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Georges Clemenceau and Serbian National Issue^[2]

Abstract: This paper examines Georges Clemenceau, a distinguished French statesman, particularly his reflections on Serbia and the Serbian people during the first two decades of the 20th century, especially during the First World War. To provide a comprehensive understanding, we shed light on issues such as Clemenceau's Balkan policy, his relationship towards the Thessaloniki front, the Yugoslav idea and, consequently, the process that led to Yugoslavia's international recognition at Versailles. The research has been supported by archival sources and literature from Serbian and French historiographies

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The question about who Georges Clemenceau was can be immediately answered as follows: he is one of the most important political figures of the 20th century. With Marshal Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle, he is considered one of the founding fathers of the French nation (*Père de la patrie* or *Père de la Nation*). On 11 November 1941, in his speech on Radio London, de Gaulle cited Clemenceau's legacy and vowed that France would once again be free and victorious: "Au fond de votre tombe vendéenne, aujourd'hui 11 novembre, Clemenceau!

Vous ne dormez pas!" (Winock, 2018, p. 5). Every 11 November and 8 May, the two of them, as symbols of freedom in the First and the Second World Wars, ~~they~~ are granted honour and gratitude for winning freedom. To Europe and the rest of the world, Clemenceau is one of the creators of the new world order, the so-called Versailles Europe (Stojić, 2020a, pp. 235–236).

Georges Benjamin Clemenceau was born in Vendée on 28 September 1841. His family had long been known as republican, which was immediately

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an unusual circumstance, having in mind that Vendée had always been famous as a strong monarchist stronghold (Clemenceau, 1996, pp. 202–203). In his choice of profession, he followed in his father's footsteps and completed studies of medicine, although he never worked as a doctor. While still a student, he stood out by his fiery speeches against Napoleon III and the monarchy. After completing his studies in 1865, he moved to the USA mainly in order to learn about its republican system. After the outbreak of the French-Prussian war in 1870, he returned to France with no hesitation (Ninčić, 1933, p. 9). He stood out as one of the staunchest followers of Léon Gambetta. They were both openly against the secession of Alsace and Lorraine. The two of them were among 107 delegates who refused to accept armistice and secession of the two provinces (Minc, 1996, p. 79). Instead of the surrender, they advocated fighting to the last Frenchman. When the moderate faction took the lead and signed the Treaty of Frankfurt, which ended the war, they accepted defeat as reality, although they were "inconsolable in their sorrow" (Geffroy, 1938, p. 12; Clemenceau, 2020, p. 16). During the Paris Commune, from March to May 1871, Clemenceau performed his first public function – the mayor of the 18th arrondissement. His ambition

was to introduce some components of American republicanism and during his short mandate he won the favour of lower circles of the population, primarily workers and the poor. After the Commune was suppressed, together with Victor Hugo he advocated amnesty for the Commune's leaders and throughout his life he considered the *Semaine sanglante* (the bloody week), when the Commune was suppressed, one of the most tragic episodes in the history of France.

As the mayor of the 18th arrondissement, he was appointed the deputy to the first republican assembly, but in it he very soon turned against his former politically like-minded people, including Gambetta. He positioned himself on the left wing of the Republican Party.^[3] At the very beginning of his political career, Jules Ferry, the main representative of moderate republicanism, was his worst opponent. Clemenceau stood out by his speeches against the corpus of constitutional laws from 1875, which constituted the foundation of the Third Republic. He strived for the introduction of a more just social order (Winock, 2018, p. 4). At the beginning of the 1880s disappointed by the indifference of his political colleagues towards the profound social crisis of French society, he resigned from the Assembly and became one of

[3] In Serbian historiography, there is a belief that Clemenceau belonged to the extreme leftist faction (radicals) but Michel Winock, the author of one of many Clemenceau's biographies, denies this position. Winock places Clemenceau in the "republican left wing" which strived for social reforms, but within the framework of constitutionality and observance of order. Clemenceau did not hesitate to violently suppress workers' strikes with the help of the army and the police. Jean Jaurès, the leader of the extreme left wing, was Clemenceau's main opponent in the Assembly in the decade preceding 1914. He frequently accused him of betraying the working class. Clemenceau's resignation in July 1909 was welcomed by Jaurès's newspaper *L'Humanité* with the headline "The End of a Dictatorship" (*La fin d'une dictature*). The same newspaper, in the article on the occasion of Clemenceau's death in 1929, labelled him as "one of the staunchest enemies of the working class" and the "defender of capitalist interests" (Winock, 1997, p. 7, 448, 456).

the fiercest critics of the regime(s). He founded the daily newspaper *Le Justice* in which he sharply criticized his former like-minded people and friends. It is recorded that since then he insisted on his surname *Clemenceau* being written without the accented é. He was one of the first to attack Gambetta, accusing him of aspiring towards absolute power. In 1884, the target of Clemenceau's criticism was also the Senate because of not adopting the official Constitution of the Third Republic, but a corpus of constitutional acts which remained in force until the end of the Third Republic, in June 1940. In the following years, he built the reputation of the greatest opponent of all governments. He always emphasized that he spoke in the name of those from the bottom of the social ladder, while criticizing those from its top (Dawbarn, 1915, p. 61). He opposed France's imperialist policy which had gained momentum at the beginning of the 1880s. He advocated secularism in education and the separation of the church from the state (Mayeur, 1965). Throughout his political career, which lasted over forty years, he never gave up the attitudes he initially proclaimed. This unwavering and rigid attitude brought him many opponents as well as nicknames. During the 1880s and 1890s he was known as a destroyer of ministries (*tombéur de ministères*); for the greatest part of his political career he was known as *l'enfant terrible de la presse et du parlement* (Winock, 1997, p. 479), while he was given the nickname the *Tiger*, associated with him to date, by his personal friend, journalist of *L'Aurore*, Émile Buré in 1903. A little later, on the occasion of his visit to it was recorded that Clemenceau had really shot a tiger and thus deserved this nickname (Duroselle, 1994, p. 321).

Clemenceau's Balkan policy: the Annexation Crisis

Not only his political opponents, but also the like-minded people found Clemenceau extremely demanding and difficult to cooperate with. That is did not get his first public functions until the beginning of the 20th century. He was appointed senator in 1902, and he got the opportunity to form his first government as late as 1906. Apart from the function of the president of the government, he also kept the department of the Minister of Internal Affairs which he previously had in Ferdinand Sarrien's government. He proudly called himself "the first policeman of France" (Winock, 2007, p. 10, 425). This government stayed in power until July 1909 and is of exceptional significance for Serbia because it best reflected Clemenceau's attitude towards the Balkans, as well as towards France's ally Russia. It is crucial to emphasize that Clemenceau renounced the policy of revanchism pursued by his predecessors. The policy of revanchism implied that France patiently waited for the moment of its revenge to Germany. In the essence of this policy lay the belief that the German Empire was the greatest French enemy even two decades after the war. Unlike his predecessors, Clemenceau chose the path of reconciliation. He believed that France and Germany had much more common interests than reasons for conflict and confrontation. In the spirit of reconciliation and strengthening economy of the two countries, in 1907 he appointed Jules Cambon as Ambassador to Berlin – the man who, just like himself, advocated putting the past aside for the sake of building a new common French-German future (Carroll, 1931, p. 256).

The epilogue of his first government was the failure of his reconciliatory policy towards Germany – it fell like a house of cards both because of the confrontation with Germany in Morocco and during the Annexation Crisis. Germany did not accept Clemenceau's extended hand. The Morocco issue had burdened French-German relations ever since the First Moroccan Crisis (1905) and the conference in Algésiras (1906). In September 1908, a new incident took place, when a group of six soldiers deserted from the French Foreign Legion. They found refuge and protection in the German embassy in Casablanca. Germany tried to use this event for a new diplomatic crisis, but Clemenceau remained reserved and hand this case to the arbitration of the Court of Peace in the Hague, which finally ruled in favour of France. The court decision was issued on 22 May 1909. The epilogue of this event was the demonstrative departure of the German ambassador, Prince Radolin,^[4] from Paris and the new French-German agreement about Morocco, which was verified at the end of February 1909. The Moroccan crisis coincided chronologically with the crisis caused by the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, further antagonizing the relations between Paris and Berlin. During the Annexation Crisis, Germany took the side of its ally Austro-Hungary and was ready to support it even in a military intervention against Serbia. On the other hand, Clemenceau denied diplomatic support to Russia.

In the case of the Annexation Crisis, he interpreted the text of the French-Russian alliance that, due to the allies' obligations and interests, excluded Alsace and Lorraine on the French side and the Balkans on the Russian side. Clemenceau believed that the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not threaten Russia's vital interests whatsoever, while he did not consider the consequences of the annexation for Russia's prestige among the Balkan Slavs (Stojić, 2017, pp. 30–32). In addition, Clemenceau believed that Russia was a "dangerous ally". He left aside his personal reservations towards the authoritarian nature of the imperial regime or the military incompetence of the Russian army, which became evident after its defeat in the war with Japan; however, the emperor's belligerent advisers most concerned him. Among them, he feared most Alexander Izvolsky (Iswolsky) who, after the fiasco in the Annexation Crisis, found refuge in the Russian embassy in Paris. Clemenceau subsequently objected to his main political opponent from the period of the First World War, Raymond Poincaré, because of his excessive openness towards Izvolsky, who constantly whispered into his ear about his belligerent plans and ideas – to which Poincaré eventually succumbed (Winock, 1997, p. 477; Stojić, 2017, pp. 71–72). Although he believed that the Annexation Crisis was not the moment for France being exposed in foreign policy, Clemenceau could not hide his deep disappointment in Austro-Hungary's politics and moves of Emperor Franz Joseph.

[4] There is an anecdote about Prince Radolin's departure. Namely, when he attempted to deliver his protest note and to threaten to leave France, Clemenceau replied that the prince had better hurry up because the train to Berlin was leaving in two hours. Later on, Clemenceau denied having said these words, emphasizing that such behaviour was below his level. Radolin's successor, Baron Wilhelm Eduard von Schoen, had much better relations with Clemenceau than his predecessor. He often described him as friendly (Winock, 1997, 452–453).



European Allied leaders in Paris Peace Conference, 1919. L-R: French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, French Premier Georges Clemenceau, British Prime Minister Lloyd George, Italian Premier Vittorio Orlando and Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidney Sonnino.

Photo: Shutterstock

He expressed his disappointment personally, during their encounter in Carlsbad in August 1909, the spa they both liked visiting (Winock, 1997, pp. 463–464). In a private letter to his family friend, Clemenceau expressed concern that the annexation *was a spark that might blow up the powder keg* (*l'étincelle qui peut faire sauter le tonneau de poudre*) (Winock, 1997, p. 477).

In Serbian historiography, there is still a prevailing belief that Clemenceau's rigid attitude towards Russia and refusal to offer it ally support at the crucial moment had unforeseeable consequences for Serbia and its interests. It is commonly known that Milovan Milovanović, Minister of Foreign Affairs, in an attempt to mitigate the consequences of the annexation, visited European capitals dur-

ing October 1908, trying to get the consent of the signatory powers of the Berlin Treaty for Serbia's receiving adequate compensation in the territory of former Novi Pazar Sandžak (Stojić, Radović, 2022, pp. 191–199).

Before Milovanović's arrival in the French capital, Momčilo Ninčić, Jovan Skerlić and Grgur Jakšić had already been sent there to agitate, together with the Serbian delegation led by Milenko Vesnić, against the act of annexation recognition. Grgur Jakšić wrote down that Serbia had been unprepared for the act of annexation declaration, and that the sent delegation could not do anything to make France change its attitude. The delegates were warmly received and heard everywhere, but "they got no real promises from anyone". Raymond Poincaré, at the head of the Ministry of Justice at the time, asked them if there was an international treaty speaking against the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the Serbs cited the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin. Poincaré replied that the great powers as signatories to the Treaty of Berlin would together take a position about its potential violation and that France was unable "to do anything on its own". It was a clear message to Serbia, which was not a signatory to the Treaty of Berlin, had nothing to ask for in the case of the annexation of the two occupied provinces either. Jakšić further explained the failure of the diplomatic mission was by the negotiating incompetence of his friends, Ninčić and Skerlić, despite their good relations with the French intellectual and political circles. One of the leaders of the Catholic Party sharply reproached Ninčić for tactlessly referring to Catholic priests from Bosnia as Austrian mercenaries. On another occasion, in Jaurès's presence, Skerlić characterized

the assassination of King Aleksandar Obrenović and Queen Draga as "justified", not knowing that Jaurès had strongly condemned this event in the past. Namely, in the newspaper *L'Humanité*, Jaurès published "a terrible article on the occasion of the crowning of King Peter, entitled 'Bloody King' ('Le roi rouge')". Until the beginning of November, it was clear that any further propaganda work agitation was useless, and the members of the special mission were recalled to Serbia, while Jakšić stayed in Paris to "proceed with the task on his own" (NBS, P558/III/91).

In the further course of the crisis, Jakšić turned national propaganda in a different direction. He believed that it was useless to continue insisting on France's advocacy for Serbian interests. That his attitude was proper is corroborated by the statement of the French ambassador to Vienna, Philippe Crozier, to the Russian military attaché in Vienna: "It would be extremely complicated to explain to the French citizen that he should march for Bosnia and Herzegovina out there and not for Alsace and Lorraine" (Nintchitch, 1937, pp. 361–363; Stojić, 2017, p. 31.) Jakšić believed that it was necessary to emphasize other issues which would compromise Austro-Hungary further, and he thought that the most suitable for it was the Agram Trial Agram (High Treason) TRial initiated in October against Serbs in Croatia and Slavonia. The translation of the indictment and the circumstances of the trial itself were readily accepted and published by many French newspapers and journals, such as *Journal des Débats*, *Revue de Paris*, *La Courrier européen* etc. Jakšić managed to compromise Austro-Hungary at the Agram Trial and to reveal its repressive policy towards all Serbs, no matter where exactly they resided in the Monarchy.

In contrast to his reserved attitude about the annexation, on the occasion of the Agram Trial (also known as *Le Procès d'Agram*), Clemenceau sharply condemned the prosecution and reprisals of the Serbs (NBS, P558/III/91). Diverting France's attention from the annexation act itself to the Trial was also approved by Milovanović who, after the failure of his mission in European capitals generally placed his hopes in the diplomatic support of Great Britain and Germany than of France. Namely, he described France as "unreliable and showing an incomprehensible inclination towards Austro-Hungary" (Stojić, Radović, 2022, p. 198).

Clash of two Balkan policies: Clemenceau and Poincaré

Clemenceau's Balkan policy in the Annexation Crisis returned to him like a boomerang. The relations between Paris and St. Petersburg were shaken. The social crisis, accompanied by a number of strikes, became deeper, while there was increasing criticism about France's acting in the case of the legionnaires' revolt in Morocco. All these issues were exhausted eventually exhausted Clemenceau's already thin patience and at the end of July 1909, in the middle of the holiday season, he decided to resign and retire to the opposition once again. In 1913, he founded a new daily called *L'homme libre*, whose main target was Raymond Poincaré, the president of the government from January 1912 and the president of the Republic from January 1913. Poincaré symbolized everything criticized by Clemenceau: he was a devoted Catholic and a loyal advocate of the French-Russian alliance, finding it the main shield

of France against the growing wave of Germanism. Poincaré's Balkan policy was the exact opposite to Clemenceau's policy. Poincaré believed that Russia was an indispensable ally and that it was France's duty to support it in all its ventures – including those in the Balkan Peninsula. Poincaré's Balkan policy was put to test in the new Balkan crisis – the First Balkan War. Although he pointed out that France would not go to war for the sake of Russian interests in the Balkans, he believed that it was France's duty to support its ally diplomatically. Poincaré assumed the role of a mediator between Russia and the powers from the Triple Alliance. He was the first to initiate the organization of peace conferences at which the warring sides, as well as great powers, would solve their disagreements. The final outcome of Poincaré's policy was strengthening the alliance with Russia, but also taking over economic primacy in the Balkan Peninsula, where France had become the main lender to the victorious Balkan countries (Stojić, 2017, pp. 437–442).

After the dynastic change in Serbia, France gradually displaced Austro-Hungary and took its place in the loans granted for military equipment and armament. However, France's economic presence in Serbia before the foundation of the French-Serbian bank in 1910 and the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) may be characterized as moderate. In all the loans before 1913, France had participated together with other great powers because it considered investing in Serbia risky. Russia guaranteed all these loans. The loan from September 1913 was the first fully financed one by the French banks, without the participation of other powers, and this is considered the turning point and the moment when France established its economic domination.

Owing to this loan, France held 75% of Serbia's total foreign debts (Stojić, 2017, pp. 399–400). At the same time, France, signed lucrative jobs with other victorious countries in the Second Balkan War, primarily Greece and Romania, and granted them loans for the recovery from war atrocities; therefore, in general, on the eve of the First World War, the Balkans ranked second in the French stock market by the amount of invested capital. The first and unrivalled place in investments was held by Russia (Stojić, 2017, pp. 400–404).

After August 1913, Poincaré reached the zenith of his popularity, despite blunt warnings by Clemenceau and other socialists that excessive attachment to the Russian Empire would take France into the abyss of the conflict of unforeseeable proportions. On the morning of 29 July 1914, when the ship of the French state delegation came to the port of Dunkirk, returning from its official visit to Russia, Serbia and Austro-Hungary had already entered the state of war, while Russia had ordered partial mobilization. The German war proclamation to France on 3 August ensued as a chain reaction consequence (Stojić, 2015, p. 103). Poincaré invited all political opponents to leave their disagreements aside and, for the sake of the *Sacred Union* (*Union Sacrée*), to unite forces in the fight against Germany. Nevertheless, Clemenceau was one of the few who ignored that invitation. The outbreak of the world war did not change his policy at all – he renamed *L'Homme libre* into *L'Homme enchaîné*, and used the newspaper as a platform for attacking Poincaré and the changing governments (Clemenceau, 1916). During the first three war years (1914–1917), Clemenceau was the President of the War Committee in the National Assembly. In that position, he was

able to follow military operations as well as the work of the Ministry of War. His criticism at the expense of the General Staff was often so extreme that several senior officers requested Clemenceau's trial for high treason. Not paying attention to his own safety, he continued requesting an increase in the military budget and putting all the resources of the country into the service of the war. His position was that everything should be subordinated to the war. Ordinary soldiers respected him because his son, his nephew and his brother fought together with them in the trenches, while his oldest daughter volunteered as a nurse (Tomei, 2018, p. 1). While Clemenceau's popularity grew, Poincaré's popularity dwindled. From August 1914 to November 1917, France had as many as four governments and none of them managed to keep the soldiers' morale and fighting spirit. The French army was on the defensive, suffering defeats and huge losses because the war was constantly waged in the territory of France. In such circumstances, with the country on the verge of defeat, in autumn 1917 Poincaré made a decision and placed the country's interest above his personal vanity. He invited Clemenceau, who was considered the final resort, to form the fifth government (Miquel, 2004, p. 8). His coming to power was welcomed by the entire press, except for the socialist newspapers for which had been and remained "the enemy of the workers" and "the first policeman of France" (Winock, 1997, p. 517).

As soon as he came to power, on 16 November 1917, Clemenceau made a precedent. In addition to the Prime Minister's function, he also took the department of the Ministry of War although he was not a professional soldier nor had any military experience. His first move was to subordinate all the

remaining resources to the war. Instead of *Union sacrée*, he proclaimed the motto *Guerre intégrale*. He mobilized the country's last defence and brought 70,000 Italian workers to consolidate the French economy. He began visiting the trenches and raising the soldiers' morale. He thought that ordinary soldiers had to hear and see their leaders in person in order to believe in fighting for the common cause. In the course of one year, he spent as many as 90 days on the front, visiting 360 different battlefields (SHD, *Voyages de Monsieur Clemenceau*; Duroselle, 1994, pp. 316–317).

Clemenceau and the Thessaloniki front

Within France, patriotism was emphasized as Clemenceau's greatest virtue, but to other nations fighting in the First World War, this was considered his worst fault. Clemenceau was completely and exclusively oriented towards the Western front and the destiny of France. He believed that the war would be decided in the West, while all other fronts were merely a distraction.

He was particularly criticizing of the Thessaloniki front. To Clemenceau, the Thessaloniki front was nothing but "wasting soldiers and money" (Feyler, 1921, pp. 12–13). On several occasions, as the President of the War Committee in the Assembly, he called for disbanding that front and sending the troops to the west. He was among the first to speak about it in *L'Homme enchaîné* and in the Assembly. In his specific style, he criticized the inactivity of the French army entrenched in Thessaloniki. He asked for that army, useless in the Balkans, to be returned to

the home front. Jovan Žujović, a special emissary of the Serbian government in France from the end of April 1915, was visibly disconcerted by Clemenceau's request in November 1915. Vesnić calmed him down claiming that Clemenceau was lonely in his opinion and that the French army would not withdraw from the Balkans (Žujović, 1986, p. 226).

It is important to emphasize that Clemenceau personally respected the Serbian army. He admired its courage and suffering in the Albanian Golgotha. During the retreat of the Serbian army and people, he bitterly attacked the French government because of its failures leading to the collapse of the Serbian state in autumn 1915 and because of the poorly organized evacuation operation of the Serbian soldiers and civilians from the Albanian coast (*L'Homme Enchaîné*, 1915, p. 1; *L'Homme Enchaîné*, 1917, p. 1). He wrote that France was responsible for Serbia's collapse and, owing to his influence in the public, we may certainly claim that in December 1915 he forced the French General Staff to form a special rescue mission led by General Piarron de Mondésir who, from December 1915 to May 1916 commanded the reorganization process of the Serbian army in Corfu (Stojić, 2016, pp. 405–427).

After forming the government and taking over the Ministry of War, he also assumed direct command of the Eastern Army. Namely, in 1915, on the occasion of forming the French expeditionary force, which was sent to Gallipoli, the relevant ministry was the Ministry of War in cooperation with the British and Russian counterparts. When the remaining French expeditionary force, together with its commander, General Maurice Paul Emmanuel Sarraill, was sent to Thessaloniki, the chain of command was not changed. The remaining anomaly

was that the Minister of War directly appointed and relived from duty the chief commanders of the Eastern Army, while the French General Staff with the seat in Limoges decided about the army commanders on the Western front.

Clemenceau truly intended to withdraw the French soldiers from Thessaloniki; however, he was dissuaded from this by military strategists claiming that in this way he would lose Thessaloniki, the most important strategic point in the Eastern Mediterranean, thus putting it directly into the enemy's hands. Clemenceau instead decided to dismiss General Sarraïl, his personal friend, since his conflicts with all other commanders could no longer be ignored. He sent General Adolphe Guillaumat to Thessaloniki, who would spend only six months as the Commander-in-Chief of the Eastern Army. During that time, General Guillaumat managed to transform the front economy (Pavlović, 2018, pp. 34). He used the rich fields where the army began its own food production because the transportation of food for soldiers and horses had been compromised by constant attacks by the Austrian cruisers in the Mediterranean. Guillaumat's plan was successful – until the summer of 1918, the soldiers planted more than a thousand hectares of arable land, from which they collected 339,000 kilograms of fruit and vegetables, as well as 113,000 bales of hay. At the same time, mining began in Chalkidiki and several archaeological expeditions successfully collected artefacts and antiquities from the territory of Greek Macedonia. However, all these successes did not prevent Clemenceau from giving a derogatory name to the soldiers of Eastern Army – “Thessaloniki gardeners” (Ancel, 1920, pp. 891, 895).

In May/June 1918, in the Third Battle of the Aisne (Battle for the Ladies' Road), the French and British armies suffered a terrible defeat. France was on the verge of military collapse. Clemenceau and Marshal Ferdinand Foch, Head of the General Staff, put the blame for that defeat on General Franchet d'Espèrey, who commanded one wing of the army (D'Espèrey, 2018, p. 34). As punishment, General d'Espèrey was appointed for the commander-in-chief of the Eastern Army on the Thessaloniki front, while General Guillaumat, entrusted with the defence of Paris, returned to France (D'Espèrey, 2018, pp. 150–151). At the moment of his appointment, D'Espèrey was a discharged officer. Clemenceau sent him to command the Eastern Army because of the words of praise by Charles de Freycinet, a friend of D'Espèrey's. The decision to appoint D'Espèrey was made by Clemenceau on his own, without consulting David Lloyd George, who sharply criticized him for such selfishness during the peace conference in Quai d'Orsay (Clemenceau, 2020, p. 103). D'Espèrey's task was to prepare French troops to re-settle gradually to the Western front, while keeping in Thessaloniki only the sufficient number of soldiers for keeping positions (Clemenceau, 1930, pp. 104–105). The circumstance unexpected and unforeseen by Clemenceau was that in a short period of time D'Espèrey would win the trust of the commanders of all other armies, particularly of the Serbian army. At only three meetings, D'Espèrey, Serbian Regent Aleksandar, General Živojin Mišić and British commander George Francis Milne drafted the plan of the front breakthrough that would change the course of the war both in the East and in the West (Stojić, 2020b, p. 459).

The plan was drafted at the beginning of August, but it just lay on the desk of the French Prime Minister and Minister of War the whole month. Sidney Sonnino and David Lloyd George gave their consent in the name of the Italian and British armies, while Clemenceau was the last to do it, waiting until 10 September. The night before the beginning of the attack, he sent a telegram to General d'Espèrey informing him that he would be the only responsible person for the operation to be conducted the following day. D'Espèrey told his orderly to burn the telegram in the candlelight and to keep all the orders unchanged (Delaye, 1956, p. 52; Stojić, 2020a, p. 244).

Not even the breakthrough of the Balkan front on 15 September 1918 changed Clemenceau's hostile attitude towards D'Espèrey and the Eastern Army. Immediately after the breakthrough, Clemenceau intended to return Guillaumat to the Balkans, but he gave up the idea after being assured that dismissing D'Espèrey at the moment when the army was at the pinnacle of its victory would compromise the achieved success. He decided that Guillaumat should lead a special mission in charge of assessing how many French and British divisions could be sent to the Western front after being replaced by the Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian units in the Balkans. He thought that the front breakthrough meant the end of the war in the Balkans, but that the final victory should be won in the West. He was furious to learn that D'Espèrey had permitted the Serbian army to cross into the territory of Austro-Hungary and to deploy its troops in the positions of the Yugoslav territory. He did not manage to stop this operation, but he stopped another order by D'Espèrey about part of the army being directed towards Vienna and

Berlin. In collaboration with the British General Staff, he directed those groups towards Istanbul and the Middle East (Stojić, 2020b, pp. 461–463).

Clemenceau and the Yugoslav idea

Just as most French politicians, Clemenceau had no clearly defined attitude towards the Yugoslav idea, and he did not want to form it either. This attitude suited his war motto about “not colluding either with soldiers or with civilians” (Clemenceau, 2020, p. 18). He wanted to come to power without any compromises and the public largely believed that he had succeeded in it because his authority and reputation were unquestionably trusted.

Just before his coming to power, he wrote in *L'Homme enchaîné* that the Yugoslav Committee should reduce its war expectations because no nation had managed to gather all its compatriots within the borders of one state. He thought that the Yugoslavs should not insist on the outlined borders, in particular because in the border regions it was impossible to assess the inhabitants' ethnic affiliation (*L'Homme enchaîné*, 1917, p. 1). He also repeated the same words to Žujović during their first encounter on St. Peter's Day in 1915. When Žujović expressed the wish of the Serbian authorities to unite all Serbs in a single state, with none of them staying outside its borders, Clemenceau mildly smiled at him and replied: “Have you ever had a cap that covered all your hair, without the smallest strand sticking under it?” (*Žujović*, 1986, p. 146). No French government, including Clemenceau's government, wanted to discuss potential changes of the borders during the war. The same attitude was taken by the intellectuals

Žujović met in summer 1915. The bluntest of them was historian and former official Gabriel Hanotaux, who once told Žujović: “All of you, both Slavs and non-Slavs, come with your claims, you want to engage us in favour of this or that opinion. Well, we will not be engaged for anyone or anything. Your aspirations are not on the agenda. Your Pan-Serbism, Russian Pan-Slavism, Pan-Romanianism, all those are dreams, phrases. [...] We would have our right arm cut off, while you are just advertising some cantons of yours” (*Žujović, 1986, p. 177*).

As for the contacts of Serbian diplomats and representatives with Clemenceau, those before 1917 may be characterized as sporadic. Vesnić, as the highest diplomatic representative, avoided contacts with Clemenceau “because he was supervised by the government”. Not paying attention to Vesnić’s warnings, Žujović insisted on meeting Clemenceau, among other eminent persons, immediately after his arrival in Paris. He visited Clemenceau twice and both times he had a very positive impression about him and their conversations. Clemenceau’s conversing manner was to keep his interlocutor at a “polite distance” (Clemenceau, 2020, p. 17). On numerous occasions Clemenceau pointed out that he “understood our arguments and approved of everything, but had no power to help us” because the entire government apparatus was against him. Žujović told him that, despite having no influence on the government, he had the public because “he did not write with his pen, but with steel arrows that killed” (*Žujović, 1986, p. 170*).

Apart from influencing officials and eminent French circles, some Serbs took a position that they had to keep closer relations with the Czechs and the Slovaks. Božidar Marković from Geneva regularly reminded Žujović during his mission in Paris

that he had to meet Tomáš Masaryk as well, and to underline the parallel between the Yugoslav and the Czechoslovakian programs in conversations with Masaryk and other Czech and Slovakian representatives. Žujović was not against these contacts and in his conversations with the Frenchmen, he always accepted and supported all the initiatives coming from the Czechoslovakian committee, including the idea of the personal union placed by the Czechs. However, Žujović and Masaryk did not meet either in France or in Geneva, where Masaryk spent much time, but eventually in London. On 19 October 1915, Žujović attended Masaryk’s lecture at the Royal College, but the Czech leader made a rather unfavourable impression on him. In his journal, Žujović wrote that Masaryk had approached him just before the lecture, so they had no time to discuss anything. In this brief encounter, he did not invite Žujović to visit him nor did he suggest meeting and discussing the complementarity of the Yugoslav and the Czechoslovakian programs. Therefore, after the lecture, Žujović concluded that the emissary in London, Mateja Bošković, was absolutely right in not appreciating the Czechoslovakian leader (*Žujović, 1986, p. 211*). If during 1914 and in the first half of 1915 there was any complementarity in the activities of these two movements, after April 1915 and Italy’s entry into the war, the two movements drifted apart on a larger scale. Italy unreservedly supported the Czechoslovakians and the idea of creating their common state. On the other hand, Italy’s hostile attitudes towards the idea of creating the Yugoslav state on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, which was claimed by Italy, are well-known in historiography and, as such, they go beyond the scope of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, we will em-

phasize that the Czechoslovakian movement was much more respected than the Yugoslav one not only in Italy, but also in France. Namely, all doors in Paris were open to Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, as former French students and university professors (Kšišan, 2019, pp. 191–196). Clemenceau considered Beneš “one of the best people, a man of resurrected Czechoslovakia, who won the trust of all by the honesty of his words and the divinity of his intelligence” (Clemenceau, 2020, p. 121).

Unlike the coherent action of the Czechs and the Slovaks, the Yugoslav Committee and Serbian emissaries in France caused confusion in the French public by two ideas of the future organization of the Yugoslav state. Both official and unofficial France leaned more towards the federal/confederal organization of the state. As a republic dominated by the socialist-oriented parties, it completely resented the idea of creating a multinational, centralist monarchy. The most influential ambassadors in London, Washington and Rome supported Ante Trumbić and the Yugoslav Committee, while the criticized Pašić’s conservatism. The military circles were on Pašić’s side because, from the military aspect, France preferred having a country politically and economically dependent on France on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, as a counterweight to Italy (SHD, Fond Clemenceau, 6 N 235; Vujović, 1987, pp. 77–103).

Clemenceau: the winner and the loser

The final stage of the war on the Western front opened a new conflict between Clemenceau and Poincaré. On 26 September, inspired by the victory

of the allies on the Thessaloniki front, French-British-American troops began an offensive in three directions. In only several days they managed to completely turn the situation over to their benefit and to push the German army from the territories of France and Belgium (Duroselle, 1994, p. 400). Poincaré then called for transferring the war to the German territory, with the aim of occupying strategically important places that would serve as a pledge during peace negotiations. In contrast, Clemenceau saw only an unnecessary waste of resources and human lives in such extension of the war. He took an uncompromising position that he did not want to postpone the end of the war for, as he pointed out, “the reasons of imperialist nature” (Clemenceau, 1996, pp. 202–203). He believed that in that manner he would break the principles he had proclaimed throughout his political career. Above all, when he came to power, he promised that the war would not last a single day longer than it was necessary. This conflict became so pronounced that Clemenceau threatened to resign, which forced Poincaré to give up his initial intention (Duroselle, 1994, pp. 316–317).

In the long run, Clemenceau’s decision proved to be wrong and cost him the loss of popularity. According to the survey conducted after demobilization, only 5% Frenchmen wanted armistice at all costs, while 90% of them wanted to transfer the war to the German territory and get revenge for all the misdeeds suffered during four years of the war. The French had not even entered Alsace and Lorraine (Duroselle, 1994, p. 404). In the Assembly, Clemenceau was fiercely attacked by the opposition, accusing him of not “disarming Germany”. The ceremonial handover of the weapons was

called for, whereas all weapons had to stay on the battlegrounds. Clemenceau called the critics “journalistic warriors”, while he found the “ceremonial disarmament” protocol unnecessary. He thought that peace brought to France and its allies was more important than the ceremony itself (Clemenceau, 2020, pp. 96–97). On 11 November, when Marshal Foch signed the armistice in Compiègne, the public was deeply disappointed. The general impression was that had not won yet, but that it should do it in the future, at the negotiation table (Tomei, 2018, p. 1). That the dissatisfaction with the end of the war did not dwindle is also corroborated by the fact that there was an assassination of Clemenceau on 19 February 1919. He was shot by three bullets, one of which perforated his lung (Vallaud, 2011, 427; Duroselle, 1988, 945). Despite grave injuries, he quickly recovered and on 14 March he continued to chair the conference (Geffroy, 1938, pp. 204–205; Porte, 2011, p. 580). His contemporaries were once again amazed by his vitality. n one occasion, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George told Franchet d’Espèrey: “Every time I see Clemenceau, he seems to be a year younger and to have one more tooth” (D’Espèrey, 2018, p. 139).

The Peace Conference began its work on 18 January 1919. It looked like a conglomerate of nations and delegates. Twenty-seven nations had their representatives at the negotiation table. During six months, sessions were held through as many as 53 commissions and committees with over 1,000 delegates participating in their work. The priority questions referred to the conditions of peace between France and Germany, while all others were treated as secondary. In the course of the conference, Clemenceau stayed the same as he was during the

war – interested solely in France. The Serbian and Yugoslav delegation, which consisted of as many as 110 members, considered the absence of Russia at the negotiation table a huge handicap. Halfway through the conference, Pašić apprehensively wrote from Paris: “The destiny of our people will be decided by the same powers which signed the Treaty of London with Italy, except for America, but it can neither protect us nor replace Russia” (Milošević & Dimitrijević, 2005). The sessions were held in the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris (Quai d’Orsay), while the final treaty was signed in the Hall of Mirrors (Galerie des Glaces) in the Palace of Versailles. It was exactly in the Hall of Mirrors that the unification of Germany had been declared in 1871, and, as a contemporary of both events, Clemenceau wanted to use this symbolic act to assure that the Germans would never again threaten the French.

Clemenceau did not belong to the faction believing that Russia and Serbia were responsible for the beginning of the war, which is just one of the many theories provided about the causes and reasons of the beginning of the war; however, at the beginning of the conference, he took a rather rigid attitude towards the Serbian/Yugoslav delegation. He insisted on the literal interpretation of the allies’ treaties. Since Serbia had no treaties, he believed that its delegation could not have a place at the main negotiation table but should be treated as other joined allies, for example Brazil, which entered the war in 1916. Only after the efforts of others, primarily David Lloyd George who called Pašić “the most intelligent man in East Europe”, Serbia got its place at the main negotiation table and the right to decide about most important matters (Geffroy, 1938, p. 9).

Knowing that they could not count completely on Clemenceau, Serbian/Yugoslav delegates focused on winning other delegations in favour of their interests – first of all, the USA. The problem was that the US President Woodrow Wilson was present only at the beginning of the conference. Wilson actually spoke in defence of Serbia and its right to get access to the sea, yet his 14 points did not stipulate the creation of Yugoslavia, but autonomy for Croatia and Slovenia within reformed Austro-Hungary (Radojević, 2001, pp. 223–237).

To this, we should also add Clemenceau's personal attitude that Austria had to be retained in a certain form because its existence was crucial to the balance of power in Central Europe. He believed that the breakup of the Habsburg Monarchy would lead to the creation of artificial states which could not independently survive and would be gradually absorbed by Germany. He wanted to avoid the chain reaction at all costs because, in case Slavs, Czechs, Hungarians and others were allowed to form their own states, the same request could not be denied to Austrian Germans either. This scenario almost came true on 12 November 1918, when Karl Renner proclaimed the Austrian republic as integral part of the German Empire. Clemenceau and other Entente leaders succeeded in nullifying that unification act, but the threat still remained (Becker, 2012, p. 148). It was only when Austro-Hungary began collapsing internally that Clemenceau had to accept its breakup as a *fait accompli*.

The recognition of Czechoslovakia on 21 October 1918 opened the door to South Slavs as well. Clemenceau was personally against the recognition of Yugoslavia which did not have defined borders and was on the verge of a direct conflict with Italy.

During the session of the conference, he pointed out that he recognized the Treaty of London but, despite Orlando's insistence, he did not support Italian claims to Rijeka (Fiume) which was not part of the Treaty of London. The French ambassador to Rome, Victor Barrère, was deeply disappointed by such attitude of Clemenceau's. In one of his reports, he points out that Clemenceau was the object of huge adoration in Italy until that moment, but after his restraint to openly take Italy's side in the dispute over Rijeka, he irretrievably ruined his own and France's reputation. Orlando left Rome before the official signing of the peace treaty (Winock, 1997, p. 572).

On many occasions during the sessions, Clemenceau expressed his gratitude to Nikola Pašić, who had visited at the hardest moments for his country, although he had belonged to the opposition at the time. In fact, while Nikola Pašić as the president of the Serbian government stayed in Paris in winter 1915, lobbying for the aid to the Serbian state among influential persons, he consulted Milenko Vesnić whether he should visit Clemenceau as well although the latter was not a member of the government. Vesnić opposed that idea, assuring Pašić that Clemenceau was a "fierce oppositionist" who attacked the "whole world" (Geffroy, 1938, p. 7). Pašić did not take his advice – eventually he had a meeting with Clemenceau. The encounter was mainly protocolar, but of great significance to the destiny of Yugoslavia at the Peace Conference. Pašić and Clemenceau met once again in November 1917, when Clemenceau had just come to the head of the government. On that occasion, Clemenceau expressed his admiration for the heroic Serbian army (Sretenović, 2008, p. 89).

The USA was the first among great powers to recognize the existence of the South Slavic state. The official recognition by France came at the end of June, just before the end of the Peace Conference. Justifying his decision, Clemenceau said that for him Yugoslavia was an equivalent of Nikola Pašić and that he recognized the new state out of his respect for Pašić (SHD, 6 N 235, № 3717; Porte, 2011, p. 589; Vallaud, 2011, p. 454).

Conclusion

The Versailles Peace Conference was at the same time the zenith and the end of Clemenceau's political career. At the Conference itself, he was glorified as "the father of victory" (*le père de la victoire*), but in the presidential election in December he experienced a huge defeat and decided to retire from politics and the public (Becker, 2012, pp. 160, 168–169). He spent last years of his life writing his memoirs and fighting against his political opponents, even against the like-minded ones who attacked and re-examined his war policy. Only a few months before his death, he published his memoir entitled *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (*Grandeurs et misères d'une victoire*) as an answer to the accusations and attacks by Marshal Foch, his closest wartime associate. He died on 24 November 1929, disappointed and misunderstood. Full of bitterness, in *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* he wrote that "the Frenchman loves nothing more than oblivion" (Clemenceau, 2020, p. 118).

If we compared Clemenceau's and Poincaré's perceptions of the Balkan policy in today's frameworks, we could conclude that modern France is Clemenceau's child. Contemporary French histori-

ography gives full priority to Clemenceau's vision of the world order and his policy during the Annexation Crisis over Poincaré's policy during the Balkan Wars. Clemenceau's policy in 1908/1909 is assessed as wisely pursued, with moderation and consideration. He succeeded in resolving the Annexation Crisis without compromising the interests of France. Clemenceau's political mind was acknowledged by the defeated as well. The most memorable are the words by German Emperor William II after the defeat in 1918: "If we had had Clemenceau, we wouldn't have lost this war" (Greilsamer, 2018, p. 2).

To sum up Clemenceau's position towards Serbia and the Serbian national question, we should once again recall his fierce patriotism towards France. Clemenceau was one of the few politicians who belonged to France and the French people with his heart and soul. The circumstances outside his fatherland affected him only to an extent of their being harmful or beneficial to France's interests. In many biographies dealing with the person and work of Georges Clemenceau, Serbia is almost never mentioned. The same refers to the Thessaloniki front and the Yugoslav state. Historian Michel Winock, considered one of the best connoisseurs of Clemenceau, mentions Serbia only once – in the context of the number of casualties, and Yugoslavia in the context of the "Rijeka issue" and the dispute with Italy. Just like Clemenceau, his biographer Winock sees exclusively France and nothing else. Although he is considered one of the founders of the new world order, Clemenceau truly wanted to be the creator of socially more just France. He was a man ahead of his time; his political horizons were far beyond the views of his contemporaries, but his descendants granted him deserved honour and recognition.

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Зашисник

Свогаче седнице Одбора Грамачине Београдске
држане на дан 30. Јануара 1921 год., на којој је изасла-
ник Председника Француске Републике, Г.
Џенерал Францис Д'Естере предао Грамачини,
орден - Крстиса Почасне Лемје, којим је одликован
Београд.



Преседавио В. д. председника
З. Карајовановић

Секретар
Марко С. Јадаковић

Тачно у 10. часова В. д. председника З. Карајовановић
отвара седницу овим говором:

Господо Одборници, госпође и господо!

Данашња седница, господо има нарочити значај, како за
Београд, тако и целу нашу земљу. Београд не само носилац и одбор-
ник идеје политичког и националног ослобођења, нашег целокупног
историјског народа, него и верни и истрајни политички савезник
у борби за испиткнути велики међународни принцип „правде и ис-
тине“ - има данас да прими велико и ретко одликовање у знак
признања, за такво своје витешко и витешничко држање у прошлом
рату. И уколико то одликовање долази од Француске, једне так-
во велике државе, не само по њеном историјском, него и по вели-

ПРОГРАМ

242-212

свечаности откривања споменика захвалности француској у Београду.

10. н о в е м б а р :

У 8.20 часова дочек француских гостију на железничкој станици. Одело: жакет, цилиндер.

Дочеку присуствују: Одбор за подизање споменика,

Приређивачки одбор,

Преставници београдске општине,

Удружења и корпорације,

Грађанство,

Војна музика.



Г. Миљанић, председник одбора за подизање споменика поздравља госте кратким говором.

У 10.30 часова свечан дочек изасланства француске Владе и осталих француских гостију. Одело: жакет, цилиндер.

Дочеку присуствују: Преставници Краљевске Владе,

Одбор за подизање споменика,

Преставници београдске општине,

Генералитет и Адмиралитет,

Музика са почасном четом,

Удружења и корпорације,

Грађанство.

Приликом доласка воза у станицу музика свира француску химну

Г. Миљанић, председник одбора поздравља госте,

Музика свира француску химну,

Шеф француске делегације обилази почасну чету.

У 14.45 часова помен на француском и нашем гробљу.

Помену присуствују: Преставници Краљевске Владе,

Изасланство француске Владе и остали гости
Француска колонија,

Генералитет и Адмиралитет,

Преставници београдске општине,

Више чиновништво,

Удружења, корпорације, грађанство,

Војна музика са почасном четом.

У 20.30 часова Бечет Краљ. Владе у Гардиском Дому.

Programme of the ceremony for the unveiling of the Monument of Gratitude to France in Belgrade, 1930 (AJ 74).

Photo: Archives of Yugoslavia