l'Italia. La Cecoslovacchia e la crisi dell'Europa centrale, 1918-1938. In *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 2015, Vol. 99, No. 1, pp. 111–158; Ideological conflicts between democratic Czechoslovakia and fascist Italy did exacerbate the two countries' foreign-policy frictions, though did not trigger them.

Although in practice, Italy and Czechoslovakia were rival powers in Central Europe and the Danubian lands, they did share some common interests. Both were attempting to prevent the Anschluss of Austria, which would leave too much power in the hands of Germany, and at the same time, competing for economic influence in this country.⁹ Czechoslovakia had extremely strong ties with France, which Rome viewed with great reservation. Italy's claims to the Adriatic coast were another source of tension, significantly complicating Rome's relations with Belgrade. Czechoslovakia's sympathies towards Yugoslavia¹⁰ were based not only on "Slavic unity", but also on the alliance of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia), which was meant to be a bulwark against the revisionist ambitions of Hungary.¹¹ In the second half of the 1920s, after Mussolini failed to establish better diplomatic cooperation with this bloc, he reoriented his country towards Hungary.¹²

In April 1927, Rome and Budapest signed the Treaty of Friendship, Conciliation, and Arbitration. On the occasion, Mussolini gave a speech expressing contempt for the countries of the Little Entente, which naturally worsened Italy's relations with Czechoslovakia.¹³ Though from a global point of view, Mussolini was a supporter of the Versailles System, bar a few exceptions in the 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁴ In 1929, the Treaty of Friendship between Czechoslovakia and Italy expired and in view of the abovementioned events, logically it was not renewed. In early-1930s Czechoslovakia, pro-Yugoslav attitudes and the attendant anti-Italian sentiments were gaining momentum.

The Great Depression provided a new impetus for ideas on deepening economic cooperation within Central Europe, possibly of a confederation, but such plans were stymied by the conflicting visions of Czechoslovakia and Italy, among other reasons.¹⁵ Hitler's ascent to the Chancellery in 1933 was not viewed positively in Rome or in Prague, but again, the two countries' views regarding a possible solution were at odds. While Mussolini favoured a so-called Four-Power Pact (Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany), which would govern Europe and guarantee its stability, Beneš sought to increase cooperation among the Little Entente. Neither of these initiatives were particularly successful. The so-called Rome Protocols of 1934 reinforced Italy's ties with Austria and Hungary. Relations between Rome and Prague were also gradually improving with encouragement from Paris, something that had been lacking in the past.¹⁶

The year 1935, when Italy invaded Ethiopia, brought major change. In response, the League of Nations imposed sanctions on Rome but they were not fully respected¹⁷ as Great Britain and France wanted to avoid completely alienating an important ally in a potential anti-

9 For more on the various economic cooperation projects in Central Europe as well as on the broader context of Czechoslovak-Italian relations, see HOUSKA, Ondřej. *Praha proti Římu. Československo-italské vztahy v letech 1922–1929*. Praha : Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Filozofická fakulta, 2011.

10 Until 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

11 FERENCŮHOVÁ, Bohumila. La France et la Petite Entente - vision slovaque. In HOREL, Catherine. *Nations, cultures et sociétés d'Europe centrale aux XIXe et XXe siècles*. Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2006, pp. 83–105.

12 CACCAMO 2012, p. 81.

13 MILZA 2013, p. 416.

14 VARSORI, Antonio. How to Become a Great Power: Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922. In VARSORI, Antonio – ZACCARIA, Benedetto (eds.) *Italy in the New International Order, 1917–1922*. Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 2.

15 MARÈS, Antoine. *Edvard Beneš. Un drame entre Hitler et Staline*. Paris : Perrin, 2015, pp. 167–227. See also the following article, which argues in favour of Beneš's position ŠEPTÁK, Miroslav. Československo-italské soupeření ve střední Evropě v letech 1929–1938. In RAUCHOVÁ – JIROUŠEK 2012, pp. 109–126.

16 CACCAMO 2012, pp. 84–86.

17 Beneš, as President of the General Assembly of the League of Nations, supported adoption of the sanctions. They were only officially lifted in July 1936.

German coalition. Italy's engagements in East Africa and its support of General Franco during the Spanish Civil War brought it closer to Hitler (the Berlin-Rome axis) while also drawing its attention away from Central Europe, creating room for German expansion.¹⁸ In 1937, Rome further deepened relations with Budapest and Vienna, also signing a treaty of friendship with Yugoslavia and made a gentleman's agreement with Great Britain. Unlike in 1934, Mussolini was no longer wholly opposed to the idea of the Anschluss even though he was keeping the door open for an alliance with Great Britain and France in case Hitler should attempt a takeover of the German-speaking South Tirol (Alto Adige). The international situation was becoming increasingly tense. In March 1938 after the Anschluss, Germany stepped up pressure on Czechoslovakia to annex territories inhabited by ethnic Germans. As far as the Sudetenland was concerned, Mussolini wanted Germany to have the final word, which would put further strain on the Versailles System. At the same time, the *Duce* was opposed to a military solution, for which Italy was unprepared. The Munich Agreement was thus a success for Mussolini, earning him the moniker "Angel of Peace" back home¹⁹, though the triumph would be short lived.

The official historical memory of the Legion in Italy in the interwar period

The official historical memory of Czechoslovak legionnaires and the Legion from Italy began to form immediately following their deployment on the front. Monuments to the fallen and the executed were erected at battle sites, military orders were issued on important anniversaries related to the Legion in Italy, and Czechoslovak army and political representatives exchanged salutations with their Italian counterparts through telegraphs. Because the legionnaires had played an important role in the creation of Czechoslovakia, the newly founded state was hugely invested in cultivating their memory. Czechoslovak Legion regiments from Italy, which in 1920 were merged with local Czechoslovak regiments as part of a unification of the armed forces, retained their Italian heritage. They were given nicknames referencing locations, names, and battles in Italy that were important to their history. On 24 October 1923, Infantry Regiment 31 was honourably nicknamed "Arco", 32 became "Garda", 33 "Doss Alto", 34 "Rifleman Jan Čapek", and 35 "Foligno". "Reconnaissance" Regiment 39 was also later given an honourable nickname associated with Italy.²⁰

Italian legionnaire literature was being published, though for understandable reasons it remained in the shadow of memoirs and fictional works devoted to the Legion in Russia. During battles on the Italian front, in Slovakia, and in Tešín Silesia, several Czechoslovak soldiers kept diaries²¹, however, many of them were only edited and published in recent decades.²² In *Doss Alto*, one part of his trilogy from 1938, the famous legionnaire writer Adolf Zeman described the titular conflict. The key personality in the historiography of

18 MILZA 2013, pp. 641, 650–654.

19 MILZA 2013, pp. 667, 670.

20 The assignment of honourable nicknames was carried out by a presidential decree issued in 1923 by the Ministry for National Defence.

21 LIBIŠ, František – HRUŠKA, Ladislav. *Pod prapor odboje: (v řadách Československého dobrovolnického sboru v Itálii)*. Brno : Moravský legionář, 1927; LIBIŠ, František. *Ve stínu Apenin a Alp. Vzpomínky vojáka československé revoluce v Itálii*. Brno : Moravský legionář, 1928.

22 FLEICHMANN, Václav. *Paměti lékaře Čs. légie v Itálii 1910–1920*. Praha : Votobia, 2002; DUDEK, Josef. *Učitel na frontě: denník legionáře Josefa Dudka*. Praha : Epoque; Československá obec legionářská, 2019; VALNÍČEK, Svatopluk. *Vzpomínky na Velkou válku*. Prague : ANLET, 2014; TRÍSKA, Jan. *Zapomenutá fronta: vojákův denník a úvahy jeho syna*. Praha : Ivo Železný, 2001; APFEL, Viliam. *Čas bez. Martin : Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej*, 2005.

the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy was trained historian and former legionnaire František Bednařík, who published several books on this matter.²³ Naturally, there were other authors in both Czechoslovakia and Italy who wrote about the subject.²⁴

Celebrations in the anniversary year of 1928

Czechoslovakia placed the highest importance on the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Legion in Italy. During a private breakfast with the Italian ambassador, Beneš mentioned that he would like to come to Rome on the occasion not only to commemorate the creation of the Legion in Italy, but also to discuss the economic and security challenges faced by Central Europe with Mussolini.²⁵ The Italian leader thought it imprudent to ascribe too great an importance to the anniversary and had no interest in meeting with Beneš, which he justified by claiming that the Italian government desired the celebrations to have a strictly military character and would limit the attendance of civilians.²⁶

During the interwar period, it was common for veterans, mostly of the victorious powers, to go on remembrance visits of cemeteries and former battle sites. In this spirit, Czechoslovak legionnaires who had fought in Italy set out on a trip to Rome following a trail of important battlefields and memorial sites, which included many detours along the way. For political reasons, they were granted free visas to enter Italy and a 50-per cent discount on train fares. On 8 April, around 150²⁷ legionnaires arrived in Brennero where they were welcomed by an Italian military delegation who then accompanied them the remainder of the way to the capital. The same day, the group reached Rovereto²⁸ where they were joined by General Graziani and took a tour of the cemetery, the museum, and the city. They visited in succession: Riva del Garda, Loppio, Doss Alto (where a handful of soil was taken to be laid at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Prague), Arco, Peschiera, Verona, Venice, San Donà di Piave, and the former Piave front. On 13 April, the group took a trip to Conegliano at which point General Graziani left to return to Rome. The following day, part of the legionnaires returned to Prague, which suggests that they may have found it more important to visit the remembrance sites than to attend the official ceremony in the capital. The remaining 80 legionnaires continued via Bologna to Florence, which they toured on 15 April. They then continued via Foligno to Rome, arriving on 17 April and enjoying an official welcome by representatives of the Italian government. On 16 April, another delegation also arrived in Rome directly from Prague comprising of “five colonels or lieutenant-colo-

23 For the author's bibliography, see entry “František Bednařík” in the Biographical Dictionary of the Czech Lands. http://biography.hiu.cas.cz/Personal/index.php/BEDNA%C5%98%C3%8DK_Franti%C5%A1ek_24.9.1892-5.3.1944 [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

24 For instance, LOGAJ, Josef. *Československé legie v Itálii*. Praha : F. Žďárský, 1920; MORAVEC, Otakar. *O naší zahraniční armádě v Itálii*. Kolín : self-published, 1922; PORCINARI, Giulio Cesare Gotti. *Coi legionari cecoslovacchi al fronte italiano ed in Slovacchia (1918-1919)*. Roma : Ministero della guerra, Comando del Corpo di stato maggiore, Ufficio storico, 1933.

25 Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (ASMAE), Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 7 February 1928, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth abbreviated as MFA), telegraph copy no. 924; See also *I documenti diplomatici italiani, settima serie: 1922-1935, volume VI (1 gennaio - 23 settembre 1928)*. Roma : Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1967, pp. 82–83.

26 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 15 February 1928, copy of Mussolini's telegraph to the Italian Embassy in Prague. See also *I documenti diplomatici italiani* 1967, pp. 95–96.

27 According to other sources, there were as many as 200. See Triezvy taliansky hlas o československom odboji. In *Slovenský denník*, 3 May 1928, p. 3.

28 We discuss the importance of the monuments and locations visited by the legionnaires in a later part of this paper.

nels, one for each regiment formed in Italy²⁹; one colonel from the Ministry of National Defence and three or four MPs who travelled as private individuals. In Rome, where the legionnaires were received by General Graziani among others, part of the group who were dressed in legionnaire uniforms lodged in the Barracks of King Umberto I. On 17 April, they laid wreaths at the Pantheon, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Basilica of St Mary of the Angels and the Martyrs. The next day they were scheduled to go on an official tour of the Barracks of King Umberto I, which housed the Museum of the Grenadiers of Sardinia, and then attend a lunch at the Ministry of Defence. Later, the legionnaires were received by Mussolini in the Victory Room at the Chigi Palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters, and in the evening, they visited the Rome Opera House. The following day they took a tour of the city and its surroundings. From the Italian capital, part of the group of legionnaires returned home and around 30 remaining proceeded via Naples, Palermo, and Messina to Reggio Calabria.³⁰ The tourism aspect of this journey deserves some attention insofar as, apart from reflecting the undeniable popularity of Italy as a destination, it attests to the fact that such “luxury” was accessible to an ever-widening segment of the population, in contrast to the 19th century.

The celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Legion understandably had a wide scope and took place in various locations. In Czechoslovakia, the events culminated in a visit by General Graziani, whose trip was sanctioned by the Italian Ministry of War. The general arrived in the Czechoslovak capital on 28 April accompanied by a mission of several officers. Although Italy insisted that the ceremony in Prague have a strictly military character, according to Italian Ambassador Count Luigi Vannutelli Rey, local authorities attempted to usurp it for their own purposes. Immediately after Graziani’s arrival and official welcome, Vannutelli Rey warned the general to keep clear of non-uniformed representatives of the Czechoslovak government or state. On the morning of 29 April, Graziani laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and then moved to a function at the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House.³¹ Aside from the many official guests, seats of honour in the hall were reserved for relatives of fallen and executed legionnaires. The function began with a speech by the chairman of the “Association of Italian Legionnaires”, František Šišma, who was followed by Minister of Defence František Udržal and by the Italian ambassador. Vannutelli Rey limited his comments to reminiscing about the war, having served under Graziani’s command as well as alongside Czechoslovak legionnaires, whom he showered with praise. He did this at the behest of Mussolini, who had also asked the ambassador to emphasise that the victory on the Italian Front had been achieved by the Italian army.³² Afterwards, the vice-chairman of the Czechoslovak Legionnaire Association, Lev Sychrava, took to the lectern followed by General Graziani himself.³³

29 Six regiments (31th–35th, 39th) were founded in Italy. On 1 October 1920, they were merged with the Czechoslovak army by a decree issued by the Ministry of National Defence, no. 5700-org.1919.

30 We reconstructed the itinerary of the trip from a planned agenda provided by the Italian authorities. It is possible that the legionnaires diverged from this scheduled route. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, attachment to a telegraph sent by the Italian Ministry of Transport to the Italian MFA, and other documents from this box.

31 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 1 May 1928, telegraph no. 100 from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

32 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Ambassador Vannutelli Rey’s speech in Prague, 29 April 1928.

33 Oslava 10. výročí zřízení československé armády v Itálii. In *Československá republika*, 1 May 1928, p. 3.

The ambassador was troubled by the words of the minister of national defence, who concluded his speech by saying that the countries of the Little Entente along with their allies from the First World War would treat anyone who might attempt to “destroy by force a part of what had been achieved through such immense sacrifice” as an enemy. Vannutelli Rey read this as a veiled, though highly contrived, reference to the most sensitive foreign affairs issues of the day and he sought a way of conveying his disapproval for this attempt by the Czechoslovaks to exploit the presence of the Italian mission for the intents of their own foreign policy. He did not, however, wish to resort to a formal protest insofar as it might interrupt the ongoing ceremony, which was above all, a demonstration of the Czechoslovak army and the people’s affection for the Italian general. After an official lunch at Hradčany with President Masaryk, the ambassador decided to abstain from the rest of the day’s events as a form of protest. He also declined Defence Minister Udržal’s invitation for lunch the next day, doing so at the very last moment and subsequently made sure that the Czechoslovak authorities interpreted his actions as he had intended them. Czechoslovak diplomats assured the ambassador that Udržal had merely hoped to impress upon Hungary that Czechoslovakia was capable of diminishing the effects of the Italian-Hungarian friendship. By the ambassador’s reckoning, the minister’s speech was also inspired by Beneš’s foreign-policy outlook seeking to ensure Czechoslovakia’s security by moving the country towards Italy, which would have been on friendly terms with France. Furthermore, Vannutelli Rey was convinced that if Beneš himself had been present in Prague during the event, the minister for national defence would not have committed such a “grave misstep”.³⁴

After lunch with the president, General Graziani visited the Resistance Memorial Institute and in the evening hours, he attended a traditional stage play.³⁵ On the morning of 30 April, he visited the Italian military cemetery in Milovice. Later, the members of the Italian mission were awarded the Order of the White Lion and treated to lunch with the minister of defence. In the afternoon, Graziani laid a wreath at the Olšany Cemetery, which housed the remains of 44 legionnaires executed on the Italian front and the following day he went, on his own request, to meet with the mother of celebrated war hero Alois Štorch³⁶, who had only recently returned from a visit to the locations around Italy where her son had fought.³⁷

In his report from the trip, Graziani stated that the Czechoslovak government had gone to great lengths to highlight the importance of his visit. He also shared some positive reflections regarding the progress that the country had made since his previous visit in 1925 and stressed that the general populace, the socialists, as well as the army were now more favourably inclined towards the fascist regime.³⁸

34 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 1 May 1928, telegraph no. 100 from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

35 Generál Graziani v Prahe. In *Slovenský denník*, 1 May 1928, p. 3.

36 Štorch was captured by Austro-Hungarian troops during a dangerous sabotage mission on Lake Garda. Although he could not swim, he allegedly attempted to escape by jumping into the lake. He fainted and was subsequently dragged out of the water by the enemy. During his execution on 5 July 1918, he refused to wear a blindfold, put on his own noose, and lifted his legs to expedite his demise. Alois Štorch: Zámečník a oběšený legionář, který miloval české básníky. Na šibenici odmítl pásku přes oči. In *Lidovky*, 5 July 2019, https://www.lidovky.cz/lide/alois-storch-zamecnik-a-obeseny-legionar-ktery-miloval-ceske-basniky.A190704_134716_lide_mber [last viewed on 24 March 2021].

37 The visit most likely took place in the village of Nová Ves u Bakova. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Stefani press agency releases regarding these events.

38 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 7 May 1928, General Graziani’s report from his mission in Czechoslovakia.

Graziani's visit continued to resonate even after his departure. The Italian ambassador noticed an article in the *Československá republika* journal which reported that during a visit to Hungary, Count Baratelli, editor of the Roman daily *La Tribuna*, had stated that just as the Alps were the natural border of Italy, so it was legitimate for Hungary to want to reclaim its natural border, the Carpathians. However according to the journal, it was clear that Mussolini did not share this view as indicated by a statement by General Graziani who had allegedly told his Czech friends that his visit had a political dimension and had been organised at the behest of the *Duce* who thus wanted to “document Italy's sympathies towards Czechoslovakia”.³⁹ Vannutelli Rey thought it unlikely that General Graziani would have said something to that effect. He interpreted the article as being part of a Czechoslovak government campaign and proposed that Italian dailies “set things straight”.⁴⁰

Ceremonies were held not only in Prague, but also in cities and towns garrisoning regiments whose foundations had been laid in Italy. The fact that they were formed in towns across the region of Umbria was also reflected in the plans for the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia and of “Foligno” Infantry Regiment 35. This regiment was named for the town of Foligno in the Perugia province of Umbria where it was formed. Its commander, Colonel Hynek Koptík, invited the mayor of Perugia to the celebrations reasoning that the legionnaires would always consider Umbria “as their homeland, their cradle, and the first step in their quest for freedom”.⁴¹ Although the Italian Ministry of Defence approved this journey, sources do not mention that the mayor ultimately attended the ceremonies. They took place on 5–8 July offering a varied programme and culminating in the handover of and swearing of an oath to the new regimental banner (the old one was laid at the Resistance Memorial Institute).⁴²

On 21 April, on the initiative of “Reconnaissance” Regiment 39, the Reduta palace in Bratislava hosted a military tattoo⁴³ which saw the attendance of the Italian consul, several official guests, and Minister of Education Milan Hodža. The minister took patronage over the event, which “celebrated the Czechoslovak-Italian friendship”⁴⁴ and in his speech he highlighted the contributions of the regiments created in Italy to the “liberation” of Slovakia in December 1918 and January 1919.

Celebrations were also held on the anniversary of the founding of the “Garda” Infantry Regiment 32 from Košice. The official part of the ceremony was moved back from April to July 1928, starting with a shooting contest on 5 July and culminating with a march to the Mound to the Fallen in the Battles of 1919 in Medzev. There a memorial plaque dedicated by the Eastern-Slovak branch of the Sokol movement⁴⁵ to the soldiers killed in the war with the Hungarian Soviet Republic was unveiled.⁴⁶

39 Vzkaz generála Grazianiho. In *Československá republika*, 5 May 1928, p. 1.

40 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 5 May 1928, Vannutelli Rey to the Italian MFA.

41 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Plzeň, 6 March 1918, copy of the letter sent by Colonel Koptík to the mayor of Perugia.

42 Včerejší vojenská slavnost v Plzni. In *Nová Doba*, 9 July 1928, p. 2.

43 Slobodu dáva si národ sám. In *Slovenský denník*, 24 April 1928, pp. 1–2.

44 ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Prague, 23 April 1928, telesspresso no. 504, Vannutelli Rey to the Italian MFA.

45 The Sokol movement was an athletic union founded in the mid-1800s, which played a part in the development of Czech patriotism.

46 Oslavy 32. pluku Gardského v Košiciach. In *Slovenský denník*, 12 July 1928, p. 4.

General Graziani was not the only person commemorated at the festivities honouring the Czechoslovak Legion. Others included the chief of the Italian General Staff, General Armando Diaz⁴⁷, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Association in Italy, Jan Čapek, who fell during the Battle of the Piave, and most importantly, General Štefánik. Štefánik's Italian ties are highlighted by the fact that two of the three⁴⁸ Italian crewmembers who were on board his aircraft when it went down on 4 May 1919 were interred with him at the Bradlo Mound.

The members of the Committee to Build a Mound to General Štefánik⁴⁹, namely Fedor Houdek and František Hromada, a former legionnaire from Italy, approached the Italian consul in Moravian Ostrava, Dadone, saying that they would like to invite General Graziani and Prince Pietro Lanza di Scalea, the former chairman of the *Comitato Italiano per l'indipendenza cecoslovacca* (Italian Committee for Czechoslovak Independence), to the inauguration of the memorial. In their view, a significant Italian presence would be in line with Štefánik's sympathies towards their country. The committee also pointed out that, particularly in Slovakia, people were sensitive about the fact that although General Graziani repeatedly visited Czechoslovakia, he never came to Slovakia, which was home to many of the legionnaires who had served under his command and who would have been honoured to meet with him again. Dadone, however, feared that an official Italian presence could be exploited in the interests of anti-Hungarian propaganda and so Italian representatives told organisers that Graziani and the prince would not attend the ceremony. As Italy could not afford to ignore the proceedings altogether, the ambassador decided that the country would be represented by the Bratislava consul, Francesco Palmieri. At the same time, Dadone was supposed to inform the organising committee that the Italian side did not wish for the ceremony to take on an anti-Hungarian character, as under such circumstances the Italian consul's attendance would be considered inappropriate.⁵⁰ In his report from the ceremony, Palmieri summarised the guests' speeches, noting that only that of Minister Hodža could have been interpreted as "anti-Hungarian". He expressed surprise at the fact that none of the speakers had mentioned the Italian soldiers buried alongside Štefánik or even brought up the general's death, limiting themselves to merely highlighting his contribution to the "liberation of the homeland".⁵¹

Graziani's death

An important moment in the memorialisation of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation came with the tragic death of General Graziani in February 1931. Ambassador Orazio Pedrazzi reported that Graziani's passing had caused an outpouring of sorrow in Czecho-

47 *Lidové noviny* (poobedňajšie vydanie), 8 March 1928, p. 1.

48 Originally, all three Italian crewmembers were buried at the site but the remains of one of them were later moved to Italy.

49 It was likely this committee, though the source does not make it entirely clear.

50 ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1928, box 5, Rome, 26 July 1928, telespresso 238983 addressed to the Italian Embassy in Prague, and attachments.

51 ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1928, box 5, Bratislava, 24 September 1918, report elaborated by the Italian Consul in Bratislava for the Italian Ambassador in Prague. Hodža's speech was published in the *Slovenský denník* daily on 25 September 1928.

slovakia. All the papers, even the socialist outlet, published reverential articles about the man, and masses of people along with official authorities came out to voice their grief.⁵²

The *Lidové noviny* daily wrote about the circumstances of the general's death and informed that his funeral had been postponed to allow for Czechoslovak representatives to attend.⁵³ On 15 March, on the initiative of the "Association of Italian Legionnaires" and with the support of the Czechoslovak government, a remembrance event was held in honour of the deceased general. In his speech, the Italian ambassador who had served under his command for a year during the war, emphasised Graziani's contributions and expressed regret over the way in which this great man who had weathered so many perils of the battlefield ultimately met his end. He declared that Graziani had been a righteous heir to Garibaldi's legacy and that Italians had always stood on the side of those fighting for national freedom. He also spoke about the death of another accomplished general, Štefánik.⁵⁴

Pedrazzi's reflections on the event itself are also important. In a cable to Rome, he noted that from a political vantage point, it was of some significance to have drawn, among others, all the representatives of the French embassy and military mission. In his speech, the ambassador avoided any political statements, restricting himself to celebrating the "brotherhood in arms during the war". He considered Beneš's speech to have been most noteworthy to the extent that it conveyed the politician's first-ever formal expression of gratitude towards Italy for its "boundless cordiality". Beneš even said a few kind words about Mussolini (who had supported the Czechoslovak cause during the war) and "insisted on speaking Italian" in front of the French and Yugoslav delegations. The ambassador further attributed the event's "agreeable" atmosphere to the signing of the London Naval Treaty⁵⁵, which Czechoslovak politicians reportedly viewed as a safeguard against revisionism and a step towards the isolation of Hungary, the weakening of Germany, and the opening of the road for Beneš to the chairmanship of the World Disarmament Conference.⁵⁶ Pedrazzi had not, however, forgotten to mention that not long ago, Czechoslovak public opinion of Italy had not been entirely positive. According to the ambassador, Beneš would try to move his country closer to Italy only insofar as it would not upset the French.⁵⁷

Shortly after his death, Graziani received another honour. On 16 April 1931, at the request of the minister of defence, President Masaryk issued Decree 2618, by which "Reconnaissance" Infantry Regiment 39 was renamed to "Reconnaissance Regiment of General Graziani".⁵⁸

52 Generál Andrea Graziani zomrel. In *Slovenský denník*, 1 March 1931, p. 2, published an obituary and a panegyric biography of General Graziani.

The Italian ambassadors paid particular attention in their cables to the reactions of the Leftist parties, which generally were not as favourably disposed towards the fascist regime. For more on Czechoslovak society's attitude to the ascendance of fascism see GRITTI, Fabiano. *La Cecoslovacchia e l'ascesa del fascismo in Italia*. In *Studi italo-slovacchi*, 2020, Vol. IX, No 1, pp. 3–19.

53 Jak zahynul generál Graziani. In *Lidové noviny* (poobedňajšie vydanie), 3 March 1931, p. 1.

54 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Praha, 6. 3. 1931, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA, interview attached.

55 The London Naval Treaty, signed on 22 April 1930, limited the naval capacities of the great powers.

56 The Italians were trying their best to thwart Beneš's bid for the chairmanship (1932–1934). In the end, the office went to the British politician Arthur Henderson.

57 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Prague, 20 March 1931, telegraph from the Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

58 ASMAE, Affari politici 1931-1945, Cecoslovacchia, box 1, Rome, 11 May 1931, verbal note for the Italian Embassy in Czechoslovakia.

Celebrations in the anniversary year of 1938

The celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Legion were held under very different international circumstances, which understandably had a noticeable effect. In March 1938, Beneš approached the Italian ambassador saying that Czechoslovakia would like to hold a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Legion in Italy as a “gesture of thanks, friendship, and affection towards Italy on the part of the Czechoslovak legionnaires”. In Czechoslovakia, the event would be held under Beneš’s patronage and as part of the anniversary, some Czechoslovak legionnaires would travel to Italy.⁵⁹ The Italian foreign service replied that the prevailing conditions were inconducive to such a proposal.⁶⁰

According to Italian Ambassador Domenico de Facendis, Rome could not forget that high-ranking former Czechoslovak legionnaires from Italy had failed to express their support for Italy in times when the country was struggling with international sanctions.⁶¹ De Facendis asked Rome for instructions as to how he should act during the celebrations suggesting that he probably should attend at least one of them, though without giving a speech.⁶²

On 17 April, Czechoslovakia took a conciliatory step towards Italy when it recognised its occupation of Ethiopia.⁶³ *Slovenský denník* linked the decision to the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Legion in Italy. “Czechoslovakia’s actions may be seen as a gesture of thanks for the help which Italy provided us 20 years ago when we were fighting for our national and political independence.”⁶⁴ The ceremony, held under the patronage of President Beneš, took place on 21 April 1938 at the Smetana Hall of the Municipal House in Prague. According to a cable from the Italian ambassador, who at the last moment had been granted permission to attend the event but without delivering a speech, it had been a “cordial demonstration of gratitude to our homeland”. Speeches were continuously interrupted by spontaneous applause whenever the Italian king and emperor, Prime Minister Mussolini, or General Graziani were mentioned.⁶⁵

The Italian Consul in Bratislava also initially did not plan on attending the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the founding of “General Graziani’s Reconnaissance” Infantry Regiment 39, but in the end, he was granted permission by the ambassador.⁶⁶ Celebrations in Bratislava were held between 17 and 24 April and included an exhibition on the regiment, public concerts, a ceremonial march through the city, a military parade, and a speech by Minister of National Defence František Machník, etc. *Slovenský denník* described how the Legion in Italy was formed and also mentioned that Italy had provided “the compara-

59 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 7 March 1938, telegraph no. 025, Italian Embassy in Prague to the Italian MFA.

60 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Rome, 25 March 1938, telespresso no. 496, Italian MFA to the Italian Embassy in Prague.

61 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 7 March 1938, telegraph no. 025, Italian Embassy in Prague to the Italian MFA.

62 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 9 March 1938, Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

63 *I documenti diplomatici italiani, ottava serie: 1935-1939, vol. VIII (1° gennaio - 23 aprile 1938)*. Roma : Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999, p. 589.

64 Po československom uznání habešského císařstva. In *Slovenský denník*, 21 April 1938, p. 2.

65 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 22 April 1938, telespresso no. 586/400, Italian ambassador to the Italian MFA.

66 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Bratislava, 11 April 1938, telegraph no. 823, Consul Francesco Lo Faro to the Italian ambassador.

tively best-armed and best-organised divisions, which played a large part in the liberation of Slovakia”.⁶⁷ Additional celebrations were held at Štefánik’s Mound in Ivanka pri Dunaji. The fallen soldiers of the “Battle for Slovakia” were commemorated at a monument at the cemetery in Nové Zámky and also in the town of Komárno.

As part of the celebrations in Košice, “Garda” Infantry Regiment 32 were gifted a silver fanfare trumpet. This was followed by a military parade and the laying of wreaths at the statue of M. R. Štefánik. The regiment were also sent telegraphs by three of their former Italian officers.⁶⁸

In the difficult situation of 1938, Czechoslovakia tried its best to improve relations with Italy. At the beginning of May that year, due to a proposal by the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party, two streets in the capital were renamed for General Graziani and the Czechoslovak civil defence units from Italy. According to an Italian Embassy cable, the recent recognition of the Italian Empire by Czechoslovakia and the gesture of honour on the part of the capital were efforts to remedy the mistakes of Czechoslovak foreign policy, “which often tends to forget that we are a great power”.⁶⁹

As mentioned previously, Štefánik was an important personality in Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation and so the Italian Consul in Bratislava took part in a remembrance event held on the anniversary of the general’s death on 4 May 1938 in Ivanka pri Dunaji. In his speech, General Miloš Žák mentioned Štefánik’s actions, the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy, and the “pan-Germanic plots against the republic”. The Italian consul filed a written complaint against this particular remark, though Žák assured him that he had been referring to historical pan-Germanism not to the contemporary political situation. At the consul’s request, any mention of pan-Germanism, historical or otherwise, was omitted from the press reports.⁷⁰

Czechoslovak legionnaire monuments and cemeteries in Italy

Aside from the abovementioned ceremonies, the historical memory of the Legion in Italy was preserved by other means. Monuments, memorial plaques, and graves naturally arose in places where Czechoslovak legionnaires and so-called “recons” were active in 1917 and 1918. These were mostly located in two regions: the area surrounding Lake Garda and Veneto. Typologically, monuments to fallen Czechoslovak legionnaires in Italy can be divided into two groups. The first, and more widely seen, is comprised of monuments to the fallen and the executed located at or near the execution sites. From an iconographic standpoint, they are rather more subdued. The second group encompasses monuments erected at military cemeteries.

Monuments to executed legionnaires are particularly widespread and typologically significant. In the area of Lake Garda, the largest such monument can be found in the village of Arco. It was built in honour of four executed legionnaires—Antonín Ježek, Karel Nováček, Jiří Schlegl, and Václav Svoboda—who were hanged as deserters by Austro-Hungarian

67 Jubileum našich légii a naša vďačnosť Itálii. In *Slovenský denník*, 22 April 1938, p. 1.

68 Slovenská krajina odmieňa jubilujúci peší pluk 32 Gardský. In *Slovenský hlas: nezávislý denník*, 26 April 1938, p. 4.

69 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Prague, 2 May 1938, telegraph addressed to the Italian MFA.

70 ASMAE, Ambasciata d’Italia Praga 1919-1939 et Ufficio commerciale 1934-1945, Archivio della legazione di Praga, 1938, box 4, Bratislava, 4 May 1938, telesspresso no. 1178 from the consul to the ambassador.

troops on 21 September 1918. An original, simpler monument was renovated in 1938 at the request of the “Association of Italian Legionnaires” and the Resistance Memorial Institute. A monument in honour of the aforementioned legionnaire and war hero, Alois Štorch, can be found in the town of Riva del Garda.⁷¹ In the past, a monument commemorating legionnaire Alois Sobotka could be found in Pieve di Bono, but today it no longer exists.⁷²

In the town of Conegliano, in Veneto, on the Street of Czechoslovak Martyrs (Via Martiri Cecoslovacchi), there is a memorial plaque dedicated to 15 executed Czechoslovak legionnaires—the largest group to be executed on the Italian front—who were members of the 39th Rifle Regiment.⁷³ Another memorial plaque, dedicated to three men executed on 16 June 1918, was erected in the town of Oderzo on the tenth anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy, and one dedicated to three legionnaires also executed on 16 June 1918 was installed in the nearby village of Piavon. The town of San Donà di Piave⁷⁴ near Venice is the site of two more memorial plaques. One installed in 1928 in the area of Davanzo is dedicated to five hanged soldiers and another in the district of Calvecchia, is dedicated to Bedřich Hlavena, one of the founders of the Czechoslovak Volunteer Corps in Italy. Ten more executed legionnaires have a memorial plaque dedicated to them in the town of Montone near Collalto. Also, a plaque in San Stino di Livenza commemorates soldiers Alois Herzig and František Turpiš.⁷⁵

That the memory of executed legionnaires was treated with exceptional reverence is also demonstrated by the fact that in 1921 and 1922, the remains of 44 out of 46⁷⁶ executed legionnaires were transported to Czechoslovakia and interred in a tomb of honour at the Olšany Cemetery in Prague.⁷⁷ Fallen legionnaires in Italy were mostly buried at the Sacratio militare (military cemetery) di Castel Dante in Rovereto, which serves as the final resting place for 151 men, with one grave belonging to an unknown soldier. In 1924, the so-called Bell of the Fallen “Maria Dolens” was installed in Rovereto. The metal it was forged with was acquired from molten cannons symbolically donated by nineteen countries, including Czechoslovakia.⁷⁸ It was originally mounted at the Castel Veneto stronghold in Rovereto, the seat of a military museum (Museo Storico Italiano della Guerra), which since 1921, housed an exhibition dedicated to the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy.⁷⁹ On preassigned days, the bell would toll in memory of the fallen from specific belligerents of the First World War. Czechoslovak combatants were assigned the date of 15 June. A smaller replica of the bell was donated by the towns of Rovereto and Trento to the Czech municipality of Benešov in 1926 on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial plaque dedicated to the Italians who

71 Today, the monument serves as the site of regular remembrance events. A memorial plaque dedicated to legionnaire Leopold Jeřábek was mounted here in 2015. Štorch e Jeřábek: la solenne commemorazione, 26 September 2016, <https://www.comune.rivadelgarda.tn.it/Notizie-ed-eventi/Archivio-delle-notizie/Storch-e-Jerabek-la-solenne-commemorazione2> [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

72 KRETŠÍ, Jindřich. *Vznik a vývoj československé legie v Itálii*. Praha : self-published, 1928, p. 244.

73 The memorial plaque was restored in 1991.

74 The plaques in the latter three towns, as well as those in Gallarate and Solbiate Olona, were donated on the 10th anniversary of the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion by the Association of Czechoslovak Legionnaires and the Resistance Memorial Institute. ASMAE, Affari politici 1919-1930, Cecoslovacchia, 1928, box 943, Rome, 27 July 1928, telesspresso no. 239237, Italian MFA to the Italian Ministry for Finance.

75 KRETŠÍ 1928, p. 244.

76 The remains of two victims were not recovered after the war.

77 České vojenské hroby a památníky na italském území, 29 September 2014, https://www.mzv.cz/rome/cz/ceskoslovenske_legie_v_italii/ceske_vojenske_hroby_a_pamatniky_na_1.html [last viewed on 7 April 2021].

78 Čs. legionáři zárukou bratrstva s Itáliou. In *Slovenský denník*, 14 April 1928, p. 3.

79 KRETŠÍ 1928, p. 245.

had died in a local internment centre.⁸⁰ Between 1918 and 1919, the cemetery in the town of Solbiate Olona near Milan, which no longer exists, housed the remains of 315 members of the Czechoslovak civil defence units, most of whom died as a consequence of injuries and infirmities.⁸¹

Monuments to legionnaires and civil defencemen from Italy in Czechoslovakia

Monuments to legionnaires from Italy can be divided into two categories. The first comprises artefacts commemorating soldiers who fell abroad, the second, legionnaires and civil defencemen who laid down their lives in battles on Czechoslovak territory. Aside from the main remembrance sites, the Legion in Italy were also commemorated with traditional monuments to fallen legionnaires. Memorial plaques dedicated to executed combatants and other persons of note comprise a special category.

Legionnaires from Italy are, of course, also commemorated on the central monument Prague to Its Victorious Sons, even though out of the seven figures, only one depicts a legionnaire from Italy. The monument also includes references to the battles of Doss Alto and the Piave. These references and the depiction of a legionnaire wearing an Italian hat (worn by Alpini troops), were the most frequent and thus most widely recognisable symbols of the Legion from Italy.

Naturally, there was also an emphasis on preserving the memory of legionnaires executed on Czechoslovak territory. Josef Sobotka has a memorial plaque in his home village of Čachotín. Alois Štorch is immortalised by several artefacts across the Czech lands, such as a plaque in Nová Ves u Bakova. One memorial plaque to Jan Čapek can be found in the town of Hranice, and another from 1926 is mounted at the legionnaire's birthplace in Prague's borough of Michle. In 1928, the Sokol movement also unveiled a plaque on the house in Orlová where Jan Čapek was drafted.⁸² Apart from monuments and memorial plaques dedicated to specific executed legionnaires, the Czech lands are graced by many other remembrance sites associated with the overall history of the Legion in Italy. One of the biggest is a monument to the fallen legionnaires from the Písek region in Peace Square in the town of Písek. One of the statues in the sculptural group depicts a legionnaire from Italy and the pedestal is inscribed with the names of famous battles including Doss Alto and the Piave. The central monument to the fallen of the Seven-Day War for Tešín Silesia, which can be found at the Orlová Cemetery, was unveiled on 30 September 1928.⁸³ The remains of legionnaire Jan Čapek were transferred here as early as 1922.

In Slovakia, the memorialisation of legionnaires and militiamen mostly relates to battles with Hungary in 1918 and 1919. Memorial sites were typically constructed in cemeteries where Czechoslovak soldiers found their final resting place. For instance, in 1919 a monument to the fallen was erected at the large military cemetery in the borough of Majer in the city of Banská Bystrica. It was basically a headstone, or more specifically a general

80 Italian residents of Austria-Hungary from Trentino who, starting in 1915, were interned in Benešov as untrustworthy. For more, see TYWONIAK, Jiří. Šedesát let česko-italské desky v Benešově. In *Jiskra*, 5 September 1986, p. 3.

81 After the destruction of the grave sites in 1968, the remains were transferred to the Cittadella military cemetery in Veneto.

82 Uctenie pamiatky zakladateľa československých légii. In *Slovenský denník*, 17 June 1928, s. 5.

83 *Těšínským hrdinům: památník vydaný ku slavnosti odhalení pomníku postaveného na hřbitově v Orlové*. Orlová: Spolek pro poctu padlých za Těšínsko, 1928.

monument to Czechoslovak soldiers killed in battles with Hungary. This included members of the 35th Rifle Regiment. Far more important is the monument at the Cemetery of St. Joseph in the town of Nové Zámky, whose cornerstone was laid on 24 June 1934, on the 15th anniversary of the battles with the Hungarian Soviet Republic, though it was only finished two years later. It was built on the site of new graves which hold the exhumed remains of fallen soldiers from several other cemeteries. Also noteworthy is a monument in the Komárno cemetery dedicated to sixteen defenders of the city from the 39th Rifle Regiment who died on 1 May 1919 during an attack by the Hungarian Bolsheviks. A smaller monument can be found at the mass grave in the village of Velký Ďur.

Apart from cemeteries, legionnaire monuments can be found at former battle sites such as Badín, Lučenec, or Turňa nad Bodvou. As far as the depiction of legionnaires from Italy is concerned, the Monument to the Fallen in Sered' is particularly important. It was constructed by two Slovak sculptors, Jozef Pospíšil and Vojtech Ihriský, and shows a legionnaire dressed in an Italian uniform with a rifle in his left hand and a raised banner in the right. The pedestal is inscribed with the words “[Dedicated to] the Fallen Heroes Defending Slovakia”, accompanied by Štúr’s maxim, “The way back is impossible; onward must we stride”.⁸⁴ There is also another, newer monument in Nové Zámky, which since 1922 stood outside the local Sokol headquarters and was meant to symbolise the subjugation of Slovakia within the Kingdom of Hungary and its “liberation” after the war. Two separate standing figures represent Czechoslovak legionnaires from Italy, while a group of three soldiers lie at their feet. The soldier in the middle is anchored with arms outstretched and the three fallen soldiers are depicted in Russian, Italian, and French legionnaire uniforms. A unique memorial plaque was unveiled in 1934 in Nové Zámky dedicated to the Commander of the 39th Rifle Regiment, Lt. Col. Jiří Jelínek, who was the highest-ranking officer to lay down his life in the war with the Hungarian Soviet Republic.⁸⁵ His remains were transported to Prague on 23 June 1919 and ceremonially inhumed at Olšany. President Masaryk as well as Minister of National Defence Václav Klofáč were present at the event.

These monuments are undeniably pro-republic and their aim was to symbolically mark the territory. References to the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy made up one layer of their iconography. In the case of monuments to soldiers who fell in battles with Poland and the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the dominant motif was that of (the original) defenders of the homeland who laid down their lives fighting for the common cause. Monuments and memorial plaques in Italy were seen as commemorating foreign citizens and simultaneously, victims. Their inauguration and continued preservation are evidence of the deep-seated tradition of honouring the fallen in Italy. On the other hand in Czechoslovakia, the Italian aspect of legionnaire monuments was secondary, principally alluding to the tradition behind the formation of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy. This was most visible in the iconography and symbolism of the statues.

Conclusion

This initial analysis of the official historical remembrance of Italian-Czechoslovak military cooperation (1918–1919) during the interwar period yields several conclusions, which

84 Slávnosť odhalenie pomníka padlých v Seredi. In *Slovenská liga*, 1929, Vol. 6, No. 6-7, pp. 213–215.

85 Nezabúdajme, že naša sloboda bola vykúpená krvou a slzami. In *Slovenský denník*, 26 June 1934, p. 2.

could be adapted through more extensive research. It is clear that official memorialisation events took place against the backdrop of a complicated international political situation, which necessarily influenced their form and content. In 1928, Italian representatives feared that the celebrations would take on an anti-Hungarian character. Ten years later, they were initially reluctant to attend and ultimately resented the Czechoslovak representatives' anti-Germanic statements. For Italy, the Legion and the civil defence units were an instrument for improving its nation's image in Czechoslovakia. As far as individuals are concerned, Generals Štefánik and Graziani were accorded particular reverence. The Italians referenced Štefánik's affection for their country in their struggle regarding the command in Slovakia as early as 1919, though we should not forget that Štefánik was a French citizen and Czechoslovakia's minister of war, which naturally prevented the Italians from claiming him wholesale. Where General Graziani is concerned, the question naturally presents itself as to why he was preferred over General Piccione. His support for the fascist regime at home undoubtedly played a role but beyond that, he also personified the effectual deployment of the Czechoslovak Legion in Italy – something that cannot be said of General Piccione, whose skirmishes with the Hungarian Soviet Republic in Slovakia were arguably less glorious. Graziani could thus at least partially compete with the popularity of General Pellé, who was then—and to this day continues to be—pedestalised as the “Saviour of Slovakia”. A similar competition of historical memory of the break of the Salonika front between France and Italy was much more pronounced in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.⁸⁶

Commemorations are normally “constructed on the premise that they embody change and continuity, past and present at the same time”.⁸⁷ The Italian insistence on a strictly military character of the commemorations, the protest of the Italian ambassador against the Udržal's speech, and the article in *Československá republika* show the will of Rome, in line with its foreign policy, to break the symbolic past – present – future link that is often proper for public commemorations.

As far as their content is concerned, remembrance events in Czechoslovakia honoured the memory of the fallen and especially the executed, who were characterized as heroes and martyrs. On one hand, this was motivated by the need to foster a military tradition in the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic. Legionnaires such as Jan Čapek and Alois Štorch became important members in the pantheon of military personalities. On the other hand, the overall losses of Czechoslovak legionnaires on the Italian front were relatively low (especially in contrast to Russia), with only about 190 men perishing in battle.⁸⁸ To a certain extent, this could have been offset by the cult of the executed, which was mostly built around the legionnaires from Italy.

86 SRETENOVIĆ, Stanislav. Memory of the Break of the Salonika Front: an Aspect of Franco-Italian Rivalry in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, 1918–1929. In RUDIĆ, Srđan – BIAGINI, Antonello – VUČETIĆ, Biljana (eds.) *Serbian-Italian Relations: History and Modern Times*. Belgrade : The Institute of History, Belgrade; Sapienza University of Rome, 2015, pp. 199–212.

87 BUCUR, Maria. Birth of a Nation. Commemorations of December 1, 1918, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Romania. BUCUR, Maria – WINGFIELD, Nancy M. (eds.) *Staging the Past. The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present*. West Lafayette, Indiana : Purdue University Press, 2001, p. 289.

88 The overall losses, including men who succumbed to various injuries and illnesses, were tallied at 723. In Russia, 4 114 legionnaires died, 1 609 of them in battle. MICHL, Jan. *Legionáři a Československo*. Praha : Naše Vojsko, 2009, p. 20.

Comparing the celebrations of the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of the formation of the Legion in Italy, certain differences can be seen. In 1928, the celebrations were part of wider festivities surrounding the decennial of the republic, mostly commemorating the formation of the Legion and the combat events of 1918. The visit of General Graziani, who symbolised the Czechoslovak deployment on the front, was basically the culmination. On the twentieth anniversary, the celebrations were held under very different circumstances as far as Czechoslovakia's international position was concerned. The sense of peril in the second half of the 1930s brought out the importance of the army with the military being present at every important social event. In contrast to 1928, the Czechoslovak Legion's contribution to the struggle against the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 took on a broader resonance, despite the fact that the memory of these particular legionnaires and members of the civil defence units was still more strongly cultivated in Slovakia than on the national level. The festivities were more massive than in 1928 and there was no real interest in combining them with the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the founding of the republic.

Monuments to fallen legionnaires and civil defencemen were an important anchoring point for Italy and Czechoslovakia's shared historical memory. References to Doss Alto or the Piave are thus commonplace in Czechoslovak legionnaire iconography. On the other hand, in Italy, monuments to executed Czechoslovak soldiers have been, above all, a symbol of honour to men who died fighting in Italian uniforms.⁸⁹

Officially, the Czechoslovak republic refused Austrian "militarism" but it was impossible to deny that the new state was one of the results of the war that had ended recently. The historical legacy of the Czechoslovak Legion and subsequent military cooperation with France and to a lesser extent, with Italy, formed the basis of the Czechoslovak military tradition. In order to piece together a more complex picture of that tradition, it would undoubtedly be helpful to subject the two partnerships to a side-by-side analysis as well as to compare them to the legacy of the Legion in Russia.

89 Great War military cemeteries are also notable, seeing as there were many more Czech and Slovak fighters (not legionnaires or civil defencemen) who fell in Italy and conversely, many more Italian soldiers who died in Czechoslovakia. However, they are not the subject of this paper.

Cite:

KŠIŇAN, Michal – BABJÁK, Juraj. Italian-Czechoslovak Military Cooperation (1918–1919) in the Official Historical Memory of the Interwar Period. In *Forum Historiae*, 2021, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 92-109. ISSN 1337-6861. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.1.8>

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