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In pursuit of stability in the New Europe: Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional questions in British political discourse, 1918-1939

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by

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Abstract

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This thesis examines British attitudes towards the constitutional questions in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. The dichotomy between centralism and federalism profoundly shaped the political affairs in the two successor states as well as the relations between their ethnic groups. In both cases, this would become a major destabilising problem that would play an important role in their eventual disintegration in 1939 and 1941 respectively.

Given the impact it had on stability of some of the largest countries in an already volatile region, this issue could not escape the attention of British policymakers. Throughout the period, Britain was concerned with maintaining peace and order on the Continent. As such, appeasing disputes, even if entirely domestic, and finding solutions to resolve them became an important element of British foreign policy in the interwar period. When it came to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, this by extension meant that the Foreign Office was forced to grapple with complex issue of federalisation in those two countries, particularly with regard to its potential to further consolidate the two successor states and therefore make them less susceptible to disintegration.

This study analyses how federalism as a system of organisation was perceived in Britain between 1918 and 1939. By comparing and contrasting the British approach to federal demands in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, it highlights a variety of factors which determined when federalism was seen as a viable state-building tool. In doings so, this thesis does not only re-examine the place that federalism occupied in British political discourse at a time but also situates it at the heart of British foreign policymaking, thereby providing a new perspective on the process of attitude formation in British governmental circles in the interwar period. It shows that whilst ultimately, federal schemes were not viewed as a universally ideal remedy for multi-national states, they were one that Whitehall repeatedly relied on when faced with instability and the prospect of conflict.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
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Definitions and Abbreviations

DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DS	Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka)
FO	Foreign Office
HPSS	Croat People’s Peasant Party (Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka)
JMO	Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija)
JO	Yugoslav Committee (Jugoslavenski odbor)
KB	Kameradschaftsbund
PID	Political Intelligence Department
Oblast	Administrative province in Yugoslavia between 1922 and 1929
Sabor	Croatian Diet
SCS	Serb-Croat-Slovene
SDK	Peasant-Democratic Coalition (Seljačko-demokratska koalicija)
SdP	Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei)
Skupština	Serbo-Croatian word for Yugoslav Parliament
SLS	Slovene People's Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka)
SL'S	Slovak People's Party (Slovenská ľudová strana, also known as *ľudáci*)
SSEES	School of Slavonic and East European Studies
TNA	The National Archives

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis examines the evolution of British governmental attitudes towards the question of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav internal organisation from their creation in 1918 through to the beginning of the Second World War. As the struggle between centralism and federalism that defined the socio-political landscapes of the two countries was primarily a domestic issue, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional debates exercised little direct influence upon broader geopolitical affairs at the time. Yet, the conflict between the Czechs and Slovaks and the Serbs and Croats, within the confines of their respective states, did have a profound influence on their internal development and by extension, their capacity to act as stabilising forces in a region already torn by nationalism and territorial disputes in the aftermath of the Great War. Accordingly, as much as the conflict between state-constitutive nationalities would not be at the forefront of British foreign policy concerns in East Central Europe during this period, for British policy makers whose one of leading objectives was the maintenance of the fragile peace created at Versailles, it was nevertheless a problem that could not simply be ignored or dismissed as an irrelevant factor in the wider contemporary European political landscape.

Given their size and geographical position, both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia played an important role in British political and strategical thinking about East Central Europe. In the immediate post-war period, the focus of British foreign policy was directed toward filling the power vacuum created by the demise of the old multinational Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and re-establishing peace and stability.[1] Accordingly, the two new multi-national states, it was hoped, could help secure such aims. Indeed, Czechoslovakia was regarded by many as the most viable pivot of British policy in the region, serving as a bulwark against both the spread of

---

[1] As Goldstein points out, British diplomats at Paris consistently pushed for the creation of large states in East Central Europe, since it was assumed that numerous small, weak states would inevitably cause instability, thereby threatening British maritime and economic interests in the region as well as on the Mediterranean. Erik Goldstein, *Winning the Peace: British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916-1920* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 241-69.

Bolshevism from the east and the German push towards the east. It was expected that it would become, Robert W. Seton-Watson, the leading British expert on the subject of East Central European affairs at the time, remarked, ‘the hub of Central non-German Europe’ or, as the British minister to Prague, Sir George Clerk, put it, ‘the lynch-pin of Central Europe’ and Britain’s ‘best bridge into Russia’.[2] Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was promoted for its perceived ability to consolidate the powder keg of Europe and act as a buffer against Italian maritime expansion in the Adriatic.[3] This large South Slav union, argued General Plunkett, British military attaché at Belgrade, would not only be ‘pro-English and pro-American and to a less extent pro-French’, but its ‘considerable military strength’ would make it ‘the best guarantee for peace in the Balkans […] for she will be too strong for other Balkan states to attack’.[4] In both cases, however, it was also recognised that such ambitious objectives largely hinged on the stabilisation of their internal affairs. Fearing further Balkanisation of this volatile region, London was under no circumstances willing to risk the break-up of the two countries over an issue they believed could be easily settled through compromise and mutual co-operation between the conflicting parties.[5] The resolution of the intractable argument between Czech and Serb centralists, and Slovak and Croat decentralists, was thus immediately thrust into the heart of British diplomatic calculations about Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and East Central Europe as a whole.

As this study will demonstrate, not only were British diplomats as well as ‘unofficial’ experts that had an interest in the region well-aware of these issues, but they were also confident about what they believed to be the best remedies for alleviating Czechoslovak and Yugoslav troubles. These, as was to be expected, were not always uniform — attitudes would differ from official to official and would also evolve to reflect both the developments in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia as well as other geopolitical issues as they emerged. However, as a rule of thumb, the vast majority of Britons (and most importantly, those in Whitehall) engaged with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav affairs favoured forms of federal solutions when the political situation in either of the countries reached a boiling point. As a combination of both their lack of understanding of how federalism differed from other similar but not identical organisational principles and their generally superficial understanding of the two countries' ethnic composition, history, political traditions, and various nationalist forces, it is worth pointing out here that British governmental officials often misused the term. Indeed, federalism and federation were often employed to denote different state organising systems, from cultural autonomy to the so-called British model they themselves employed at home — a great departure from the fairly strict definitions used in federalist studies nowadays. Nevertheless, regardless of the phrasing, a form of decentralised government was regularly brought up as the most viable political device for stabilising their domestic affairs and maintaining peace and order.

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[2] London, UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies [hereafter “SSEES”], The Papers of Robert William Seton-Watson, Seton-Watson to Headlam-Morley, 29 May 1919, SEW 17/9/3; Kew, The National Archives [hereafter “TNA”], Foreign Office Records, General Correspondence [hereafter FO 371], FO 371/8572/15698, Clerk to Lampson, 15 September 1923.

[3] Goldstein, *Winning*, pp. 251-52.

[4] TNA, General Plunkett to the Directorate of Military Intelligence, 25 January 1918, FO 371/3507/16797.

[5] For contemporary accounts representative of the negative perception of Balkanisation in Britain, see Charles Roden and Dorothy Buxton, *The World After the War* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1920) and Henry Noel Brailsford, *Olives of Endless Age: Being a Study of this Distracted World and its Need of Unity* (London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928).

The primary purpose of this thesis will thus be two-fold. Firstly, it will examine why and when Foreign Office officials looked favourably upon federal measures when it came to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Here, it will look at a variety of factors. It will focus on how stereotypes of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav ethnic groups or leading political figures that were commonly held in Britain at the time influenced their support for centralism or federalism. This is particularly valuable, as it will showcase how these initially informed British attitudes towards the two countries' constitutional orders and highlight the fact that Whitehall's views were often a product of more than just political realities on the ground. In particular, it will analyse how British stances on the matter evolved as their understanding of the Slovak and Croat questions — the resolution of which were more or less treated as conterminous with the resolution of the dichotomy between centralism and federalism — deepened. This will allow us to not only assess how preconceived assumptions about the nature of Czech-Slovak and Serb-Croat relations, and prejudicial attitudes towards different national groups, shaped British approaches towards

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but also to examine and compare the contexts in which British policymakers of the interwar period broached the federal idea as a remedy for state consolidation.

Second, it will analyse how far and in what ways the pro-federal stance of Foreign Office officials intersected with broader British security interests in the region. As stated above, Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic problems could not be divorced from the events on the entire Continent, particularly as the rise of Nazi Germany began to uproot the foundations of the Paris Peace Conference. This thesis will therefore look at how London's objective of preventing another conflict informed its attitudes towards the contentious constitutional debates in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and how these shifted as the situation in Europe evolved. Here, it will show that as the general geopolitical situation became more volatile, British support for decentralised streams in the two countries tended to strengthen, further underlining the perceived correlation between federalism and peacekeeping in British governmental discourse. Lastly, it will examine the extent to which domestic debates concerning the thorny question of Irish Home Rule and Britain's own internal structure provided a reference point for dealing with the troubles in the Balkans and demonstrate how commonplace was the tendency of British officials to apply their own domestic arrangement onto countries when faced with a challenge they struggled to grapple with or to properly understand. By placing the federal idea as understood by British observers at the time at the centre of British debates on Yugoslav and Czechoslovak state-building, this thesis will provide a fresh insight into British foreign policy-making processes and offer a new way of thinking about the factors that shaped post-war British diplomacy in East Central Europe.

Here, it is worth briefly reflecting on what T. G. Otte has referred to as the British "official mind".[6] Given the important role the Foreign Office played as a department, some overarching characteristics that it fostered in its servants cannot be overlooked; as Robert Nightingale noted,

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[6] T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy, 1865-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

> What is true of the British people as a whole is almost equally true of its representative assembly. Parliament has but little power over the conduct of foreign affairs. Some of the most momentous changes in the country's relations with other Powers have, in the present century, been accomplished without the reference to the House of Commons, and often without even its knowledge.[7]

In the period leading up to the First World War, but certainly after it as well, the Foreign Office was primarily composed of Britain's upper class, which came both with its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, they were conscientious and perceptive observers. These were the qualities that were indeed fostered amongst the members of the department; in Lord Strang's words, the finest quality that a Foreign Office servant can have is 'the ability both to draw out knowledge and wisdom possessed by others, and to synthetise it fully for one's own use'.[8] When it came to dealing with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during 1920s and 1930s, this skill would regularly come out; reports coming from Prague and Belgrade would regularly contain a tremendous amount of detail obtained from various sources to help paint a singular, but cohesive picture and those in London commenting on them would likewise provide equally-exhaustive comments and suggestions, albeit often couched in what was superficial and cursory understanding of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic turmoil.

Yet, at the same time, they were also a product of their upbringing, which meant they largely tended to engage with those from the same societal strata and operated in a closed circuit which, Otte explains, often caused them to only be able to 'think "inside the box"'.[9] From this also stemmed the tendency to apply their own lessons and previous experiences to other places. According to Zara Steiner, the Foreign Office 'saw the world in static terms', relying on traditional remedies to solve completely new problems, and drawing on their belief that everything could be solved through discussion.[10] As she goes on to conclude, 'it was most unfortunate that a group of men who prided themselves on their intelligence and rationality should have to deal with a country whose leaders were erratic and whose policies were often inexplicable'.[11] And though Steiner here primarily refers to Germany, this reliance on familiar solutions and a reactive rather than a proactive approach would also dictate policy suggestions for both Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic framework. Though the pre-1914 period has often been described as one of 'old diplomacy', this thesis will demonstrate that the style of foreign policy making that was so inherent to the British Foreign Office in the early twentieth century would certainly survive long enough to shape how this department and its servants approached two countries created only in the aftermath of the War.

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[7] Robert T. Nightingale, *The Personnel of the British Foreign Office and Diplomatic Service, 1851-1929* (London: The Fabian Society, 1930), p. 3.
[8] Lord Strang, *The Foreign Office* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), p. 183.
[9] Otte, p. 394.
[10] Zara Steiner, *The Foreign Office and Foreign Policy, 1898-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.210.

Moreover, though this study will first and foremost be based on the Foreign Office general correspondence and memoranda, it will also rely on newspapers as well as private papers and diaries of British intellectual elites of the time. Indeed, whilst perhaps not directly involved in foreign policy making, these observers played a pivotal role in shaping Whitehall's attitudes towards Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. As R. J. W. Evans pointed out in his first Masaryk lecture in 2002, British policy in the region was more often than not a hybrid product of the Foreign Office's 'correct, but rather distant and non-committal' approach to East Central Europe and 'much closer, but haphazard and often conflicting' unofficial contacts with the region's prominent figures.[12] British officials — particularly the younger echelon which entered the Foreign Office's newly-created Political Intelligence Department (PID) in 1918 — were profoundly influenced by the sympathetic writings of these scholars and journalists, often becoming vocal champions of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav causes as a result.[13] In fact, during the war, many prominent members of the PID and later officials in various Foreign Office departments (James Headlam-Morley, Allen and Rex Leeper, Lewis Namier and Alfred Zimmern, to name but a few) actively contributed to *The New Europe,* a journal established in 1916 with the intention of helping develop 'a sane and well-informed body of public opinion upon all subjects affecting the future of Europe'.[14]

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[11] Steiner, p. 211.

[12] R. J. W. Evans, *Great Britain & East-Central Europe, 1908-48: A Study in Perceptions* (London: King's College London, 2002), pp. 14-15.

[13] Formed in March 1918 as a department of the Foreign Office, the Political Intelligence Department (PID) was created for the purpose of collecting and analysing the vast sources of political intelligence coming into the FO and synthetising the most relevant information that could assist with post-war planning. For more on the history of the PID, see Erik Goldstein, 'The Foreign Office and Political Intelligence 1918-1920', *Review of International Studies,* 14. 4 (1988): 275-88.

Accordingly, given both their direct presence inside the Foreign Office and indirect influence on its staff, the attitudes of the *New Europe* group — and particularly those of its founder Seton-Watson — cannot be neglected when studying the formation of British policy towards Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. As Harold Nicolson, British delegate to the Peace Conference and a member of the PID, remarked, Britain's representatives at Paris were 'overwhelmingly imbued' by the doctrines espoused by the *New Europe*.[15] In 1918, he explains, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, or Turkey were not 'in the forefront of our minds'; instead, 'it was the thought of the new Serbia, the new Greece, the new Bohemia, the new Poland which made our hearts sing hymns at heaven's gate'.[16] By focusing on how the topic of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional arrangements were discussed outside of the confines of Whitehall, this will also shed light on the interplay between career diplomats and the intellectual networks in the process of constructing knowledge in instances when information about a place was extremely scarce and limited.

1.1 Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: A brief historical overview

Unlike their Austrian, Hungarian, Polish, or Romanian counterparts, to name but a few, the First Czechoslovak Republic and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes only appeared on the map of Europe for the first time in the aftermath of the Great War.[17] Their borders were neither restored nor enlarged but carved out of the remnants of the collapsed Austria-Hungary. Never before in history had the Czech and Slovak lands on the one hand, and the South Slav lands of the Balkan peninsula on the other, formed two single, sovereign units. They were, in other words, completely novel inventions founded on the principles of national self-determination of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav peoples. Conceived in the nineteenth century, the concepts of Czechoslovakism and Yugoslavism were central to state-building processes in the two successor states. To put it in its simplest terms, the two ideologies rested on the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks, and the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were simply different "tribes" or ethnic branches of one nation which had simply been divided by historical developments.[18] The Czechoslovak and Yugoslav awakeners based their ideas on the notion of linguistic and cultural unity of these main "state-making" nations, who they argued needed to cultivate closer ties in order to be able to resist the threats of Germanization and Magyarization.[19] However, though they did attract support among the educated intelligentsia and the clergy before 1914, neither Czechoslovakism nor Yugoslavism gained widespread popular support (particularly among the peasant population) and were just two among many political currents that emerged and competed at the time.[20]

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[14] Hugh Seton-Watson and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R.W. Seton-Watson and the Last Years of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 179.

[15] Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking 1919* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1964), p. 33. Nicolson adds that Allen Leeper, his colleague at the PID, and him 'never moved a yard without previous consultation with experts of the authority of Dr. Seton-Watson'. He does, however, question 'whether life-long familiarity with a country is always an advantage when it comes to framing decisions which should be wide, impartial, unprejudiced, and adjustable to needs and proportions outside the particular area under discussion'. Nicolson, p. 126.

[16] Nicolson, p. 33. The younger men at Paris, he argues, were not guided by revenge but by the aspiration to consolidate the new nation-states which they viewed 'with maternal instinct, as the justification of our sufferings and of our victory'.

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[17] Though its official name was the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes until 1929, the country was better known as Yugoslavia throughout the period. This name was also regularly employed by the Foreign Office, British academics as well as the British press at the time and will thus be used in this thesis most commonly.

[18] For more on Czechoslovakism, see Elisabeth Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism in the First Czechoslovak Republic', in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik, 1918-1938: Politische, Nationale und Kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*, ed. by Martin Schulze Wessel (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), pp. 23-44 and Miloslav John, *Čechoslovakismus a ČSR 1914-1938* (Berounď: Baroko&Fox, 1994). For a general overview of Yugoslavism from the perspective of all Yugoslav nationalities, see Dejan Djokić (ed.), *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2003). For the origins of the Yugoslav idea, see Petar Korunić, *Jugoslavizam i federalizam u hrvatskom nacionalnom preporodu, 1835-1875: Studija o političkoj teoriji i ideologiji* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989).

[19] Nadya Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community: National Identity, Individual Rights, and Minority Membership in the Czech and Slovak Republics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 29-48; Tihomir Cipek, 'The Croats and Yugoslavism', in *Yugoslavism*, ed. by Djokić, pp. 71-83 (pp. 71-73).

[20] For the political trends and developments in the Czech and Slovak lands pre-1914, see Victor S. Mamatey, 'The Establishment of the Republic', in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948*, ed. by Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 3-38. and Nedelsky, pp. 49-64. For national movements in Croatia and Serbia, see Mirjana Gross, 'Croatian National-Integrational Ideologies from the End of Illyrism to the Creation of Yugoslavia', *Austrian History Yearbook,* 15 (1979), 2-

It was only following the outbreak of the First World War that the movements for the unifications of the Czechs and Slovaks, and of the South Slav peoples, into consolidated states started gaining in popularity. In both cases, the growth of pro-unification sentiments was largely a consequence of the realisation that their national programmes could never truly be fulfilled under the banner of Austria-Hungary, as they would always clash with the aspirations of the Germans or the Magyars.[21] Indeed, in order to imbue their demands for the creation of independent states, the emigre representatives abroad based their arguments on the popular principle of national self-determination, and they precisely relied on the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks, and the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes formed single, indivisible nations. This, however, was not really the case in practice. Though Czechoslovakism and Yugoslavism were used as the key principles to justify the creation of the two states, not all Czechoslovak and Yugoslav state-constitutive national groups subscribed to these ideologies, nor did they have the same ideas about the character of their new states.[22] In fact, the clash between the Slovak and the Croat national programmes with those of the Czechs and the Serbs in interwar Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was not unlike the clash between the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav national programmes and those of the German and Magyar leadership in Austria-Hungary.

On the whole, Czechoslovakia's founding fathers — Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and Milan Rastislav Štefánik — saw the new state as the direct successor to the historical Bohemian kingdom (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) which was destroyed in 1620.[23] Indeed, in a secret 1915

33; Jasna Dragović-Soso, 'Rethinking Yugoslavia: Serbian Intellectuals and the 'National Question' in Historical Perspective', *Contemporary European History,* 13. 2 (2004), 170-84.

[21] Jan Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1939', in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe, 1918- 1948*, ed. by Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 13-26 (p. 15); Gale Stokes, 'The Role of the Yugoslav Committee in the Formation of Yugoslavia', in *The Creation of Yugoslavia 1914-1918*, ed. by Dimitrije Djordjevic (Oxford: Clio Books, 1980), pp. 51-67 (p. 53).

[22] For example, in their resolution where they proclaimed their independence from Hungary, the Slovak National Council asserted that the Slovaks were 'a part of the Czecho-Slovak Nation, united in language and in history of its culture […]'. Similarly, in a manifesto from 1915, the Yugoslav Committee precisely argued that 'the Jugoslavs form a single nation, alike by identity of language, by unanswerable laws of geography and by national consciousness […]'. Jozef Lettrich, *History of Modern Slovakia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 288-89; Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making*, pp. 131-32.

[23] The Battle of White Mountain, in which Frederick V was defeated by Ferdinand II, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and most of Bohemian nobility killed or disposed, has traditionally been seen as the

memo submitted to the British Government, Masaryk argued that aside from the addition of Slovakia, the establishment of Czechoslovakia was essentially the case of the ‘reorganisation of Bohemia as an independent State’.[24] Many Czechs shared this outlook and quite readily accepted Czechoslovakism as the realisation of their national programme; as Elisabeth Bakke points out, ‘for the Czechs, the new identity was […] *complementary*; Czech and Czechoslovak amounted to the same’.[25] This attitude, however, also informed how the Slovaks and their position in the joint state were perceived. From a Czechoslovak standpoint, the Slovaks were not a separate nation but simply ‘less developed’ Czechs.[26] As Masaryk himself put it, ‘the Slovaks are Bohemians, in spite of their using their dialect as their literary language’.[27] Slovakia was not seen to be any different than Bohemia, Moravia, or Silesia — it was not a state, just another province. To the authorities in Prague, the adoption of a rigid centralist arrangement thus seemed a logical move — if the Czechs and Slovaks were one single constituent nation, then the establishment of one joint, central government was the natural next step.[28]

Moreover, having just witnessed the collapse of Austro-Hungarian dualism, numerous Czech as well as a handful of Slovak politicians were not keen to leave the new Czechoslovak state vulnerable to similar centrifugal forces. From Prague’s perspective, centralism was seen as a remedy for the multi-ethnic composition of Czechoslovakia. The Czech leaders were aware that without the Slovaks, the new state would have approximately two Germans for every three Czechs, which would barely grant them a majority status in their own country. With the Slovaks

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moment in which Bohemian independence perished, with the period that followed being presented in historiography as the one of darkness (*temno*). Elisabeth Bakke, *Doomed to failure?: The Czechoslovak nation project and the Slovak autonomist reaction, 1918-38* (Oslo: Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, 1999), p. 102. As Rychlík points out, however, this is not entirely correct, since the Bohemian crown remained united with other Habsburg lands through a personal union as it was before 1620. Rychlík, '*Czech-Slovak*', in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. by Cornwall and Evans, p. 17 (f. 13).

[24] Tomáš G. Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia' in R. W. Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1943), p. 118; p. 25. See also Roman Szporluk, *The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1981).

[25] Bakke, '*Czechoslovakism*', in *Loyalitäten,* ed. Schulze Wessel, p. 35.

[26] Ibid., p. 23.

[27] Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia' in Seton-Watson, *Masaryk*, p. 125.

[28] James Ramon Felak, *'At the price of the Republic': Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1929-1938* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), p. 18.

included, however, Czechoslovakia would have a two-thirds Czechoslovak population, and the Germans and Hungarians (among others) would become mere minorities.[29] In other words, the Slovak autonomist movement could simply not be supported, as the treatment of the Slovaks as a separate nation would both challenge the notion of the existence of a strong Czechoslovak majority as well as set a precedent for other national groups (most notably Sudeten Germans) to demand autonomy.

A natural corollary of this attitude, however, meant that the new Czechoslovak authorities would quickly find themselves in conflict with the Slovak political establishment.[30] Throughout the nineteenth century, national consciousness began to develop across national groups in Europe and Slovakia was no exception to this rule. Due to their oppressive treatment under the Hungarians, this process, as historians have argued, took slightly longer amongst the Slovaks, especially when compared to their Czech counterparts.[31] Nevertheless, by the time the war broke out, the idea had taken root amongst intellectual and middle classes as well as the peasantry that there was a level of reciprocity that existed between Czechs and Slovaks, though for the Slovak "awakeners", this was primarily restricted to linguistic and cultural kinship rather than political unity.[32] It was this idea of reciprocity that helped mobilise the population in the support of the Czechoslovak cause once the war commenced, as those were not entirely indifferent to it certainly preferred the idea of uniting with the Czechs to the alternative of remaining under Magyar rule. As Dušan Kováč notes, by 1918, 'the Slovaks had supported the idea of building a common state with the Czechs, accepting the principle of a "nation-state of the Czechoslovak nation"'.[33] This, however, did not mean that the dream of some form of independence was completely abandoned. Indeed, though the Slovak political leaders wished to join the Czechoslovak state, they did not share Masaryk's vision of Slovakia merely being another territorial unit, believing it instead to be separate nation which was similar but nevertheless was different from the Czech lands and thus needed to be granted some form of autonomy as a reflection of its status as one of the two main constitutive nations of the Czechoslovak state.[34]

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[29] Ibid.

[30] See Carol Skalnik Leff, 'Czech and Slovak Nationalism in the Twentieth Century', in *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter F. Sugar (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1995), pp. 103-61.

[31] See Chapter Two in Nedelsky, pp. 49-64.

[32] Elisabeth Bakke, 'Czechoslovakism in Slovak History', in *Slovakia in History*, ed. by Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kováč and Martin D. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 247-268 (pp. 248-249).

[33] Dušan Kováč, 'The Slovak political programme: from Hungarian patriotism to the Czecho-Slovak state', in *Slovakia,* ed. by Teich, Kováč and Brown, pp. 120-36 (p. 136).

The struggle between "state-making" nationalities in Yugoslavia developed along similar lines. As with the Czechoslovak example, the debates over state form were inextricably linked to the question of national identity. Though the representatives of the South Slavs abroad spent much of the war promoting the idea of Serb-Croat national oneness as the justification for the creation of a joint Yugoslav state, most Serb and Croat leaders did not entirely share this view. There was, of course, a number of those who truly did subscribe to Yugoslavism and supported the adoption of a centralist system as a reflection of Yugoslavia's unitary character.[35] The rest, however, viewed Yugoslavia through the prism of their own national programme. Generally speaking, Serbian political leaders perceived the Yugoslav state as the endpoint of the quest to liberate and unify all Serbs into one single state. For them, Yugoslavia was primarily an enlarged Serbian state where the Croats and Slovenes — as different "tribes" of the Yugoslav nation — would be able to retain their national particularism and symbols, so long as Serbia took the leading role in the organisation and administration of the new state.[36] They accordingly favoured centralism, both as the means of preventing the disintegration of central legislative authority and keeping the Serbian population united.[37]

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[34] It is not that the Czechs completely ignored the differences between them. They did, however, interpret them as merely temporary (as opposed to permanent feature that shaped the Slovak national consciousness) until the Slovaks caught up with the Czech cultural and the 'barbaric' influence of the Magyars waned. Bakke, '*Czechoslovakism*', in *Loyalitäten*, ed. by Wessel, p. 34. See also Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938: Education and the Making of a Nation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1985).

[35] The most prominent advocate of unitary Yugoslavism in interwar Yugoslavia was the Democratic Party. For more on their ideology, see Branislav Gligorijević, *Demokratska stranka i politički odnosi u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1970).

[36] Macedonians and Montenegrins were regarded as Serbs and were thus not considered as separate nationalities. The same goes for the Muslims of Bosnia, who were either viewed as Muslim Serbs or Muslim Croats. Stevan K. Pavlowitch, 'Serbia, Montenegro and Yugoslavia', in Djokić, *Yugoslavism*, pp. 57-70 (p. 62).

This attitude, however, was in stark contrast to that of their Slovene and Croat counterparts. Unlike the Serbs, they saw in centralism an assimilationist threat and insisted on the adoption of a decentralised system as a safeguard against Belgrade's domination in the new state. There was, as always, a group in both Croatia and Slovenia that also shared Belgrade's pro-centralist leanings, fearing that federalism would make the country more suceptible to Italian, Hungarian and Austrian pretensions on their lands. However, the vast majority disagreed; as Dejan Djokić points out, the Croat conception of the Serb-Croat-Slovene (SCS) Kingdom was dualist, 'not unlike former Austria-Hungary, in which Croatia would be Hungary to Serbia's Austria'.[38] Yugoslav internal structure, Croat and Slovene representatives argued, should capture the fact that Serbia was just another state-forming unit like all the other Habsburg South Slav provinces and therefore should be put on an equal footing with the rest through the implementation of a federal system. For the Croat intelligentsia, this argument was largely rooted in the concept of 'state right', the idea that Croatia had the right to exist as an independent polity and a political nation, which they argued traced its roots back to the Personal Union with Hungary in 1102. Moreover, as a consequence of the 1868 Nagodba which reognised Croatia as a distinct political unit, the idea of operating under a heavily devolved system was not something novel but an extension of the system to which Croatian leaders were already accustomed.

Thus, even before Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were officially created in 1918, the conflict between various ethnic groups had already emerged due to their opposing and incompatible conceptions of their joint state. Though a struggle couched in national ideologies, disparate traditions and diverging historical developments, it would be one that would most visibly manifest in the dichtomy between centralisation and federalism. Throughout the period, the inability to find a consensus over the contentious problem of their constitutional organisation would have a profound impact on both states. Whilst in Czechoslovakia, the Czech-Slovak dispute would mostly simmer under the surface during the 1920s, the fact that Prague did not seriously attempt to resolve it during the period of relative peace had severe implications for the country's unity when the rise of Nazi Germany thrust this issue into the global limelight. In Yugoslavia, on the other hand, it was a topic that regularly brought the entire political system to a halt, not only influencing the workings of its parliament and the ability to pass and agree on most social and economic measures vital for the stability and smooth functioning of the state, but also resulting in the assassination of both Stjepan Radić, the Kingdom's most vocal champion of federalism, and its pro-centralist King Alexander.

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[37] Ivo Banac, *National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 165-67.

[38] Dejan Djokić, 'Nationalism, Myth and Reinterpretation of History: The Neglected Case of Interwar Yugoslavia', *European History Quarterly,* 42. 1 (2012), 71-95 (p. 81).

1.2 Literature Review

British foreign policy towards interwar Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia has received a relatively cursory treatment in historiography. For the most part, Britain’s role in East Central Europe has been either completely neglected, or simply dismissed as that of a disinterested and rather ignorant spectator. This interpretation, of course, is not entirely incorrect. As G. H. Bennet observed, it is not that Whitehall had no interest in the region; it was more that these did not go ‘beyond general commitments to peace, stability and trade’.[39] Commonly, this tendency has been explained away by the general ignorance of the British public at the time. ‘Geographers might talk of the “Far” East and measure the distance to India in thousands of miles’, observed Peter Calvocoressi, ‘but to many an Englishman, Delhi and Singapore and Hong Kong were psychologically no further away than Calais; they were often more familiar, and they were, of course, more British’.[40] This approach, though rooted in how the peoples of East Central Europe were perceived by the vast majority of Britons, nevertheless leaves much to be desired when it comes to contextualising British policy towards East Central European countries on the eve of the Second World War, and their attempts to promote unity both within and amongst Habsburg successor states. Indeed, though historians are right in saying that these efforts were sparse or contained to specialised departments in the Foreign Office, they nevertheless existed.

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[39] G. H. Bennett, *British Foreign Policy during the Curzon Period, 1919-24* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 58. See also M. L. Dockrill and J. Douglas Goold, *Peace without Promise: Britain and the Peace Conferences, 1919-23* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1981).

[40] Peter Calvocoressi, *World Politics since 1945* (London: Pearson Longman, 2009), p. 183.

In recent years, this gap has been filled by a handful of historians who have sought to challenge this narrative by focusing on broader geopolitical and security issues that influenced British policy. Directly addressing the question of Britain's approach towards the region, and more specifically the two countries, scholars such as Gábor Bátonyi, Miklós Lojkó and Dragan Bakić have stressed that Britain played an instrumental role in reconstructing post-war East Central Europe, encouraging free trade amongst the Danubian states and the formation of political alliances between them.[41] As the shadow of the war loomed large in the minds of British diplomats, Bakić explains, the lesson that 'a small and local conflict in a distant region might easily spread into a conflagration of global proportions' provided more than enough justification to closely observe the area which sparked it in 1914.[42] All three scholars have suggested that whilst Whitehall's primary objective in the region — stabilisation and consolidation — was defined fairly clearly, British policymakers had no coherent and uniform strategy on how to achieve this goal, which gradually resulted in diminished interest in East Central European affairs.[43] Yet, despite their detailed examination of the general principles that guided British policy in the region, none of these scholars concerned themselves with British views of the constitutional debates and inter-ethnic disputes in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which — given the impact they had on their internal affairs — not only featured prominently in British governmental and academic discourse but shaped some key aspects of British attitudes towards the two states between the wars.

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[41] Gábor Bátonyi, *Britain and Central Europe 1918-1933* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999); Miklós Lojkó, *Meddling in Middle Europe: Britain and the 'lands between' 1919-1925* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006); Dragan Bakić, *Britain and interwar Danubian Europe: Foreign Policy and Security Challenges, 1919-1936* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). In all three cases, the boundaries of Central, Middle and Danubian Europe are not defined in the same way, with Bátonyi focusing on British approach to Austria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Lojkó replacing Austria with Poland, and Bakić analysing all the countries of the Little Entente as well as Hungary.

[42] Bakić, *Britain*, p. 3.

[43] For Bátonyi, British dissilusionment was a product of their 'failure to reconstruct a Danubian league of states and promote free trade in the region'. Likewise, Lojkó assesses that Britain's withdrawal from the region was largely a response to their realisation that financial assistance was not enough to pacify the new successor and counteract 'the divisive effects of the peace treaties'. Bátonyi, p. 222; Lojkó, *Britain*, p. 343.

This aspect has also been neglected in the literature on Britain's policy towards the two countries individually. Here, British perceptions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have not been tackled evenly. As a consequence of its central role in the appeasement policy, the studies dealing with Anglo-Czechoslovak relations greatly outnumber those dealing with the South Slav lands. Though a vast majority of these primarily focus on the immediate period leading up to and following the Munich Conference, several works have addressed how London's view of the domestic situation in Czechoslovakia evolved after the Paris Peace Conference.[44] This topic has been dealt with several times by Harry Hanak, who underlined some of the key elements that characterised the British approach to Czechoslovakia in the interwar period.[45] Hanak has asserted that Whitehall — aware that Czechoslovak problems 'were not dissimilar from those of Austria-Hungary' — actively advocated national reconciliation between the Czechs and the minority groups as a means of consolidating the Republic, with British representatives in Prague often pleading 'for a just national policy' with Czech statesmen.[46] He, however, does not discuss any similar diplomatic efforts to promote the improvement of the relations between the constitutive nationalities — the Czechs and the Slovaks. Hanak, of course, is not alone in this. Though there have been several studies of British involvement with Czechoslovak domestic affairs, most of them have neglected

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[44] For a fairly recent example of a monograph on Britain's policy towards the First Republic between 1938 and 1942, see Vit Smetana, *In the shadow of Munich: British policy towards Czechoslovakia from the endorsement to the renunciation of the Munich Agreement (1938-1942)* (Prague: Charles University, Karolinum Press, 2008). Conversely, for an insight into Britain's attitudes towards the Czech lands before the First World War, see Steven Beller, 'The British View of Bohemia before 1914', in *Grossbritannien, die USA und die böhmischen Länder 1848-1938 = Great Britain, the United States, and the Bohemian Lands 1848-1938: Vorträge der Tagung des Collegium Carolinum in Bad Wiessee vom 2. bis 6. November 1988*, ed. by Eva Schmidt-Hartmann and Stanley Winters (München: Oldenbourg, 1991), pp. 75-86.

[45] Harry Hanak, 'Great-Britain and Czechoslovakia, 1918-1948: An Outline of their Relations', in *Czechoslovakia Past and Present*, ed. by Jr. Miloslav Rechcigl (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 770-800; Harry Hanak, 'British Views of the Czechoslovaks from 1914-1924', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 87-106.

[46] Hanak, 'Bohemia', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, p. 98.

British attitudes towards the Czech-Slovak dispute in favour of examining their views of the conflict between the Czechs and the Germans.[47] Indeed, a detailed analysis of British considerations of the Slovak Question in the interwar period is still lacking.

In contrast, an aspect that has often been addressed in historiography is that of British opinions of Czechoslovakia's first president, Tomáš G. Masaryk, as these views closely reflected the attitudes which prevailed in Britain at any given time.[48] Indeed, Yeshayahu Jelinek has suggested that criticism of Masaryk went hand in hand with the criticism of Czechoslovak internal developments. In other words, the more disinterested the Central Department officials grew, the more scathing the remarks on the President's character became; in less than a decade, Masaryk apparently went from a politician who 'endeavoured to lead democracy into the path of sane evolution' to a man no different from Marshal Pilsudski or Mustafa Kemal.[49] Furthermore, scholars have also highlighted the impact that personal sympathies or antipathies of British representatives in Prague had on the shaping of official attitudes towards the country. Mark Cornwall, for example, has asserted that Sir Joseph Addison, Minister to Prague from 1930 to 1936, was 'primarily responsible for altering the whole Foreign Office perspective on the Czech-German relationship'.[50] His anti-Slav prejudices and overall pessimistic outlook painted an overwhelmingly negative portrait of the Czechs, playing a crucial role in moulding British policy towards the Sudeten Question and strengthening an ‘anti-Czech and “appeasing” mentality in London’ which culminated with Munich.[51] Likewise, Gerald Protheroe’s biography of Sir George Clerk, Britain’s First Minister to Prague, has demonstrated how Clerk’s activities, particularly his efforts to portray Czechoslovakia as an orderly, democratic oasis in otherwise chaotic East Central Europe and to foster closer Anglo-Czechoslovak financial ties through state loans, helped make Prague — albeit rather briefly — ‘a major focal point of British economic and political influence in the Danube region’.[52]

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[47] The one —and rather dated— exception is Reiner Franke's short chapter which addresses Slovak and Ruthene complaints against the Czechs. However, apart from asserting that the Foreign Office was well-aware of the Slovak complaints against the central government, Franke does not analyse the impact this had on the formation of British policy towards Czechoslovakia nor does he discuss any solutions recommended by the Central Department officials. Reiner Franke, *London und Prag: Materialien zum Problem eines multinationalen Nationalstaates 1919-1938* (München: Oldenbourg, 1982), pp. 62-69. For studies dealing with British perceptions of Czech-German relations, see also Jonathan Zorach, 'The British View of the Czechs in the Era before the Munich Crisis', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 57. 1 (1979), 56-70; Mark Cornwall, 'A Fluctuating Barometer: British Diplomatic Views of the Czech-German Relationship in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1938', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 313-33; and Lukáš Novotný, *The British Legation in Prague: Perception of Czech-German relations in Czechoslovakia between 1933 and 1938*, 1st edn (Boston: De Gruyter, 2019).

[48] See 'British Attitudes to Masaryk' in Harry Hanak, *T.G.Masaryk (1850-1937)* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990), pp. 125-48; Yeshayahu Jelinek, 'Thomas G. Masaryk and the British Foreign Office', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 277-84.

[49] Jelinek, 'Masaryk', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 279-80.

[50] Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, p. 332. See also Mark Cornwall, 'The Rise and Fall of a 'Special Relationship'?: Britain and Czechoslovakia, 1930-1948', in *What Difference Did the War Make?*, ed. by Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), pp. 130-50.

On the other hand, British interwar diplomacy towards a Serb-Croat-Slovene state has received even less attention in English-written historiography. The occasional works which have examined British foreign policy in the region have usually mentioned the royalist Yugoslavia only in passing, most often examining it within the wider context of the Italo-Yugoslav dispute or the Balkan Locarno schemes.[53] Indeed, there are only three monographs that explicitly look at Britain’s attitudes towards the Yugoslav Kingdom — James Evans’ *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia*, Vesna Drapac’s *Constructing Yugoslavia*, and Samuel Foster’s *Yugoslavia in the British Imagination*. Here, Evans’ book is particularly noteworthy, as the author dedicates almost an entire chapter to the internal Foreign Office debates concerning the Yugoslav constitutional question in the immediate post-war period. Focusing on British preconceptions about the South Slav “race”, language, religion and tradition, he argues that Whitehall’s attitudes towards the internal organisation of Yugoslavia were primarily informed by their conceptualisation of the notion of Yugoslav nationality.[54] In other words, as their belief in the existence of a unitary Yugoslav nation dwindled, their support for a federal solution which could placate older traditions grew.[55] His analysis, however, does not extend beyond 1921, essentially leaving the subject of British interwar views of Yugoslavia largely unexplored.

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[51] Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, p. 333.

[52] Gerald J. Protheroe, *Searching for Security in a New Europe: The Diplomatic Career of Sir George Russell Clerk* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 84.

[53] See Patrick Finney, 'Raising Frankenstein: Great Britain, 'Balkanism' and the Search for a Balkan Locarno in the 1920s', *European History Quarterly,* 33. 3 (2003), 317-42; Miklós Lojkó, 'Retrenchment at Home and Abroad: The political, economic and intellectual background to the British retreat from Central Europe and the Balkans in the early interwar years', *European Journal of English Studies,* 14. 3 (2010), 281-93; and Dragan Bakić, ''Must Will Peace': The British Brokering of 'Central European' and 'Balkan Locarno', 1925—9', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 48. 1 (2013), 24-56.

Meanwhile, in a chapter tackling the 1920s and 1930s, Drapac examines how the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom was perceived by outside spectators across Europe, Britain included. In essence, she argues that due to British concerns about maintaining stability in the Balkans and protecting their interests in the region, the Serb-controlled centralist system in Yugoslavia was mostly tolerated and the complaints of those who seemingly opposed the South Slav union were either ignored or denounced as extreme.[56] Indeed, even when British observers, such as Seton-Watson, did openly criticise the Yugoslav authorities, they nevertheless emphasised the notion of Yugoslav reciprocity and oneness without ever questioning 'the fundamental nature and necessity of the state of Yugoslavia itself'.[57] Surprisingly, in the light of its importance for Yugoslavia's domestic affairs in the interwar period, Foster does not even touch upon the question of Croatian autonomy and federalisation. This is a somewhat disappointing gap given the focus the book places on the peasantry (which was at the time in Croatia represented by the party that most vocally advocated for autonomy), an omission which, however, further highlights the need for examining how Britain engaged with the Yugoslav debates on federalism prior to 1945.[58]

The topic of British engagement with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav internal affairs has received equally scant attention in Czech (Czechoslovak) and Serbo-Croat historiography. Indeed, British involvement with the affairs of the two countries in the interwar period has received only a passing interest, with barely a handful of relevant books published since the end of the Second World War. Whereas Czech historians have tended to examine the period between 1938 and 1945, and in particular the activities of the Czechoslovak Government in exile in London, their South Slav counterparts have almost exclusively dealt with Tito's Yugoslavia and its relations with both the Soviet Union and the West. On the other hand, the studies which have analysed the diplomatic activities of their interwar predecessors often neglect British relations with the two states. In the Czechoslovak case, scholars such as Alena Gajanová and Robert Kvaček have predominantly focused on Czechoslovakia's position in Central Europe, and the response of its statesmen to French and German intrigues in the region.[59] Likewise, the rare academic publications which have tackled British attitudes towards Yugoslavia have predominantly done so within the context of its conflict with Italy. Indeed, in his study on the foreign policy of the Yugoslav state between 1918 and 1941, Bogdan Križman dedicated virtually the entire book to the Italo-Yugoslav dispute, almost entirely ignoring the Western democracies that competed in the region.[60] Indeed, the only notable exceptions to this trend in both historiographies are Jindřich Dejmek's studies of Britain and Czechoslovakia between the two wars.[61] However, though valuable for its detailed examination of how the Sudeten German problem helped shape Anglo-Czechoslovak relations, what is missing from Dejmek's analyses is the British reaction to Czechoslovak constitutional debates relating to the Slovak Question and how the re-organisation of Czechoslovakia was tackled before the rise of Nazi Germany pushed this topic into the limelight.

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[54] James Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia: Negotiating Balkan nationality and identity* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), p. 223.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 110-13.
[57] Drapac, p. 135.
[58] Samuel Foster, *Yugoslavia in the British Imagination: Peace, War and Peasants before Tito* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

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[59] Robert Kvaček, *Nad Evropou zataženo: Československo a Evropa, 1933-1937* (Praha: Svoboda, 1966); Alena Gajanová, *ČSR a středoevropská politika velmocí, 1918-1938* (Praha: Ceskoslovenská Akademie Ved, 1967).

[60] Bogdan Krizman, *Vanjska politika jugoslavenske države 1918-1941: Diplomatsko-historijski pregled* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1975). A similar approach is taken by Živko Avramovski, *Balkanske zemlje i velike sile, 1935-1937: od italijanske agresije na Etiopiju do jugoslovensko-italijanskog pakta* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1968); and Dunja Hercigonja, *Velika Britanija i spoljnopolitički položaj Jugoslavije 1929-1933: britanska politika prema jugoslavensko-italijanskim sukobima u vreme svetske privredne krize* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istorije, 1987).

[61] See 'Sympatie versus velmocenské zájmy: Československo a Velká Británie', in Jindřich Dejmek, *Československo, jeho sousedé a velmoci ve XX. století, 1918 až 1992: vybrané kapitoly z dějin československé zahraniční politiky* (Praha: Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku, 2002), pp. 231-62; and Jindřich Dejmek, *Nenaplněné naděje: Politické a diplomatické vztahy Československa a Velké Británie od zrodu první Republiky po Konferenci v Mnichově (1918-1938)* (Praha: Karolinum, 2003).

1.3 Defining federalism

Lastly, before turning our gaze to Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional problems, it is worth briefly looking into the semantics that dominated British discussions on federalism. Deriving from the Latin word for covenant (*foedus)* and its cognate *fides* (faith), the term "federal" has commonly been utilised to describe a *contractual* form of union between two or more entities anchored on the principles of mutual reciprocity, trust, co-operation, and recognition.[62] It emerges as a solution to a situation in which various entities who see themselves as collectively different wish to form a single community for the purpose of achieving common goals without giving up the sense of regional individuality; it provides union but does not demand unity.[63] On the most basic level, all definitions of federalism are a variation on the theme of achieving political integration by combining the elements of "shared rule" for some purposes and "self-rule" for others.[64] In his *Federal Government,* one of the most seminal works in the field of federal studies, Kenneth Wheare postulated that what determines whether a system is federal is the extent to which it is governed by "the federal principle" or 'the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent'.[65] It stems from there that for a system to be federal, it has to composed of a minimum of two levels of governments whose separate political spheres of influence are specified and guaranteed by an overarching constitutional framework. The two levels can never be subordinate to one another; whilst limited to their allotted territory, they should both 'operate directly upon the people'.[66]

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[62] S. Rufus Davis, *The Federal principle: A Journey Through Time in Quest of a Meaning*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 3.

[63] Albert V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*, (Indianapolis: Liberty/Classics, 1982), p. 75.

[64] Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring Federalism*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), p. 5.

[65] Kenneth C. Wheare, *Federal Government*, 4th edn, (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 10.

[66] Wheare, p. 13.

More importantly, it is precisely this feature that separates federations from other non-unitary form of governments which fall within the genus of federal political systems. Ronald L. Watts, for example, identifies nine other types of governmental organisations, whose structural character at first glance resemble federations but are not because their subnational units are usually subordinate to the central government.[67] And whilst differentiating between these various terms is a common academic practice nowadays, that was not always the case. As Duncan Bell has shown, the differentiation between these concepts was not employed as scrupulously in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Indeed, it was not uncommon for the two to be used interchangeably, especially when it came to hybrid variants.[68] Edward Freeman, the foremost authority of federalism in Victorian Britain, precisely argued that confederations were essentially no different from federations, particularly when there existed 'the two conditions of external unity and internal plurality' — that is, where a country externally operated as one, but internally remained a composition of several states.[69] Many scholars at the time argued that confederations were simply a transitional stage to federations. In fact, Henry Sidgwick, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge, maintained that both federal and confederal unions could be classified as actual federations since they both represented two stages in the development of "federality".[70] Drawing a sharp distinction, he stated, was not a simple task, since federality — defined as 'the balanced combination of "unity of the whole aggregate" with "separateness of parts"' — could manifest itself in many ways.[71]

The greatest merit of federalism, it was argued in Victorian Britain, was its ability to keep large states together. Indeed, the idea that large states were not only economically, militarily and politically more viable — and therefore less likely to upset the cherished balance of power amongst European nations — but generally more capable of commanding prestige and creating a sense of pride amongst its people became widely accepted in the second half of the nineteenth century.[72] They were, argued Freeman, better suited for hindering and reducing the severity of domestic and international conflicts, lessening local prejudices, and securing order, stability, peace, and national unity.[73] 'There can be little doubt', he stated, 'that the balance of advantages lies in favour of the modern system of large states'.[74] Alfred Zimmern, a close associate of both *The New Europe* and *The Round Table* groups, likewise concluded that 'modern mankind is bound to the chariot of industrial development and large-scale organisation'.[75] This is where federalism came to the rescue; its greatest advantage, noted James Bryce, a Gladstonian Liberal and a Regius Professor of Civil Law at Oxford, was its ability to aid the development of 'new and vast' countries.[76] As an inherently flexible mode of governance where the respect for diversity is a pivotal feature, it supplied the best means of building large polities when racial, linguistic or ethnic divisions stood in the way of consolidation. Likewise, it was regularly conceptualised as an effective peace-keeping mechanism. For instance, Herbert Spencer was convinced that since humanity consistently progressed in the direction of closer cohesion and heterogeneity, it was inevitable for the future to take a federal shape. A federation of the highest nations,' he asserted, 'exercising supreme authority […], may, by forbidding wars between any of its constituent nations, put an end to the re-barbarization which is continually undoing civilisation'.[77] Similarly, John Hobson, a Liberal journalist and economist famous for his critique of imperialism, drew explicit lines between maintenance of 'reasonable security for good order and civilisation in the world' and the proliferation of the global application of federalism.[78] It was only by the 'bold' application of the federal principle, concurred Sir John Marriott, a Lecturer in Modern History at Oxford, 'that we can at the same time secure the independence of the smaller nations and further the cause of international peace'.[79]

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[67] These are: unions, constitutionally decentralised unions, confederations, federacies, associated states, condominiums, leagues, joint functional authorities and hybrids. For more detail, see Ronald L. Watts, *Comparing Federal Systems in the 1990s*, (Kingston, ON: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, Queen's University, 1996), pp. 8-9.

[68] Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 97.

[69] Edward A. Freeman, *History of Federal Government in Greece and Italy*, (London: Macmillan and Co.), pp. 7-9.

[70] Henry Sidgwick, *The Development of European Polity*, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1920), p. 433.

[71] Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics*, 2nd edn, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1987), p. 532.

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[72] See Georgios Varouxakis, ''Great' versus 'small' nations: size and national greatness in Victorian political thought', in *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Duncan Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 136-58.

[73] Freeman, *Federal Government*, pp. 61-64.

[74] Freeman, *Federal Government*, p. 67.

[75] Alfred E. Zimmern, *The Prospects of Democracy and Other Essays*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 124.

[76] James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 3rd edn, (London: Macmillan and Co, 1893), p. 351.

[77] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. 3 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), p. 610.

Freeman, on the other hand, suggested that federalism provided small nations with the best means to achieve self-determination and form a stable state. This, he believed, was particularly applicable to South-Eastern Europe. Freeman argued that once the ethnic groups of the Balkans finally managed to liberate themselves from 'the Turkish horde', the only way they will be able to retain this independence was by forming a federation.[80] Otherwise, they would just be 'fettered down by some centralising Monarchy', thereby merely substituting 'a Christian for an Infidel master'.[81] Several decades later, British observers would voice similar arguments in regard to Austro-Hungarian national groups. 'The future', argued historian J. Ellis Barker, 'and especially economic future, probably belongs to the great nations'.[82] However, this did not mean that small nations could not exist. On the contrary, they could 'live and prosper by voluntary co-operation', concluding arrangements for mutual defence.[83] Federalism, he asserted, 'may provide the bond which Habsburg absolutism, Habsburg selfishness, and Habsburg tyranny failed to create'.[84] 'Whenever possible, and on as large a scale as possible', a *New Europe* article from September 1918 concluded, 'the small nations of the world, acting in groups, should create for themselves a federal framework within which freedom for all can be achieved'.[85]

It is thus easy to see why federalism would be seen as a suitable solution for Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in 1920s and 1930s, both for its capacity to keep together large polities and to keep peace. However, given the ambiguity over what constituted federality at that time, federalism was regularly equated with other concepts, such as decentralisation, devolution, or autonomism. Indeed, John Seeley, a prominent advocate of the Greater Britain idea, precisely argued that 'every political union which has not sufficient central power to deserve the name of a unitary state must in our system be called federal'.[86] In the language of the Victorians and those who succeeded them, it was not always explicitly the presence of strict federal structures that signified in practice the existence of federalism, but rather the complete absence of centralisation. This, John Kendle notes, was particularly common in the discussions on the Irish Question and broader imperial issue, where British policymakers would utilise federalism, autonomy, or Home Rule interchangeably to describe virtually any reform which suggested some form of power distribution away from Westminster to provincial governments.[87] In other words, there was very little regard for the fact that all these terms meant very different things in practice, and either signified far more or far less than devolution of legislative powers. So long as all of the decision-making power was not solely in the hand of the central authorities, it did not matter much whether a system was "truly" federal in the sense that Wheare's federal principle was strictly applied.

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[78] John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study*, (New York: James Porr & Company, 1902), p. 351.
[79] John A. R. Marriott, 'Big States and Small Nations', *Fortnightly Review,* 97. 579 (1915), 382-93 (p. 393).
[80] Freeman, *Federal Government*, p. 555.
[81] Ibid. For Freeman's racial ideas and views on the Ottoman Empire, see C. J. W. Parker, 'The Failure of Liberal Racialism: The Racial Ideas of E. A. Freeman', *The Historical Journal,* 24. 4 (1981), 825-46.
[82] J. Ellis Barker, *The Great Problems of British Statesmanship*, (London: John Murray, 1917), p. 144.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Barker, *Statesmanship*, p. 145.
[85] [Anon]., 'Through Liberation to the New Commonwealth', *The New Europe,* 8. 99 (1918), 169-72 (p. 171).

This confusing use of terms is worth stressing here, as the tendency to replace federalism with other similar, yet very different, concepts and organisational principles will feature prominently in British discussions on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional organisation. Indeed, whilst British policymakers would regularly advocate for a federal solution, it is important to remember that what they meant in practice was a decentralised union. In fact, as the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, what they often had in mind was an arrangement that closely resembled that of the United Kingdom, where Slovakia and Croatia were to obtain a similar status to Scotland or Ireland. This favouritism for decentralisation is not surprising. Though federalism — at least in the way that it would be defined nowadays — certainly gained in popularity over the course of the nineteenth century, it was far from universally eulogised.[88] Many of its critics — the most influential being Albert Venn Dicey, whose works, as William Gummow noted, managed to give federalism 'a bad press in the United Kingdom for over a century' — argued that it was essentially a weak form of government.[89] Its divided sovereignty, he argued, made it not only more susceptible to various centrifugal forces but would lead to divided loyalties which would then serve to pull the polity apart from the inside; it was, as he put it, 'a certain waste of energy'.[90]

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[86] John R. Seeley, *Introduction to Political Science: Two Series of Lectures*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), pp. 98-99.

[87] John Kendle, *Ireland and the Federal Solution: The Debate over the United Kingdom Constitution, 1870-1921*, (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 236.

The impact of Dicey's scathing critique should not be understated, as it left a permanent mark on how federalism was viewed in Britain. It effectively curated the image that a federal government with its divided sovereignty was essentially a weak form of government, fragile and unable to withstand centrifugal pressures that would draw a country apart.[91] The implications of such arguments went beyond the realm of academia or intellectual theorising. As Kendle points out, this belief in the supremacy of centralised power also translated into policymaking. Indeed, when British politicians spoke of federalism (at least in the context of the United Kingdom), they usually meant no more than 'the devolution of certain defined legislative powers to regional or national or provincial parliaments'.[92] By tying unitarism to the notion of "the strength of the state", it helped reinforce the idea that central authority should always be preserved when possible, even in cases where British officials blatantly favoured a federal-like scheme. It is then perhaps not surprising that it was the British model — an essentially unitary state where sovereignty rested with the central government whilst devolving limited legislative powers to other units — that emerged as a happy medium that Foreign Office officials would regularly prescribe when faced with the issue of constitutional organisation in ethnically-diverse countries.

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[88] For an analysis of nineteenth-century British political thought, see Chapter Two in John Kendle, *Federal Britain: A History* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 18-36.
[89] William M. C. Gummow, *Change and Continuity: Statute, Equity, and Federalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 71-72.
[90] Albert V. Dicey, *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (Indianapolis: Liberty/Classics, 1882), pp. 97-98. See also See Albert V. Dicey, *England's Case against Home Rule,* 2nd end (London: John Murray, 1886).
[91] Kendle, *Ireland*, p. 24.
[92] Kendle, *Ireland*, p. 236.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

This thesis is composed of four main chapters. Chapter Two primarily deals with British dealings with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav emigres between 1914 and 1918, as well as providing an overview of what British officials knew of the peoples and the politics of those lands prior to the Sarajevo assassinations. It provides a basis for analysing the long-lasting impact that initial impressions of Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, and Croats had on how the Foreign Office would come to approach their relations throughout the 1920s and 1930s. It also demonstrates how prevalent federalist ideas were in British discourse about East Central Europe prior to the formation of both states, further underlining a point about the continuous role the concept played in British political discourse when it came to multi-national states.

Chapter Three looks at Britain’s policy towards Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the 1920s. This was a particularly volatile time in the history of both countries, which saw them establish the constitutional and organisational foundations and the crystallisation of the conflict between the main state-constitutive nationalities over the dichotomy between federalism and centralism. Given how much this conflict shaped their internal political landscape, it was also a topic that was extensively tackled by the Foreign Office, the British press, as well as other non-governmental experts. It is suggested here that attitudes towards federalisation were primarily guided by London’s perception of its capacity to act as a stabilising force in post-war East Central Europe. This becomes particularly apparent when comparing Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Both Prague and Belgrade instituted heavily centralised systems yet British views of the two differed greatly based on how internally stable the two states seemed to be at the time. It thus suggests that rather than being regarded as a universal remedy for all multi-national states, federalism was at the time still regarded in Britain only as a solution to be employed when all other alternatives have been exhausted. Moreover, it further sheds light on the impact that the prejudice established prior to and during the Great War had on these attitudes, highlighting that the majority of Foreign Office debates on the Czech and Slovak and Serb and Croat conflicts over federalisation, were couched in the language of stereotypes that they attributed to each of those groups.

Chapters Four and Five tackle the 1930s, a period which culminated with the Munich Conference, the break-up of Czechoslovakia and the creation of an autonomous Croatian unit within Yugoslavia. Chapter Four largely stresses the importance that the attitudes of diplomats appointed to these countries had on the formation of Whitehall's attitudes. Both Sir Joseph Addison, the British Minister to Prague, and Sir Nevile Henderson, his Yugoslav counterpart, were prejudiced against different nationalities that lived in the two states and this had a profound influence on how they approached these states' constitutional organisation. Chapter Five in turn focuses predominantly on the situation in Czechoslovakia and analyses different solutions that were considered by the Foreign Office. It also examines how British officials reacted to the greater decentralisation of Yugoslavia, particularly in light of broader geopolitical circumstances in 1938-1939. The two chapters further underline the consistency in how federalism was viewed in regard to its ability to promote internal stability, which became particularly apparent in the Czechoslovak case following the strengthening of the Sudeten German question. Moreover, they also demonstrate the general misunderstanding of what the term itself meant in practice, often mistakenly used to actually imply mere autonomy or regional decentralisation. This highlights how poor London's overall grasp of the countries' political situation and ethnic composition remained, even after a decade of extensively studying their affairs.

Chapter 2 Great Britain and the Slavs of Austria-Hungary: British perception of the Czechoslovaks and Yugoslavs before 1918

2.1 Introduction

As Hugh Seton-Watson remarked in the introduction to his 1945 monograph on East Central Europe:

> Between Germany and Russia live a hundred million people. A few hundred miles separate them from the shores of Britain, but to the British people, which is aware of the existence of Zulus and Malays, Maoris and Afridis, they are unknown. […] When Mr Chamberlain spoke of the Czechoslovaks as 'people of whom we know nothing', he was telling the truth and he was speaking for the British people.[93]

Whilst seemingly a rather parochial attitude, it is certainly not a surprising one. Even though both the Czechoslovak Republic and the Yugoslav Kingdom had existed on the map of Europe for nearly two decades by that point, to an average or even a well-educated individual, they were still novel, unfamiliar creations. Indeed, Sir Nevile Henderson, the British Minister to Yugoslavia from 1929 to 1935, once complained about the number of letters he received that were 'addressed to Belgrade, Budapest or Bucharest, Yugoslavia'.[94] As he explained, 'all three began with a "B" and were more or less in that part of the world, and who cared, anyway?'.[95] The fact that such ignorance remained one of the most pervasive features of British views of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia even after twenty years had passed since their unification perhaps says enough about just how little was known about these peoples prior to 1918. Indeed, with the exception of a handful of scholars who actively travelled and kept up with the domestic developments in Austria-Hungary, the affairs and aspirations of many peoples that found themselves under the Habsburg sceptre were far from a well-known subject.

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[93] Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918-1941* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. xv.

[94] Nevile Henderson, *Water Under the Bridges* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1945), p. 170.

[95] Ibid.

For the most part, the attitudes towards the two states that emerged during the First World War were informed by a variety of pre-existing ethnic, religious and cultural stereotypes and prejudices which would come to play an important role in the process of formulating British foreign policy towards Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. This chapter explores how these preconceptions about Czechoslovak and Yugoslav 'nation-states' shaped British stances towards the constitutional orders of the two countries. The first section briefly focuses on the debates concerning the constitutional re-organisation of Austria-Hungary. Not only did these closely touch upon the South Slav Question and the idea of Yugoslav unification, but they also shed some light on how the federal system of governance was understood in pre-war Britain, particularly with respect to multi-national states. The second section goes on to analyse wartime discussions on the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. More explicitly, it tackles the issue of their internal structure and examines the influence that underlying assumptions about Czech-Slovak and Serb-Croat relations had on the formation of the Foreign Office's attitudes towards their problems. By exploring the stereotypes attached to each of these national groups alongside other important political developments, this chapter demonstrates that British support for the implementation of a federal solution was not determined by an in-depth understanding of Czech-Slovak and Serb-Croat dynamics but was instead a product of greater familiarity and favouritism for one group over another.

2.2 British observers and the reorganisation of the Dual Monarchy

In October 1918, British newspapers widely reported on Emperor Karl's failed attempt to federalise Austria-Hungary as the last-ditch effort to save it.[96] Yet, the topic of how it should be reorganised was broached by British scholars, journalist, travellers, and politicians long before that. Prior to 1914, the question of whether Austria-Hungary should survive was never posed in British academic circles; the answer was always a resounding yes. ‘There is a general consensus of opinion’, Geoffrey Drage noted in 1909, ‘that the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is a European necessity’.[97] It was commonly argued at the time that the cause of the stability of the continent was best served by the existence of a strong, unified state in Central Europe. As Seton-Watson wrote in 1907, the Habsburg Empire ‘forms the pivot of European politics’ whose disappearance would ‘deal a fatal blow to the balance of power’.[98] At the same time, however, it was also recognised that the growing dissatisfaction and unrest amongst its various ethnic groups, each with its own territorial demands and national aspirations, did much to destabilise this pivot and the entire region alongside it. This, it was argued, was a pressing issue that had to be resolved swiftly and effectively if equilibrium in Europe was to be maintained, as the existence of frustrated subject nationalities was far from compatible with the concept of a consolidated, unified Dual Monarchy that was essential to the preservation of the European *status quo.*

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[96] 'The Federation of Austria', *The Times,* 18 October 1918, p. 6; 'Federalisation of Austria: The Emperor's Manifesto', *The Scotsman,* 18 October 1918, p. 5; 'Reconstruction of Austria', *The Times,* 19 October 1918, p. 5; 'Austria's Break Up', *The Daily Telegraph,* 19 October 1918, p. 8; 'Austria Breaking Up: States demanding Independence — Federation Scheme', *Manchester Guardian,* 18 October 1918, p. 5; 'A Federal Austria?', *Manchester Guardian,* 19 October 1918, p. 6; 'The Effort to Reunite Austria: Karl's Manifesto', *Manchester Guardian,* 19 October 1918, p. 7; 'Pro-Ally Hungarians', *Daily Mail,* 19 October 1918, p. 3; 'Austrian Plea for Peace', *The Times,* 29 October 1918, p. 6;

In their attempt to reconcile the two, most British observers that did concern themselves with the problems of Austria-Hungary’s nationalities recommended the reorganisation of the state. But on what principle? Centralisation was unsurprisingly immediately ruled out given that it was precisely the failure of the strict centralising policy that the authorities pursued so vigorously in the aftermath of the 1848-1849 revolutions that resulted in the implementation of the existing dualist system in 1867. The only other option was, of course, further decentralisation, particularly if it would help pacify increasingly popular national movements that clamoured for greater autonomy and self-rule. Here, Seton-Watson believed that the British model could come to the rescue. This suggestion, of course, was not coincidental, for Seton-Watson saw the political union between Scotland and England as definitive evidence that it was possible to have a stable state where provincial and cultural autonomy could be reconciled with broader national unity.[99] What was required in Austria-Hungary, he argued, was a system that would act as

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[97] Geoffrey Drage, *Austria-Hungary* (London: John Murray, 1909), p. 592.
[98] R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Future of Austria-Hungary and the Attitude of the Great Powers* (London: Archibald Constable & Co. Ltd, 1907), p. 4.

> a compromise between Centralism and Federalism, by which the various races […] would attain full scope for national development, while a central Parliament […] would give expression to a strong executive for joint affairs and render possible the unification of foreign policy.[100]

This advocacy for further decentralisation was primarily brought on by his long-standing belief that the survival of the Habsburg Empire depended on the resolution of the South Slav question, which he already labelled in 1909 as 'the decisive problem of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.'[101] Though the term "South Slav" technically referred to many more groups than just Serbs and Croats, for Seton-Watson and his contemporaries their relationship was the crux of this problem.[102] At the time, it was not uncommon for the two to be treated as two separate branches of an identical race, 'two kindred Slavonic tribes' and 'inseparable elements in the life of a single nation'.[103] Indeed, most works on the South Slavs produced in Britain before and during the First World War described the Serbs and the Croats as 'the two halves' of the same nationality, divided solely by their religion, alphabet and separate political history.[104] Even their names ("Srb" and "Hrvat"), claimed Seton-Watson, were proven to have derived from the same root; their significance was merely geographical.[105] Ethnologically, explained A. H. E. Taylor, they were 'one people, speaking one language, with but slight tribal differences'.[106] Additionally, even when any dissimilarities were acknowledged, they were quickly dismissed as exaggerated, artificial or simply unimportant; despite the Austrian and Ottoman attempts to sow discord between them, 'these long dispersed fragments of the Serbian race', argued Harold Temperley in his *History of Serbia*, unequivocally shared 'the feeling of unity of nationality and sympathy'.[107]

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[99] Mark Cornwall, 'R. W. Seton-Watson and Nation-Building Clashes in Late Habsburg Space', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 100/ 1 (2022): 65-94.

[100] SSEES, SEW/1/1/1, R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Future of the Habsburg Monarchy: Disruption or Reform? - The Bankruptcy of the Dual System', 1914.

[101] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Hungarian Crisis and the Southern Slavs', *The Spectator,* 1909, 547-49 (p. 548).

[102] R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Habsburg Monarchy* (London: Constable&Co., 1911), p. 2. Furthermore, as James Evans points out, aside from including the national groups that would later come to form Yugoslavia, the term South Slav also included the Bulgarians in the pre-First World War period. Evans, *Negotiating*, p. 16. See Chapter One for an excellent discussion on British perceptions of the so-called Yugoslav "race".

[103] Seton-Watson, *Southern Slav*, p. 2; p. 339.

[104] Nevill Forbes, *The Southern Slavs* (Lond on: Oxford University Press, 1914-1915), p. 16.

[105] Seton-Watson, *Southern Slav*, p. 2; Nevill Forbes and others, *The Balkans: A History of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Rumania, Turke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), p. 80.

[106] A. H. E. Taylor, *The Future of the Southern Slavs* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1917), p. 250. See also H. H. Howorth, 'The Spread of the Slaves. Part I: The Croats', *The Journal of Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,* 7 (1878), 324-341.

To those British scholars with some level of understanding of South Slav affairs, it thus seemed as though the union of this common Serbo-Croat "race" under one government was not a matter of *if* but *when* and, more importantly, *how*. There were two possible answers to this problem: the unification could be attained either under the aegis of the Karađorđević dynasty and the expansion of the Serbian Kingdom, or under the Habsburg sceptre in a trialist Austria-Hungary.[108] In the era before the Great War, Seton-Watson firmly supported the latter. The former, pan-Serb option would mean 'the triumph of Eastern over Western culture' and deal a 'fatal blow to progress and modern development throughout the Balkans' — an attitude which went hand-in-hand with a belief in Austria's civilising mission in the region.[109] In fact, he insisted that anything but the Austrian solution would 'involve a universal war and an upheaval such as Europe has not seen since the days of Napoleon'.[110] A trialist solution whereby the South Slavs would be granted a broad autonomy was therefore not only a more pragmatic but also a more prudent policy. Croatia, he argued, was to Hungary what Ireland was to the United Kingdom.[111] It is worth noting here that though Ireland would emerge as a useful point of reference on how a devolutionary solution (or lack thereof) might play out in the Yugoslav setting during the 1920s, here, it primarily served an illustrative purpose to help clarify the position of Habsburg or Ottoman subject nationalities to an average reader with a presumably limited understanding of regional affairs. As the only genuine European parallel to what Ireland's position would be under the system of Home Rule, Croat-Magyar relations provided an accurate insight into how Ireland *should not* be treated and 'how ineffectual are repression and lack of sympathy in the solution of any national or racial question'.[112] For trialism to succeed, all that was needed was for Viennese statesmen to reject this narrow and oppressive conception of the state as advocated by the Magyars and to instead emulate the British one,

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[107] Harold W. V. Temperley, *History of Serbia* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1919), pp. 6-7. Any Serb-Croat differences were often attributed to foreign powers and their deliberate attempts to keep two brotherly nations apart in order to prevent the emergence of a strong South Slav state. A popular trope at the time, it was regularly employed by academics, journalists, and governmental officials alike to account for complete absence of any South Slav union in history. Indeed, a PID report from 1918 precisely noted that 'the Hapsburg policy of "divide and rule" has never been so clearly exemplified as in the case of the Yugoslavs'. TNA, War Cabinet and Cabinet: Memoranda (GT, CP and G War Series) [hereafter CAB 24], CAB 24/54/4830, Monthly Report, 10 June 1918.

[108] Seton-Watson, 'Hungarian Crisis', p. 549.

[109] Seton-Watson, *Southern Slav*, pp. 336-37.

[110] Seton-Watson, 'Hungarian Crisis', p. 549.

[111] For a detailed analysis of the role of Ireland in conceptualising the Balkans in Victorian Britain, see James Andrew Perkins, 'British liberalism and the Balkans, c. 1875-1925' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birckbeck, University of London, 2014), pp. 78-88.

> which takes a delight in creating new nations and combining an endless diversity of race and type with the essential unity which encourages rather than hampers individuality.[113]

Prior to 1914 — that is, prior to the time Seton-Watson came around to the view that the future of South Slavs rested in union with Serbia — trialism thus supplied the way of territorially uniting these lands without completely stifling their cultural or religious differences. Not only that, but it also helped facilitate what he considered to be the ideal solution for this portion of the world: the creation of a Yugoslav nationality which would 'transcend the sense of racial individuality' and unite the peoples of the southern part of the Monarchy.[114] Indeed, he rejected the point of view of Croatian nationalists whose claim to greater autonomy within Austria-Hungary rested on the tradition of 'historic state rights' and instead endorsed it on the principle of South Slav unity and reciprocity. For him, the lands inhabited by Serbs and Croats formed 'a natural geographical unit and is populated by a homogeneous population, speaking a single language, [that] has been split up by an unkindly fate into a large number of purely artificial fragments'; any narrowly nationalistic ideologies that only focused on one of these "kindred races" rather than championing what he believed to be the natural progress of historic evolution was thus anathema to him.[115]

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[112] Seton-Watson, *Southern Slav*, p. ix.
[113] Ibid., p. 340.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., p. 336.

In fact, most British scholars familiar with the situation in East Central Europe and particularly the Magyars' repressive treatment of their subject nationalities thought that some form of decentralisation was the best remedy for the preservation of the Dual Monarchy. As Harry Hanak points out, this solution was supported by a number of Seton-Watson's contemporaries, the two most influential being Henry Noel Brailsford and Noel Buxton.[116] Both Brailsford and Buxton favoured the idea of Home Rule for the South Slavs of the Dual Monarchy.[117] Like Seton-Watson, they feared that the break-up of Austria-Hungary would lead to the spread of illiberalism, as it would enable Russia to emerge as the most dominant power in the Balkans.[118] Though neither Austrian nor Russian dominance in the region was optimal, both Brailsford and Buxton argued that 'the more tolerant and more cultured German influence' of the Habsburg empire was certainly a more favourable alternative.[119] Furthermore, Brailsford warned that dismemberment would achieve little aside from creating 'several "Ulsters" as perplexing and insurgent as our own'.[120] Dismembered Austria was seen as the antithesis of a peaceful Europe, as these scholars speculated that such an outcome would primarily lead to economic disarray, reduced protection for minority groups, and German expansionism.[121] At the same time, however, they also concurred that the dualist structure could not remain unchanged. What was required was a federal solution which could simultaneously provide self-determination to various races whilst ensuring that the 'inevitable minorities' were still adequately protected.[122] Austria-Hungary, Buxton asserted, was 'a model of what the Balkans should be' and its frontiers were worth preserving for the sake of peace and progress; as far as nationalities were concerned, it was a matter that should be settled through internal reforms.[123] It was not the disintegration of the Monarchy but federalisation, he adamantly claimed, that was 'most in harmony with a settlement aimed at securing stability in the future'.[124]

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[116] For a detailed discussion on the opposition to the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary in Britain, see Chapter Six in Hanak, *Britain*, pp. 135-73; and Chapter Seven in Géza Jeszenszky, *Lost Prestige: Hungary's Changing Image in Britain 1894-1918* (La Vergne: Helena History Press LLC, 2020), pp. 212-237.

[117] Henry Noel Brailsford, *The War of Steel and Gold: A Study of the Armed Peace*, 10th edn (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1918), p. 313.

[118] Henry Noel Brailsford, 'The Empire of the East', *The Contemporary Review,* 106 (1914), 334-45; Noel Buxton, 'The Liberation of Bohemia', *New Statesman,* 8. 198 (1917), 372.

[119] Brailsford, 'Empire', p. 344.

[120] Henry Noel Brailsford, 'The New Spirit in Austria', *The Contemporary Review*, 112 (1917), 130-38 (p. 132).

[121] Noel Buxton, 'The Entente and the Allies of Germany', *The Contemporary Review,* 113 (1918), 22-28 (p. 28).

[122] Interestingly, just as the Foreign Office argued years later in the case of Yugoslavia, Brailsford insisted that the ideal federation would be the one based on 'the grouping of nationalities' rather than 'the restoration of ancient historical units'. Brailsford, 'Spirit', p. 134.

Of course, these discussions were primarily held within the context of Austria-Hungary. However, the fact that federal re-organisation was suggested by the vast majority of observers in Britain familiar with its domestic problems does demonstrate that on the eve of the First World War, federalism was generally accepted as the most viable option for multi-national, unstable states. In a situation where certain national groups clamoured for recognition of their national particularism, it was a solution that would provide them with just enough autonomy without risking dismemberment, thereby protecting not only the country itself but also the general geopolitical equilibrium of power. It is thus worth keeping in mind that firstly, British officials were not entirely unfamiliar with the concept of federalism and how it could potentially be applied in East Central Europe by the time they were faced with the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in 1918. More importantly, however, this brief overview also shows that whether the federal principle would have been recommended as the basis for the future constitutional arrangement for either Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia would have also been profoundly influenced by how British observers at the time perceived the relationship between their national groups and particularly, their ability to weld together the state into one Czechoslovak or Yugoslav nationality. This will be explored in the following section.

2.3 Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia: From Imagination to Creation, 1914-1918

> When, in far-off Serbia, an archduke was assassinated, it seemed such a faraway incident—nothing that concerned us. After all, in the Balkans people were always being assassinated.

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[123] Noel Buxton, 'Austria-Hungary and the Balkans', *The Atlantic Monthly (1857-1932),* 121. 3 (1918), 370-74 (p. 371).

[124] Buxton, 'Entente', p. 28.

> That it should touch us here in England seemed quite incredible—and I speak here not only for myself but for almost everyone else.[125]

As we have seen, before 1914, precious little was known in Britain about various national groups of the Habsburg empire. Even in the Foreign Office, very few had even heard of peoples such as Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, or Croats. Not only that, but certainly none of these officials understood their history, national aspirations, and territorial demands enough to even be able adequately to grapple with fairly novel concepts of Czechoslovakism and Yugoslavism. Nevertheless, the outbreak of the war dictated that British officials had to familiarise themselves with these peoples and their ideas very quickly, particularly as their attention began to be increasingly drawn to the causes of Czechoslovak and South Slav unification by the émigré ‘Czechoslovaks’ and ‘Yugoslavs’ who found themselves in London at the time. Gathered around the Czech Foreign Committee (renamed the Czechoslovak National Council in 1916) and the Yugoslav Committee (JO), these exiles spent the greater part of the war conducting public independence campaigns aimed at the Allied recognition of their national programmes. Ready to make a complete break with Vienna, both advocated for the destruction of Austria-Hungary, described by Masaryk as ‘the Catholic Turkey’, and the creation of their own independent states in the Dual Monarchy’s stead.[126] For the most part, their appeal to Whitehall relied less on the merits of the principle of national self-determination and more on the premise that only through liberation of oppressed nationalities would Britain be able to bring an end to German domination in Europe, thereby helping restore peace and order and cultivate a more democratic East Central Europe.[127]

Both organisations owed much of their success in Britain to the activities of their prominent patrons, such as Seton-Watson and Wickham Steed. They were, of course, not the only ones, as there were numerous contemporaries who shared this point of view; their contributions, however, were relatively minor by comparison and their views often echoed Seton-Watson and

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[125] Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1977), p. 211.
[126] Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia' in Seton-Watson, *Masaryk*, p. 123.
[127] Ibid., p. 134.; TNA, Cabinet Office: Photographic Copies of Cabinet Papers [hereafter CAB 37], CAB 37/123/46, Frano Supilo, Memorandum Respecting the Southern Slavs, 7 January 1915.

Steed's sentiments. Aside from helping facilitate a more sympathetic view of Habsburg subject nationalities, they also acted as intermediaries between Czechoslovak and Yugoslav representatives and Whitehall.[128] Arguing in favour of reorganising Europe according to the "principle of nationality", the duo persistently emphasised the necessity of Britain supporting Czechoslovak and Yugoslav independence claims in their private correspondence, popular press articles, and academic publications. Having launched a scorching attack on Austria-Hungary, Steed was particularly committed to demonstrating the value behind the establishment of the two states. 'The future equilibrium of Europe' and the permanent resolution of the Austrian question, he argued, depended on the creation of 'an ethnically complete Serbo-Croatia' or Yugoslavia, the 'chief cornerstone of any solid and lasting European reconstruction'.[129] Likewise, Seton-Watson argued that along with constituting 'one of the most valuable assets in the struggle against pan-Germanism', Bohemia also had the potential of acting as an 'intermediary between Russia and Britain', presenting the Russians with 'the ideas of the West in suitable Slavonic garb'.[130] Moreover, as the editor of the weekly journal *The New Europe,* Seton-Watson also provided a platform for both the members of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav Committees to widely espouse their arguments on the dismemberment of Austria-Hungary and their own conception of what the future Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states should look like.

Despite these efforts, however, it was not until the dying days of the War that the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was brought to the policy-making table. Indeed, it was not until the summer of 1918 that such an outcome was given greater consideration. This rather dramatic change in attitude was largely a reflection of changing British policy towards the Dual Monarchy as a whole. Up to that point, Whitehall was simply unwilling to pledge public support for Czechoslovak and Yugoslav aspirations. Any governmental endorsement of their causes, it was feared, would extinguish all hopes of concluding a separate peace treaty with the Habsburgs and officially commit Britain to the plan for Austria's disintegration — something British authorities would not even consider an option viable enough that it could be publicly endorsed until April 1918.[131] Though they were, as Kenneth Calder points out, not entirely indifferent to the future of East Central Europe, they did not have any specific approach in mind when it came to satisfying the myriad of national groups that competed and existed in that space.[132] For the greater part of the War, the only real priority was to find a solution that would not be conducive to the territorial expansion and military growth of the Central Powers.[133] However, by October 1918, as the idea of concluding a separate peace with Austria was abandoned and the belief that the Monarchy could be preserved through some constitutional reform gradually ruled out, it became clear that united Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were, at least on-ground, somewhat accomplished facts. Though public recognition was still absent, by the time July rolled around, a PID memo had already asserted that Britain had extended 'definite recognition of the strength and solidity of the Czech and Yugo-Slav national movements in favour of unity and independence'.[134]

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[128] This was particularly true of Seton-Watson, who introduced both Tomáš Masaryk and Frano Supilo, one of the leaders of the JO, to George Clerk, the head of the War Department, numerous Whitehall officials as well as the Intelligence Service. Christopher Seton Watson, 'Czechs, Poles and Yugoslavs in London, 1914-1918', in *Actes du colloque de Rome (3-5 mars 1988)*, (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1991), 277-93 (pp. 281-82).

[129] Henry Wickham Steed, 'A Programme for Peace', *The Edinburgh Review*, 223. 456 (1916), 373-92 (p. 387); Henry Wickham Steed, 'Austria and Europe', *The Edinburgh Review*, 225. 459 (1917), 1-22 (p. 16).

[130] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Pan-German Plan and its Antidote', *The Contemporary Review*, 109 (1916), 422-28 (p. 424); R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Future of Bohemia*, (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1915), p. 31. Similar arguments were also echoed by Lewis Namier. See Paul Latawski, 'Lewis Namier and the Criteria of State-Building: The Construction of Czechoslovakia and Poland 1915-1920', in *Grossbritannien*, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 143-51.

More importantly, as the proclamation of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states began looming large on the horizon during the autumn of 1918, Foreign Office officials were finally forced to reckon with the issue of the constitutional structure of the two states. This, however, was a rather formidable task. Given that the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was no more than wishful thinking in 1914, the Foreign Office had absolutely no reason to concern itself with the issue of their internal organisation up to that point. The only notable exception to this trend was the Paget-Tyrell Memorandum submitted in the summer of 1916 which only superficially touched upon the question of the arrangement the two states could potentially adopt. Indeed, when it came to Czechoslovakia, the country was not even explicitly mentioned. Instead, the authors simply concerned themselves with Bohemia, suggesting that it should be ‘tacked on to the Kingdom of Poland’ as a solution ‘desired both by far-seeing Czechs and Poles’.[135] Slovakia, unsurprisingly, was entirely ignored, revealing in fact how little was known of the concept of Czechoslovakism and the fact that it encompassed the Slovaks. Indeed, the usage of the term “Bohemia” to describe the future Czechoslovak state is rather indicative of how the First Republic and its national groups were conceptualised at the time. As far as Yugoslavia was concerned, on the other hand, the memo was slightly more specific and even displayed a level of understanding about the relations between the Habsburg South Slavs and their Serbian counterparts, envisaging ‘the union of Serbia, Montenegro and the Southern Slavs into one strong federation of States with a view to its forming a barrier to any German advance towards the East’.[136] Such a system, it was noted, was in tune with popular opinion in southern Habsburg lands, which wanted to become a part of a joint state but on their own terms; the idea of direct incorporation into Serbia was completely ‘repugnant to Yugoslav conceptions of their own future’.[137] What the Serbian Government thought about this proposed arrangement, however, was entirely neglected, further highlighting the blinkered approach taken by Paget and Tyrell in coming up with these solutions.

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[131] Hanak, *Great Britain and Austria-Hungary*, pp. 274-76.

[132] Kenneth J. Calder, *Britain and the Origins of the New Europe 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 108.

[133] Ibid.

[134] TNA, FO 371/4358/212, Memorandum on the Prospects of a Revolution in Austria, July 1918. The Czechoslovak National Council was recognised by the British as the 'trustee' of the future government on 13 August. On the other hand, owing to both Serbian and Italian opposition to any Allied recognition of the JO, the Yugoslavs did not receive official public recognition until June 1919. See Mark Cornwall, *The Undermining of Austria-Hungary: The Battle for Hearts and Minds* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

In any case, beyond such remarks, the issue was not broached in a serious manner again until spring 1918. By then, British officials generally assumed that both states would take a centralist shape, an attitude which largely stemmed from their preconceptions of Czechoslovakia’s and

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[135] Bohemian independence or its unification with a southern Slav state were dismissed as either impractical or too artificial and therefore, temporary. TNA, CAB 24/2/78, ‘Suggested Basis for a Territorial Settlement of Europe’, 7 August 1916.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.

Yugoslavia's state-constitutive nationalities. In both instances, there was a certain vagueness about the relations between these groups as well as their separate national ideologies and aspirations. This tendency was particularly apparent in the case of Czechoslovakia, where there was a distinct contrast between how the Czechs and the Slovaks were perceived. Despite Seton-Watson's claim that 'ignorance of Bohemia has been a tradition in this country ever since the days when Shakespeare wrecked a certain famous ship upon its imaginary coasts', the Czechs — or, as they were commonly called at the time, the Bohemians — were not altogether unknown in pre-war Britain.[138] As Steven Beller points out, whilst the wider public was probably not familiar with their existence, there were nevertheless several works that offered an insight into the region's history, culture, or traditions.[139] Seen as the true native peoples of Bohemia, the Czechs were often venerated as an advanced, well-educated, liberal nation. Already in 1903, British author Francis H. E. Palmer wrote that they were 'by far the most capable and progressive of all the Slavonic races'.[140] 'Hardworking and intelligent', the Czechs possessed 'all the qualities required to hold a high place among European nations in art and literature, as well as in commerce and industry'.[141] This view survived unaltered at least until the war, during which it was not only echoed by the likes of Seton-Watson but by British officials themselves.[142] Indeed, a War Office memo on the Czechoslovaks from April 1918 asserted that the Czechs were 'a sturdy independent race, with all the Slav tenacity and power of resistance', 'remarkable as organizers, as industrial workers and capitalists, and remarkable also as Chauvinists'.[143]

When it came to the Slovaks, on the other hand, not only were the British unfamiliar with their affairs but were for the most part entirely indifferent to their existence. Unlike their Czech counterparts, the Slovaks were predominantly regarded as somewhat primitive; they were, as James Bryce had succinctly put it, ‘the less advanced and less politically active race’.[144] For Palmer, the Slovaks could be best described as ‘poor, hard-working, honest, and superstitious’.[145] Though very similar to the Czechs in both race and language, they were ‘physically and intellectually […] inferior to the Czechs properly so called’.[146] This sentiment likewise endured, with a PID memorandum noting as late as 1919 that whereas the Czechs were ‘highly intelligent, as a rule well educated, sceptical and not over-scrupulous’, a typical Slovak was a ‘dull and ignorant peasant, and a devout churchman’, a member of a ‘gifted, but relatively backward race’.[147] Additionally, what further reinforced these pernicious stereotypes was the fact that the Slovaks were often not even mentioned in the earliest proclamations of the Czech émigrés in London. As Edvard Beneš noted in his 1917 *Bohemia’s Case for Independence,* though the term Czechoslovak technically encompassed ‘two branches of the same nation’, these peoples could also just as easily be referred to as ‘the Czechs’.[148] Indeed, the memos submitted to the Foreign Office in the formative wartime years generally referred exclusively to the Czechs and completely ignored the fact that the Slovaks constituted a completely separate national group. Likewise, there was no mention of the Slovaks as an equal state-constitutive group in this new Czechoslovak project. Instead, they were often subsumed under the umbrella of the Czech nation and incorporated within the broader idea of Bohemian unification. Their language was regularly dismissed as a dialect, and their political programme was often simplified as to vaguely imply their wish to be directly assimilated into Bohemia.[149] Even Seton-Watson — arguably the greatest authority on Slovakia in Britain at the time — argued that the Slovaks, the ‘close kinsmen’ of the Czechs, were

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[138] Seton-Watson, *Bohemia*, p. 3.

[139] Beller, 'Bohemia', in *Grossbritannien,* by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 75-86 (p. 84).

[140] Francis H. E. Palmer, *Austro-Hungarian Life in Town and Country* (London: George Newnes, Limited, 1903), p. 54.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Seton-Watson, *Bohemia*, p. 21; Seton-Watson, 'Pan-German', p. 424.

[143] TNA, FO 371/4355/97, The Czecho-Slovak Problem: Summary since 1914, 30 April 1918. Similar descriptions can also be found in the Peace Handbook on Bohemia and Moravia. See Historical Section of the Foreign Office, *Peace Handbook: Austria-Hungary, Part I* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1920), p. 37.

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[144] James Bryce, *Memories of Travel* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1923), p. 103.
[145] Palmer, p. 61.
[146] Palmer, p. 60.
[147] TNA, FO 371/4383/630, Memorandum on the Unrest in Slovakia, 8 November 1919; TNA, FO 371/3525/27919, Gosling to Curzon, 4 February 1919.
[148] Edvard Beneš, *Bohemia's Case for Independence*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1917).
[149] Masaryk, 'Independent Bohemia' in Seton-Watson, *Masaryk*, p. 125; Seton-Watson, *Bohemia*, pp. 26-27; London Czech Committee, *Bohemia's Claim For Freedom* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), p. 35.

‘the essential part of the Bohemian problem’; ‘every reason alike of political, race, and geography’ dictated that they should become a part of the Czech state.[150]

What further took away from the Slovak cause was the so-called Martin Declaration of October 1918, in which Slovak leaders declared that ‘the Slovak Nation is part of the Czecho-Slovak Nation, united in language and in the history of its culture’, thereby further adding to the legitimacy of the Czech argument in the eyes of British policy makers.[151] The situation was slightly complicated by the fact that in May 1918, Masaryk had signed a proclamation in Pittsburgh which recognised the union of Czechs and Slovaks in a joint state and also stated that Slovakia would ‘have her own administrative system, her own diet and her own courts’; this would form the basis of Slovak demands throughout the interwar period.[152] As Carol Skalnik Leff points out, from the perspective of the wartime liberation struggle, both of these documents were produced to enshrine the Czechoslovak national cause with legitimacy. Designed to emphasise collaboration and co-operation, however, both would ultimately become the main source of division. As she concludes, the complete lack of consensus over what was actually being agreed meant that ‘when the time came to sustain a state on the basis of these divergent understandings, the bill for prior obscurity fell due’.[153] Nevertheless, to British observers, whose thinking about the region in 1918 was fairly short-term and concerned only with finding suitable alternatives to populate the European map once the Austro-Hungarian Empire disappeared, the details of Czechoslovakia’s internal arrangement as discussed in the Pittsburgh Agreement merited little attention. All London heard at that point was that unity was desired by all parties involved; the details could ultimately be ironed out later if necessary and as far as British policy makers were concerned, there was nothing to suggest that this would even be a point of contention between the two parts of the new Czechoslovak nation.

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[150] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Issues of War', in *The War and Democracy*, ed. by Robert W. Seton-Watson, J. Dover Wilson, Alfred E. Zimmern and Arthur Greenwood (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1914), pp. 237-98 (pp. 272-73). See also SSEES, SEW 10/1/2, R. W. Seton-Watson, ‘Czech and Slovak’, 28 October 1922.
[151] See ‘Number 4: Declaration of the Slovak Nation’ in Lettrich, pp. 288-89.
[152] See ‘Number 5: Czech-Slovak Agreement’ in Lettrich, pp. 289-90.
[153] Leff, *National Conflict,* p. 38.

There was, in other words, a complete lack of understanding of what kind of position the Slovaks envisaged for themselves in a united Czechoslovakia. Whereas Masaryk and Beneš believed that centralisation supplied the best means of bringing the new state into existence and nationally unifying the country, to the Slovak leaders, being ruled from Prague as just another region could hardly count as the fulfillment of their national aspirations. Though the idea of becoming a part of Czechoslovakia was far from unpopular by 1918, for some nationally-conscious Slovaks, it was paramount that their political and cultural differences from the Czechs to be specifically recognised and protected, fearing that a completely unitary state would essentially lead to the loss of their national identity.[154] Yet, the Slovak point of view was not widely publicised in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the fact that the idea of becoming not more than a region in a heavily centralised country did not appeal to many Slovaks was not articulated anywhere. Instead, primarily owing to the successful campaign conducted in London by the Czechoslovak National Council, many governmental officials in Britain treated Czechoslovakia as first and foremost a Czech national state that happened to encompass other groups that were particularly keen to join them. Indeed, the entrenched view that prevailed in the Foreign Office at the time accurately mirrored the argument presented by the Czech leadership abroad; that is, that treating the Slovaks as a separate national entity was merely a steppingstone to an unstable federation, the strengthening of Czechoslovakia’s non-Slav groups and its hostile irredentist neighbours, and the ultimate collapse of the entire Republic.[155]

It is thus hardly surprising that by the time the creation of Czechoslovakia came to be seen as an inevitable outcome of the war, very few in British governmental circles viewed the Slovaks as a separate nation and arguably all had a very skewed understanding of their demands for some form of autonomy. Indeed, most of the observations on Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1918 simply stressed that if Slovakia remained a part of Hungary, its political existence would be entirely extinguished; exactly how their national identity would be safeguarded in the new Czechoslovak state was left unaddressed.[156] Additionally, the reports that not all Slovaks enthusiastically embraced the idea of a union with the Czechs were explained away solely as a consequence of the activities of the Magyar government, which 'has sternly suppressed all pro-Czech outbursts'.[157] With most wartime proclamations in Britain stressing that 'the Slovaks and the Czechs are at one' and the Slovak voices almost entirely absent from the discussions about Czechoslovak unification, by August 1918, the Foreign Office had assumed that a centralised structure was a solution favoured by all parties involved.[158] Given the vague reputation that the Slovaks acquired in Britain, centralisation seemed to be a more sensible option, as a system that would largely be administered by the better educated, the more qualified and more organised Czechs. Simply put, the question of Czechoslovak internal organisation was not a subject of much debate in 1918 because the vast majority of British officials did not think that this was a contentious issue at the time nor that it would become a source of political instability in the foreseeable future. The Czechoslovak problem, a PID memo argued, was 'extremely simple'.[159] Unlike the Yugoslavs, who still bickered over the issue of joint representation, the Czechoslovaks had no internal complications; in their case, 'the unity and unanimity of the nation' were complete.[160]

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[154] See Róbert Letz a kolektív, *Úsilie Slovákov o autonómiu* (Martin: Matica slovenská, 2019).
[155] Leff, *National Conflict,* pp. 135-136.

The Yugoslav case was, on the other hand, considered to be a lot more complex. As has already been noted, the concept of Serbo-Croat unity had already been popularised in Britain long before the Sarajevo assassinations. However, it was only during the war that the idea of South Slav unification under Serbian leadership gained popularity. Indeed, prior to the Balkan Wars, Serbia had a less than favourable reputation in Britain. Given its turbulent political developments — including the royal assassinations of 1903 — it was often seen as corrupt, barbaric, and primitive. Serbia's culture, claimed Brailsford, was 'backward', its politics 'so parochial and so corrupt', and its economic life 'so primitive and stagnant' that its expansion was surely in nobody's interest.[161] In contrast, Croatia — with its centuries-long ties to the Habsburgs and the more "civilised" cultures of Central Europe — was perceived as the far more cultured part of the Balkan peninsula. As Temperley noted, it was a place where 'Latin and Teutonic influences have penetrated deep into her fibres'.[162] Despite their shortcomings, the Croats, it was commonly argued at the time, were at the very least politically developed enough to be able to rule themselves and establish a functioning administrative and legislative system. As Seton-Watson noted in his 1914 memo to the Foreign Office, 'it is safe to forecast that the more civilised Croats and Slovenes will soon assume a lead in the political life and thought of the new state over their gallant but more primitive Serbian kinsmen'.[163] The Pan-Serbian solution to the South Slav problem was therefore regarded as entirely undesirable, as it was feared that the so-called superior western culture that was fostered in Croatia would quickly be wiped out by an orientalism that permeated the Serbian society — 'a step backwards instead of forwards'.[164]

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[156] TNA, FO 371/4355/68, Sir Ralph Paget, Allen Leeper and Harold Nicolson, Memorandum on South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans, November 1918.; FO 371/3136/177223, Remarks on Captain L.S. Amery's Paper on the Austro-Hungarian Problem, 22 October 1918.

[157] FO 371/4355/97.

[158] TNA, FO 371/4362/267, Fortnightly Report on Czechoslovak Affairs, 2 August 1918.

[159] TNA, FO 371/3135/130680, Appendix to the Memorandum on the Recognition of Czechoslovak Sovereignty, 2 July 1918.

[160] Ibid.

The events of the First World War, however, radically transformed Serbia's image. The Serbian defeat of the Austro-Hungarian invasion in 1914 and its 1915 winter retreat through Kosovo and Albania helped paint the image of a heroic nation, guarding the gateway between civilised Europe and 'the barbarisms of Turkestan and Berlin'.[165] To many British observers, the restoration and eventual expansion of Serbia thus seemed not only a fitting reward but the most logical way to go about the unification of Yugoslavia. The idea that a unitary state under Serbian leadership was the ideal objective was further reinforced following the signing of the Corfu Declaration between the JO and the Serbian Government under Prime Minister Nikola Pašić in July 1917. Referred to by Ante Trumbić of the JO as the South Slav 'Magna Carta', the Pact of Corfu was a joint Serb-Croat-Slovene agreement which endorsed the creation of an independent Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the war.[166] Whilst it clearly stipulated that the new state would become 'a constitutional, democratic, and Parliamentary monarchy' under the Karađorđević dynasty, nowhere did the document actually specify which form of government the country would adopt.[167] In Britain, this omission was not perceived as particularly relevant, as seen from the fact that the reports of Slovene and Croat misgivings about the lack of clarity over their status in the new state were completely brushed off. [168] Indeed, Sir Horace Rumbold's lament that these groups not only viewed Corfu 'as a mere trick of Pašić', but actively opposed his 'centralising and imperialistic tendencies', was lost amid the fanfare.[169] With the exception of 'insignificant factions', Allen W. A. Leeper of the PID's South Eastern Europe section curtly replied, the Pact was welcomed universally by all Yugoslavs.[170]

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[161] Brailsford, 'Empire', p. 339. See also E. J. Dillon, 'Servia and the Rival Dynasties', *The Contemporary Review,* 84 (1903), 131-143. and Seton-Watson to Ivo Lupis-Vukić, 17 October 1909 in *R. W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906-1941*, 2 vols, vol. 1, ed. by Christopher Seton-Watson and Hugh Seton-Watson (London: British Academy, 1976), pp. 51-52.

[162] Temperley, *Serbia*, p. 3.

[163] Seton-Watson to Foreign Office, 1 October 1914 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, eds Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 1, pp. 180-186 (p. 185).

[164] Seton-Watson to Lupis-Vukić, 17 October 1909 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, eds Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 1, p. 52.

Furthermore, the fact that there was no explicit mention of federalism was largely interpreted by Foreign Office officials as an indication that a centralised system was the inferred alternative. This conclusion went hand in hand with the concept of the so-called Yugoslav racial cohesion.[171] Though the Yugoslavs, a memo by Paget, Leeper and Nicolson argued, were historically separated by some 'artificially created' divisions, these differences have now been 'to a very large extent swamped' by 'the idea of racial unity' which could only be preserved in a unitary state.[172] Federalism, they concluded, would simply 'allow the old rivalries to continue'.[173] This assessment was in line with how federalism versus centralism tended to be conceptualised in British political thinking at the time, where latter was seen as the natural way for states with a pronounced or defined national identity to come together. This notion that Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were in fact a single nation was also reflected in the language employed. The case of the Yugoslavs, it was noted, was no different from those of the Italians or the Romanians. Rather than claiming 'the right of national self-determination in the sense of full national independence', these three groups 'merely ask to be allowed to join an existing state organism to which they are attracted by affinity of race and culture'.[174] After all, remarked Harold Nicolson, the Habsburg South Slavs — as opposed to their Czechoslovak and Polish counterparts — 'will not form a distinct state, but will be assimilated to Serbia'.[175]

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[165] Robert G. D. Laffan, *The Guardians of the Gate: Historical Lectures on the Serbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1918), p. 3.
[166] Banac*,* p. 124.
[167] Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, *Jugoslavija 1918-1984.: Zbirka dokumenata* (Beograd: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad", 1985), pp. 51-53.
[168] Unsurprisingly, considering that the Pact not only envisaged the destruction of Austria-Hungary but directly challenged Italian pretensions on the Adriatic and the provisions of the Treaty of London in which Britain was implicated, the reaction of the Cabinet was somewhat subdued. Lord Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at the time, simply remarked that the news of the Corfu Declaration and the ideas contained within it were received 'with great interest and sympathy'. House of Commons, *20th Century House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers* (28 November 1917, vol. 99, cols. 1985-1986) (London: Hansard)
[169] TNA, FO 371/3133/88314, Weekly Report on Conditions in Austria-Hungary, 17 May 1918.
[170] TNA, FO 371/3133/88314, Minute by Leeper, 22 May 1918.

There was, in other words, a struggle in the Foreign Office to comprehend distinct differences between Serb and Croat visions of the joint state. Pašić's position was no different from that of the Czech leaders. For him, unity was conterminous with state centralisation. The belief that one authority would be better at safeguarding territorial integrity was not unorthodox but one that was quite popular across the Serbian political establishment. Many Serbian leaders and particularly Pašić's Radicals did not see Yugoslavia as a completely new state but as an expanded Serbia which inherently carried with it the preservation of the existing Serbian institutions and systems — centralism included. To the JO, however, the idea that Serbia would take a leading role in this union with Croatia taking a back seat was unacceptable. Both Supilo and Trumbić were believers in the concept that each nation had a sort of "natural right" to existence; that is, unity and independence within a state of their own.[176] What they envisaged was thus a unified Yugoslavia where Croatia would not be subjugated but remain a political entity with all attributes of statehood and retain, at the very least, the autonomist privileges the Croat lands enjoyed in Austria-Hungary.[177] They thus argued that in a joint Serb-Croat state, this condition could only be fulfilled through the implementation of a heavily decentralised system as a way of ensuring Belgrade and Zagreb were equal partners, neither ruling over the other.

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[171] Here, the term "race" was primarily used to denote nationality. For more on how the concepts of race and nationality intersected in British political thought, see Chapter Four in Bell, pp. 92-119.
[172] FO 371/4355/68.
[173] Ibid.
[174] TNA, FO 371/4354/64, Memorandum on the Principle of Self-Determination and its Application to the Baltic Provinces, November 1918.
[175] TNA, FO 371/3135/111985, Minute by Nicolson, 25 June 1918.

The attitudes of British officials only began shifting towards the JO's point of view in the weeks leading up to the Armistice. As the endless bickering between the Habsburg émigrés and the Serbian Government over the issue of Allied recognition of the JO was brought to Whitehall's attention, this long-held belief in South Slavic ethnonational oneness was gradually undermined.[178] Though Trumbić's complaints that Pašić was determined to hold the Habsburg Yugoslavs in a position of 'subjection and humiliation' were initially dismissed as 'purely fantastic', it was quickly recognised that the best hope for the stability of the future state would be to adopt an internal arrangement that allowed for political and legal expression of regional particularisms.[179] In fact, as the awareness of Croat and Slovene dissatisfaction with a Belgrade-centred political apparatus progressively grew, the Foreign Office predominantly came to side with them; Pašić now seemed less like a man to lead the unification of a new nation but rather as an imperialist. Given their historic, cultural, and administrative ties to Austria-Hungary, the Croats and the Slovenes were now presented as far more qualified nationalities for setting up the constitutional order of the new state. Furthermore, another consequence of Pašić's refusal to reach an agreement with the JO was the gradual revival of pre-war anti-Serbian sentiments. Robert Cecil, Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at the time, sympathetically remarked that 'the relatively advanced Slavs of Croatia […] will never consent to be "bossed" by the bands of dishonest and murderous intriguers which constitute the backbone of the Serbian Government'.[180] As much as the Austrian Yugoslavs desired unity with Serbia, Steed concurred, 'they were determined not to be Balkanized by any Serbian policy of conquest and annexation'.[181]

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[176] Banac, pp. 96-97.

[177] Gross, pp. 23-24.

[178] This recognition would essentially put both parties on an equal footing, whereby the JO would be granted the status of a legitimate provisional government of the Yugoslav state *in addition* to the Serbian Government. Though Serbian opposition parties supported this request, from Pašić's perspective, such demands were nonsensical, given that Serbia was "Yugoslavia's Piedmont". Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, *Making,* p. 300. For more on how the dispute between the Serbian Government and the JO was internationalised, see Milada Paulová, *Jugoslavenski Odbor: Povijest jugoslavenske emigracije za svjetskog rata od 1914.-1918.* (Zagreb: Prosvjetna Nakladna Zadruga, 1925), pp. 474-484.

[179] TNA, FO 371/3137/169690, Ante Trumbić, Memorandum regarding Yugoslav recognition, 7 October 1918; TNA, FO 371/3154/169142, Minute by Leeper, 4 October 1918.

By December 1918, centralism thus largely came to be seen as synonymous with the idea of Greater Serbia. 'The Yugoslav kingdom that has been associated with M. Pašić and Serbia', explained Alexander Devine, a British activist for Montenegrin independence, 'is a very different thing to the Yugoslav Federation that is in the minds of so many'.[182] The former, he argued, 'is an aggressive, even imperialistic scheme'; the latter 'is a fraternal scheme more modern in aspiration'.[183] There were, of course, still some Foreign Office officials, such as Laurence Collier, who viewed a united Yugoslavia as conterminous with an enlarged Serbia.[184] However, most officials now seemed to be well aware of the sensitivity of the issue. Leeper asserted that it was paramount that Britain understood that 'no Austrian Yugoslav will permit himself to be annexed to Serbia'; this particular issue was 'the root of the whole trouble between M. Pašić and a few "Greater-Serbians" on the one hand and the rest of the Yugoslav race on the other'.[185] Pašić and his Radicals, claimed Sir Eyre Crowe, were primarily interested in maintaining 'the same close militarist and bureaucratic control'.[186] The 'more honest and intelligent […] Yugoslav statesmen', in contrast, sought to devise a structure which would enable various peoples ‘to retain their peculiar local institutions of self-government in the form of a regularised provincial autonomy’.[187] Indeed, whilst still holding on to the notion of “one nation of three names”, a PID memo on the Yugoslav unification in December 1918 concluded that once the dispute with Italy was resolved, western Yugoslavs would certainly demand autonomy. Yugoslavia would ‘then enjoy a constitution not unlike that of the United States, but under the Serbian Royal House’.[188]

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[180] TNA, FO 371/3137/172539, Minute By Cecil, October 1918.
[181] TNA, FO 371/3154/171702, Interview between Pašić and Steed, 8 October 1918.
[182] Alexander Devine, 'Jugo-Slavs and the Greater Serbia', *The Scotsman,* 1 March 1919, p. 8.
[183] Ibid.
[184] TNA, FO 371/3138/206375, Minute by Collier, 21 December 1918.
[185] Emphasis in original. TNA, FO 371/3160/200994, Minute by Leeper, 7 December 1918.
[186] TNA, FO 371/3581/142846, Crowe to Curzon, 16 October 1919.

2.4 Conclusion

The story of British involvement with the issue of state organisation in East Central Europe began long before Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia even entered the realm of possibility. Indeed, it is a story that traces its roots back to the early twentieth century discussions concerning the constitutional reform of Austria-Hungary. To many British scholars, the Dual Monarchy was synonymous with the concept of regional stability. It was widely argued that the Habsburgs were an essential peacekeeping force on the Continent, acting as a bulwark against the spread of both Russian and Ottoman influence. At the same time, however, it was also recognised that the growing Austro-Hungarian nationality problem was becoming a major source of domestic instability which had to be adequately addressed for the state to survive. Its disappearance, it was acknowledged, would simply cause more problems than it would solve. These tensions, those with any knowledge of them believed, could only be relieved through some form of reorganisation of the existing dualist structure. Here, many called for a federal-like arrangement, arguing it was the most effective remedy for preventing the disintegration of the state whilst still allowing for greater political expression of national identity. A federal solution provided an answer to a multitude of problems this multi-national empire faced, as it allowed for certain autonomist concessions to be granted to Habsburg subject nationalities without destabilising the entire region by granting them full independence.

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[187] Ibid.

[188] This was primarily discussed in the context of Bulgaria joining the South Slav union, a ‘hardly probable’ outcome if Yugoslavia remained a unitary state. TNA, FO 371/4356/172, Memorandum on the Unification of the Jugo-Slavs, 16 December 1918.

That federalism was from the start seen as the most effective tool for managing ethnic tensions in multi-national states is also clear from comparing the evolution of British attitudes towards the constitutional arrangements of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia between 1914 and 1918. This shift in perceptions was closely related to both the changing views of the concepts of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav national unity and a much more informed (though still far from in-depth) understanding of the relations between the main national groups. As a consequence of the efforts of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav émigrés as well as their enthusiastic British supporters who stressed the existence of common Czechoslovak and Yugoslav nationalities in most wartime documents and publications, the adoption of a centralist system was advocated by most Foreign Office officials in the early days of the war. The reasoning was fairly straightforward. With the exception of national minorities, the two were essentially seen as the mother countries of a singular nation that just so happened to be composed of two or more “tribes”. As such, there would be no need for an arrangement that would allow for an articulation of political or cultural differences as these were initially assumed to be non-existent or insignificant. This was the crux of the Foreign Office approach to Czechoslovakia, where a complete ignorance of Slovak demands and Slovak opposition to unitarism resulted in centralism being treated as the only option even worth considering in a situation that seemed relatively black and white. However, centralisation only seemed like an attractive solution in the case where national homogeneity was assumed. As shown by the Yugoslav case, as soon as the multi-national element came to the fore in 1918, so did the Foreign Office’s endorsement of federalism. Indeed, once the façade of shared interests of the Serbian Government and the JO crumbled in October 1918, and Slovene and Croat opposition to a Belgrade-centred political order crystallised, Whitehall was fairly quick to back their case and turn in favour of some sort of federalisation.

Likewise, London's stance towards the issue of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav state organisation was also profoundly influenced by a variety of well-established stereotypes towards their state-constitutive nationalities. In both instances, Whitehall was inclined to support the option that was championed by the group perceived in the most positive terms. The argument that the cause of Czechoslovak unity would be best served by a centralised form of government was entirely unchallenged, given that it was a solution proposed by the Czechs — the nationality the British were somewhat familiar with before 1914, with whom they had extensive contacts during the war, and who they regarded as fairly advanced (at least in comparison to their Slovak kinsmen). Their leadership in the new state was thus welcomed, as it was hoped that the Czechs would help guide the Czechoslovak state onto a more progressive and democratic path. As Seton-Watson himself put it a few years later, in Czechoslovakia, 'those with whom the initiative lay were far more highly developed than those whom they set out to free'.[189] This same line of thinking was applied to the Yugoslavs. Here, however, British officials approved the implementation of the federal principle, since those who pushed for more autonomy were also the ones that were seen to be slightly more educated and westernised. Indeed, as soon as it became clear that Slovene and Croat aspirations clashed with the ambitions of the Serbian government, the Foreign Office was quick to sympathise with the former Habsburg subjects and endorse their demands for some form of federalisation. Given their experience with the more sophisticated Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy, they were regarded as not only more qualified to put the administrative machinery of the new state into action but might be able to bring a speck of Central European civilisation and progress to the peoples of the backward Balkans.

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[189] R. W. Seton-Watson, *The New Slovakia* (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1924), p. 6.

Chapter 3 Britain and the birth of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav centralism, 1919–1929

3.1 Introduction

Having successfully overseen the unification of their respective states, the leaders of the newly created Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia embarked on a new challenge in 1919: establishing political systems. In both cases, this task was anything but straightforward. There were multiple internal as well as external factors that had to be taken into consideration. At this point, the two countries were far from being fully consolidated. Czechoslovakia, for one, not only found itself in the middle of a territorial dispute with Poland over Těšín, but experienced numerous domestic upheavals. The Sudeten German secessionist movement, the widespread Communist Party demonstrations, and the Hungarian occupation of Slovakia alone did much to perpetuate fears about the integrity of the state, resulting in the adoption of several constitutional measures aimed primarily at cultivating unity.[190] Further to the south, Yugoslavia, with six of its seven borders disputed, and the people from regions that came together to form the state deeply divided on a number of issues, followed in the same footsteps. The regime in Belgrade implemented a strictly centralist system and a unitarist policy which failed entirely to reflect the country's extremely heterogeneous composition. These decisions would prove so contentious that even though the two states would firmly establish their political orders by 1921, the debates over administrative division and internal structure would continue to define their political landscapes for years to come.

This chapter looks at how British officials and other observers responded to this struggle between federalism and centralism in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. By examining the initial reaction to the establishment of the centralist system in each of the two states, the first section largely analyses what the Foreign Office believed to be the most optimal solution and the reasons behind their recommendations. The second section takes the discussion through to 1926 when the interest in both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia began to gradually fade. Focusing primarily on the debates concerning the Slovak and Croat autonomist movements, it demonstrates that British attitudes towards these contentious issues throughout the period were, by and large, a product of both the concern for regional stability as well as the pre–1918 stereotypes. Lastly, the third section deals with Czechoslovak administrative reform on the one hand, and the Skupština murders and the establishment of the Yugoslav dictatorship on the other. The fact that the former began to gradually implement greater autonomy as the latter started to move towards even more stringent centralisation allows us to draw comparisons between the British views of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav states and nationalities, illuminating the variety of factors that determined whether federalism constituted a fitting model for any given multi-national state in the eyes of the British.

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[190] Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování Státu,* vol. 2 (New York: Universum Sokol Publ., 1974), pp. 120-130.

3.2 Setting the state foundations, 1919–1921

3.2.1 Czechoslovakia

The Slovaks in 1918 found themselves in a rather peculiar position. Rather than becoming a federal state with the Czechs and Slovaks being completely equal partners that some Slovaks expected, the Czechoslovak Government instead opted to adopt a strictly centralised system of governance that reduced Slovakia to no more than a mere territory with no specific legislative or administrative powers that would reflect the distinct national status of the Slovaks.[191] The reasons for this, as discussed in the previous chapter, were compelling, particularly if seen from Prague's point of view. For one, they justifiably feared that the extension of territorial autonomy to Slovakia would set a precedent for other minorities, dissatisfied with the new position they found themselves in after the collapse of the Dual Monarchy — a concern further reinforced following the invasion of Slovakia by the Hungarian Red Army in 1919.[192] For another, they also believed this would provide a significant source of weakness, as it was generally argued that the Slovaks were too reactionary, too traditional and too politically inexperienced to set up their own government, let alone one that would follow in the progressive footsteps of its Czech counterpart.[193] To combat these centrifugal forces, the authorities went as far as instituting an authoritarian form of government in December 1918 under Vavro Šrobár, who became Minister Plenipotentiary for the Administration of Slovakia.[194] Tasked with consolidating Czechoslovak rule in Slovakia, Šrobár wielded almost dictatorial powers, having complete and unchallenged authority in filling the most important political and administrative posts in the country. Aside from bringing a number of Czechs over to fill in the administrative posts (as the number of Slovaks qualified to hold such positions was insufficient), the deeply anticlerical Šrobár also heavily favoured the more progressive members of the Slovak intelligentsia and the Lutherans when appointing administrators or electing the deputies for the National Assembly.[195] Unsurprisingly, such choices proved unpopular among the majority Catholic population who did not take kindly to being treated as ‘unreliable elements in their native land’ or being completely sidelined in a state where they were supposed to be one of political equals. This pushed many Slovaks further into the autonomist camp.[196]

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[191] See Natália Krajčovičová, 'Začleňovanie Slovenska do Československej republiky (1918-1920)', in *Slovensko v Československu, 1918-1939,* ed. by Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický (Bratislava: Veda, 2004), pp. 57-93.

Yet, in spite of the dissatisfaction it provoked, this extensive centralising effort did not raise any eyebrows in Britain. Indeed, the fact that the ‘Slovak Question’ would never be more than a blip on the Foreign Office’s radar had begun to crystallise barely a few months after the country was officially unified. Already in February 1919, Cecil Gosling, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Prague at the time, attempted to bring the Slovak movement for increased local autonomy to Whitehall's attention.[197] Obtaining most of his information through either interviews or travel, Gosling was relatively well-informed on the Slovak problem.[198] Though he initially dismissed the autonomist demands as rather obsolete (he initially maintained that, under Šrobár, Slovakia already had a 'virtually separate administrative authority'), it was not long before Gosling realised that Šrobár's rule could hardly be considered as an example of Slovak autonomism and soon began to express serious concerns about 'the really grave situation' in Slovakia.[199] There was, he lamented, a complete lack of racial cohesion between the various parts of the Republic but particularly between the Czechs and the Slovaks.[200] Having been subjected to 'harsh and, in some cases, brutal domination' by the Czech authorities, the vast majority of the population in Slovakia was either extremely pro-Magyar or desired independence.[201] Contrary to what London believed, he explained, the Slovaks were 'by no means enamoured of the Czechs'.[202] This, Gosling asserted, was particularly worrisome, as such developments were undoubtedly 'leading up to a highly dangerous state of affairs for the security of the Republic'.[203] Masaryk's retorts that the Slovaks were 'at heart' loyal to Czechoslovakia and that these disturbances were caused by the Magyarised section of the population did little to ease Gosling's conscience.[204] Quite the opposite; he believed that the President failed to grasp the gravity of this issue, underestimating 'the general difficulties of the situation and the strength and fervour of the movement in favour of local autonomy'.[205] The activities and the demands of the autonomists, he urged the Foreign Office, should be taken seriously, for both 'the solidarity of the Republic and [...] the future peace of Central Europe' depended on the resolution of the Slovak Question.[206] To Gosling, it seemed as though centralisation was achieving the exact opposite of what the Czechoslovak leaders intended: instead of consolidating the state and thus securing its very existence, it was destabilising it even further.

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[192] Bakke, *Doomed,* p. 460. See also Marián Hronský, *Trianon: Vznik hraníc Slovenska a problémy jeho bezpečnosti (1918-1920)* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2011).
[193] Leff, *National Conflict,* pp. 35-38.
[194] For more on Šrobár, see Josette Baer, *A Life Dedicated to the Republic: Vavro Šrobár’s Slovak Czechoslovakism* (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2014).
[195] For reference, Protestants at the time constituted barely 12 percent of the entire population. The Catholics, on the other hand, comprised 77.4 percent of the population. However, the authorities in Prague were wary of the Catholics as they were regarded to be rather Hungarophile. Beneš, 'Czechoslovak', in *History*, ed. by Mamatey and Luža, pp. 56-58.
[196] Felak, p. 23.

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[197] TNA, FO 371/3525/27919, Gosling to Curzon, 4 February 1919.

[198] For his reports on his travel through Slovakia, see TNA, FO 371/3527/148582, Gosling to Grahame, 3 November 1919; FO 371/3527/151913, Gosling to Curzon, 6 November 1919. For an interview with Beneš, see TNA, FO 371/3527/150085, Gosling to Curzon, 24 October 1919. For his conversations with Masaryk, see TNA, FO 371/3526/95172, Gosling to Curzon, 23 June 1919; FO 371/3526/116533, Gosling to Curzon, 10 August 1919; FO 371/3527/168358, Gosling to Curzon, 29 December 1919.

[199] TNA, FO 371/3525/50061, Gosling to Curzon, 26 March 1919; FO 371/3526/95172.

[200] FO 371/3526/95172; TNA, FO 371/3526/132778, Gosling to Curzon, 15 September 1919.

[201] FO 371/3527/151913.

[202] TNA, FO 371/3526/102513, Gosling to Curzon, 11 July 1919.

[203] TNA, FO 371/3527/14783, Gosling to Curzon, Summary of Political Events for September, 10 October 1919.

[204] FO 371/3526/116533.

Back in London, however, Foreign Office officials for the most part agreed that decentralisation of Czechoslovakia was a drastic and somewhat impulsive solution at this point. For one, the developments at the Paris Peace Conference certainly helped reinforce the belief that centralisation was the way forward. Not only did the Big Four spend a good deal of time listening to Edvard Beneš hold forth on the national oneness of the Czechs and Slovaks but also never actually heard from the Slovaks themselves. In fact, as early as February 1919, the Council of Four had already 'generally agreed that the [Czechoslovak] claim to Slovakia presented no difficulties', concluding that all that remained to be resolved there was the question of the Slovak frontier with Hungary.[207] As such, when Andrej Hlinka, the leader of the Slovak People's Party (SL'S) or the *ľudáci*, came to Paris to plead the Slovak case and ask the conference to support their autonomist cause, he did not manage to gain an audience with any of the Great Powers, achieving nothing but cementing the reputation of Slovak autonomists as traitors and separatists.[208] This combined with the fact that Gosling's reports of Czech–Slovak antagonism were simply seen as vastly exaggerated did much to convince virtually everyone that decentralisation was not the way forward. Indeed, the Foreign Office was well-aware of Gosling's aversion to the Czechoslovak state, having once stated that even the 'more backward states' in Latin America (where he had previously served) were ‘run on more enlightened and less corrupt lines than [...] Czechoslovakia’.[209] As such, his harsh criticism of the domestic conditions was difficult to take seriously. Lewis Namier, a PID expert on East Central Europe, argued Gosling was ‘rather too pessimistic [...] and sometimes even depreciatory’ of the new country.[210] As a bulwark against Germany and Hungary, Czechoslovakia needed to be centralised; it was the most pragmatic way of preserving its unity and thereby strengthening its external position.[211] In other words, British officials, quite familiar with the Czech point of view and far more sympathetic to them, were essentially echoing the argument of the Czechoslovak regime. Likewise, Leeper asserted that though the Slovak autonomists did ‘probably deserve some sympathy in their complaints of the inefficiency of the administration in Slovakia’, the matter was quite clearly overblown.[212] The rumblings of discontent in Slovakia were as much a consequence of political disorganisation as they were of economic instability, food shortages, and undeveloped transport links. Once these issues were ironed out, Leeper explained, there was no reason for Slovakia not to ‘form a contented and prosperous portion of the Czechoslovak nation’.[213]

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[205] FO 371/3526/116533; TNA, FO 371/3527/170343, Gosling to Curzon, 31 December 1919.
[206] FO 371/3527/170343.
[207] *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States,* 1919, The Paris Peace Conference, ed. by Joseph V. Fuller (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942–1947), vol. 3, Document 60, Secretary's Notes of a Conversation Held in M. Pichon's Room at the Quai d'Orsay, 5 February 1919.
[208] Felak, pp. 27-28.

Further doubt was cast on Gosling’s claims when they were repudiated by Seton-Watson, who was seen as a far more reliable expert on Czechoslovakia. In a letter to James Headlam-Morley, the assistant director of the PID, Seton-Watson outright refuted the claims of any trouble between the Czechs and Slovaks.[214] These troubles, he argued, were not a sign of an actual inter-ethnic dispute. Instead, they were an extension of a private dispute; that is, personal rivalry between Šrobár and Hlinka.[215] As such, he asserted that these rumours should not be ‘taken seriously for the present' since the Slovaks have in practice had 'a free hand in the construction of their part of the state'.[216] Indeed, throughout the 1920s, Seton-Watson would argue that the SL'S's demands for the creation of a legislatively autonomous unit that would have its own diet were on the whole 'excessive and ill-considered'.[217] This form of autonomy, he explained, was too vague and too akin to separatism.[218] Unlike its South Slav neighbour, Czechoslovakia's constitutional foundations were not entirely unsound.[219] They did not need to be entirely uprooted; they just had to be adjusted.[220] Unlike the Foreign Office, he did argue in favour of a decentralised system under which the Slovaks would be in charge of governing their educational, administrative and economic affairs.[221] Yet, unlike Gosling, he also did not believe the situation to be that dire. Just as when he was concerned with the Austro-Hungarian internal structure, Seton-Watson once again turned to the British model, the perfect compromise between fusing nationalities together without any of them losing their "racial" identity. What Czechoslovakia needed, he asserted upon his return from Slovakia in 1924, was exactly what had occurred in Britain: the conception of 'the dual consciousness [….] of the narrower Scottish nationality and of the higher British citizenship embracing and transcending it'.[222] To him, it seemed obvious that Slovakia's position in the new Republic should be virtually identical to that of Scotland in the union with the English. In practice, he meant that the Slovaks should be granted the greatest degree of self-governance possible so long as that did not interfere with the survival of an overall centralised framework and threaten the safety of the country. This, he argued, was 'a practical

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[209] *Documents of British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, ed. by Ernest Woodward and Rohan Butler (London: HMSO, 1947-) [hereafter DBFP], First Series, vol. VI, No. 405, Lindley to Curzon, 1 January 1920. Furthermore, as Lockhart notes, there was mutual animosity between Gosling and the Czech authorities, the latter openly resenting the former’s sympathy for ‘the old feudal aristocrats’. See R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *Retreat From Glory* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1934), pp. 49-50.
[210] TNA, FO 371/3526/102513, Minute by Namier, 17 July 1919.
[211] See Bakke, *Doomed,* pp. 449-53.
[212] TNA, FO 371/4723/180198, Minute by Leeper, 28 February 1920.
[213] Ibid.
[214] TNA, FO 371/3526/83043, Seton-Watson to Headlam-Morley, 14 May 1919.
[215] Coming from a very different camp of Slovak political thought, Hlinka and Šrobár’s rivalry certainly predated the creation of Czechoslovakia. As a member of the Catholic clergy whose value-system was close

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to that of an average Slovak peasant, Hlinka saw himself as a far more suitable representative of the Slovak peoples and greatly resented the appointment of anti-clerical, pro-Lutheran Šrobár as the minister for Slovakia, even rejecting his offer to become the 'Referent' for Catholic affairs. Felak, pp. 25-26.

[216] Ibid. In fact, he would still maintain in 1924 that that manner in which Prague attempted to 'adjust the constitutional position of Slovakia' in these formative months was 'altogether admirable'. See also Seton-Watson, *New*, p. 25.

[217] Seton-Watson, *New*, p. 30.

[218] Seton-Watson, 'Message to American Slovaks', 14 June 1923 in *R.W. Seton-Watson and His Relations with the Czechs and Slovaks: Documents 1906–1951,* eds. Jan Rychlík, Thomas D. Marzik, and Miroslav Bielik, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Praha: Ústav T.G. Masaryka, 1995), pp. 377-80.

[219] Seton-Watson, *New*, pp. 9-10.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Seton-Watson, 'Message' in *Seton-Watson*, ed. by Rychlík, Marzik, and Bielik, pp. 377-80.

[222] Seton-Watson, *New,* pp. 129-30.

compromise'; as the British model had demonstrated, there was no 'inherent objection, no weakening of state authority, in the existence of two distinct administrations [...] within a single territorial unit'.[223]

Similar attitudes could also be found outside of British governmental circles. During the first few years of the country's existence, most newspapers published in Britain stressed the democratic, progressive, peace-loving character of the First Republic and its importance for maintaining stability in the region. Indeed, Czechoslovakia was often described as 'Central Europe's bright spot', and the Czechs as 'a dominant race in Central Europe'.[224] Out of all successor states, it was argued, it was 'the nearest to our Western world in everything — save the name'.[225] Czechoslovakia was routinely praised for the relatively fast stabilisation of its economy, the liberal spirit of its constitution, and the effective consolidation of its internal affairs.[226] The fact that this same constitution had put in place an extremely centralist system of government was not even acknowledged. Accordingly — and perhaps unsurprisingly — the consensus at the time was that the Slovak problem was greatly exaggerated. The Slovaks, it was widely reported, were determined to remain a part of the Czechoslovak state; those who stated otherwise were dismissed as Magyarophiles or fringe minorities. Indeed, *The Sunday Times* argued that even those who did push for autonomy did not actually call for extensive political and legislative reforms; their demands were 'solely of a cultural and economic character which would tend towards consolidation'.[227] Besides, an article in *The Scotsman* made the superficial observation that Slovakia was already almost entirely autonomous — after all, it had its own Minister plenipotentiary (which the paper incorrectly assumed meant Prague had already extended to Slovaks the self-governance they so badly desired).[228]

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[223] Seton-Watson, *New,* p. 122.

[224] 'Central Europe's Bright Spot: Progress of Czechoslovakia', *The Times,* 28 October 1919, p. 11.; 'A Dominant Race in Central Europe', *The Times,* 18 June 1923 in FO 371/8574/10604.

[225] 'The Condition of Central Europe: Czechoslovakia — Views of Dr Benes', *The Times,* 5 August 1922, 6-7 (p. 6). Likewise, Temperley asserted that Czechoslovakia, having come to the end of her period of organisation, will be ahead of 'the nations to the East, and possibly on equal terms with some nations in the West of Europe'. TNA, FO 371/5831/24163, Temperley to Cadogan, 27 December 1921.

[226] 'A Journey in Czechoslovakia', *The Daily Telegraph,* 9 January 1920, p. 6.; 'The Making of a State: Three Years of the Czechoslovak Republic', *The Observer,* 23 October 1921, p. 14. As far as the Czechoslovak constitution is concerned, *The New Europe* labelled it 'the most democratic in the world'. Alexander Brož, 'The Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic', *The New Europe,* 15. 185 (1920), 61-63 (p. 61).

[227] 'Break with Magyars', *The Sunday Times,* 30 January 1921, p. 12.

The outcome of parliamentary elections in April 1920 greatly supported such conclusions. Contrary to the expectations of George Clerk, the newly appointed British Minister to Prague and a great admirer of the Czechoslovak state, the vast majority of Slovak votes did not go to the autonomists gathered around SL'S. Instead, it was the pro-centralist Social Democratic Party that obtained 38% of the vote in Slovakia as opposed to the 17.8% that went to the *ľudáci*.[229] In Clerk's mind as well as those of other British policymakers, this result had not only irrefutably proven that 'the general feeling in Slovakia was strongly in favour of remaining united with the Czechs', but it had also shown that the Slovaks were also strongly in favour of centralist control from Prague.[230] Indeed, Clerk was determined to counteract the bleak picture of Czechoslovakia that his predecessor had painted during his tenure. The relations between the Czechs and Slovaks, he argued, were nowhere near as deplorable as Gosling would have led Whitehall to believe. Though Clerk did acknowledge that there was some unrest in Slovakia, he largely attributed it to the inefficiency of the Czech administration in consolidating the state.[231] The 'illiterate and backward' Slovak peasant did not

> much care what flag flies over his country, so long as he gets plenty to eat, facility to move about in summer [...], and so long as his religion and its symbols are not interfered with. In all these respects he has suffered since 1918, partly from force of circumstances, partly from Czech inexperience, tactlessness, and venality, and he is consequently discontented.[232]

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[228] 'Slovakia: A Promising Future', *The Scotsman*, 3 September 1921, p. 10.

[229] Felak, p. 29.

[230] TNA, FO 371/4723/200406, Clerk to Curzon, 22 May 1920.

[231] TNA, FO 371/4721/5986, Clerk to Curzon, 1 September 1920.

[232] TNA, FO 371/4724/13728, Clerk to Curzon, 10 December 1920. Religion played a great role in exacerbating Slovak discontent with the Czechoslovak regime. Whereas the majority of the population in the Czech lands was either fairly indifferent to religion or saw it as a symbol of Habsburg rule, the Slovaks were still very religious and suspicious of Czech anticlericalism, which ran counter to Slovak traditions and culture. As a consequence, they were profoundly disturbed when the Government began implementing anti-Catholic measures in Slovakia. Aside from the attempts to insert a clause on the separation of church and state into the new constitution, the new authorities also seized many of the parochial schools, confiscated church lands and removed crucifixes from classrooms. Felak, pp. 21-23. For the attitudes of different political parties on this as well as other contentious social and economic issues, see Ľubomír Lipták, *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860-1989* (Bratislava: Archa, 1992).

In other words, he was convinced that Slovak national aspirations did not extend beyond the Czechoslovak state; they would be quite content there so long as its certain national particularities were left alone. Indeed, Clerk did not believe that the Slovak problem posed a considerable threat to the stability of the Czechoslovak state and was quite dismissive of any reports that suggested otherwise.[233] The Slovaks did not desire independence but merely wanted to ensure that their local administration was 'as purely native as possible'.[234] In essence, they wished to be 'in much the same sort of position as Scotland is to England'.[235]

Yet, despite their likening of the situation in Czechoslovakia to relations between national groups in Britain, neither Clerk nor the rest of the British Legation at Prague outwardly supported the implementation of such an arrangement. Instead, it was still argued that this was not a feasible solution when it came to Slovakia. This was largely down to the belief that unlike the Scots or the Irish, who did have some capacity to govern themselves, the Slovaks were on the whole too underdeveloped to manage their own affairs. Even three years after the war, prejudice towards the Slovaks still shaped how British officials approached the question of Czechoslovak state organisation. For example, the Passport Control Officer at Prague concluded that even though Slovakia was on the way to becoming 'a sort of Ireland in the newly established Republic of Czechoslovakia', this nevertheless did not warrant the adoption of a more decentralised system.[236] 'All well-informed persons', the report explained, understood that autonomy for Slovakia was simply not possible at the moment 'as the political education of the people is in far too backward condition for any form of Home Rule to be thought of'.[237] As such, even the British model advocated by Seton-Watson was not seen as viable in the Foreign Office circles, as it simply allowed for too much self-administration for which the Slovaks were regarded as unprepared. It was essentially argued that by granting Slovakia what was thought to be excessive autonomy, the Czechoslovak authorities would be potentially sacrificing the overall stability and unity of the country in exchange for resolving what was essentially believed to be a minor internal dispute. Slovakia in 1920 did not have much choice but to stay in the Czechoslovak fold, and London was well aware of that. Therefore, there was absolutely no need to appease them; autonomy or no autonomy, they would eventually settle down. To British officials, the Slovak Question was a molehill that even the strictest centralist regime would not turn into a mountain.

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[233] TNA, FO 371/4722/3194, Clerk to Curzon, 2 August 1920; FO 371/4721/14280, Clerk to Curzon, 20 December 1920.

[234] FO 371/4721/14280.

[235] Ibid.

[236] TNA, FO 371/5822/15123, Clerk to Curzon, Summary for the Month of June, 22 July 1921. Hlinka's S'LS and its followers were often likened either to Sinn Fein or Stjepan Radić's peasants, both in terms of their demands as well as the methods they employed to achieve their goals. TNA, FO 371/7391/2889, Cecil to Gosling, 16 February 1922; FO 371/7386/8162; Clerk to Balfour, 6 June 1922; FO 371/8594/5951, Clerk to Curzon, 20 March 1923; 'Slovaks' demand for Independence', *The Scotsman,* 30 October 1920, p. 9.

[237] FO 371/5822/15123.

3.2.2 Yugoslavia

In contrast, British officials advocated a federal solution for Yugoslavia from the very beginning. Ironically, this belief was becoming increasingly entrenched precisely as the South Slav state started heading in the opposite direction during August 1919 under the government of the Democratic Party's (DS) Ljuba Davidović and its policy of doctrinaire centralism.[238] During just six months that they were in power, the new leadership passed several very unpopular laws which drastically curbed local and regional autonomy across the country.[239] These measures were accompanied by a series of strikes and protests, for which the Foreign Office quickly blamed the Democrats and their attempts to 'coerce' Croatia, Slovenia and Montenegro 'into a single centralised State'.[240] As far as British officials were concerned, this was conclusive evidence that the strengthening of centralist forces was directly connected to the growing domestic instability.[241] Indeed, Alban Young, British ambassador to Yugoslavia, stressed that if Italy truly wanted to prevent the emergence of a strong Yugoslavia which could pose a threat in the Adriatic, 'she would be well advised […] to wait for the culture and civilisation of Croatia and Slovenia to react against the centralisation scheme of the militarist peasant State to which they are now yoked'.[242] It was clear, likewise argued General Plunkett, British military attaché in the Balkans during and after the First World War, that the only viable option for Yugoslavia was 'the early grant of a large measure of local autonomy, with a central Government controlling, say, foreign policy, the Army and Navy and the national Finances'.[243] This view, of course, did not stem from an actual belief that decentralisation always equated with stability but rather that (at least in the South Slav case) stability equated with the appeasement of the "more advanced" western Yugoslavs which could only be achieved by giving them what they wanted.

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[238] For more on the ideology of the Democratic Party, see Gligorijević, *Demokratska stranka*.
[239] Banac, pp. 383-84.
[240] TNA, FO 371/3511/149375, Minute by Adam, 7 November 1919. What the Foreign Office failed to acknowledge here, however, was that in certain instances, the turmoil in Croatia was not solely due to the DS' centralist policy but an extension of the broader (mostly peasant) opposition to the unification with Serbia. As Banac notes, the peasantry on the whole still preferred Emperor Karl of Austria to King Petar of Serbia and did not share the enthusiasm of middle-class intellectuals for the ideology of Yugoslav unitarism. Banac, pp. 130-31.
[241] Evans*, Negotiating*, pp. 193-97.

Consequently, the assumption that Yugoslavia was bound to adopt a decentralised system that would confer a high degree of autonomy on different provinces, if it were to become the successful South Slav state everyone envisaged in 1918, was so widespread that it was not uncommon for London officials to casually speak of a federal Serb-Croat-Slovene state as if the matter had already been settled. Already in October 1919, Eyre Crowe confidently asserted that there was no doubt the Yugoslav Assembly would eventually secure 'to the Dalmatians, the Bosnians, to the people of Croatia-Slavonia, and to the Slovenes, a very large measure of provincial autonomy within the framework of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State'.[244] Likewise, Frederick E. Adam, an official at the Central Department, contemplated the recognition of Montenegro as a 'separate federal unit in a Yugoslav Federation' and even Lloyd George ventured to speculate about the Montenegrin desire to enter 'a great Slavonic Confederation'.[245] Even more interesting, however, is the fact that this conviction was so widespread despite Young's repeated efforts to point out that the internal structure that was being set up in Yugoslavia was anything but federal. If Whitehall truly believed that 'a federal construction of the Yugoslav State was to be expected', Young noted in December 1920, then he was obliged to 'incur the reproaches of the Government here for having so misled you as to the tendencies of the Coalition Government or any of the Governments which have been in power since my arrival over a year ago'.[246] Unfortunately for Young, however, his remarks were promptly ignored; not a few weeks later, Adam was again casually speculating about 'the successful negotiation of a federal Constitution'.[247]

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[242] TNA, FO 371/3511/155966, Young to Curzon, 22 November 1919.
[243] TNA, FO 371/3578/155512, Report by General Plunkett, 25 October 1919.
[244] FO 371/3581/142846.
[245] TNA, FO 371/3590/157197, Minute by Adam, 3 December 1919; FO 371/4662/12481, Reply by Lloyd George, 25 November 1920. Following the electoral success of the KPJ in Montenegro in November, Adam also wondered 'whether this communist victory implies a desire to be outside the Yugoslav federation or not'. TNA, FO 371/4662/12576, Minute by Adam, 30 November 1920.

Equally influential for the popularity of this wildly idealistic conviction were the results of the November 1920 Constitutional Assembly elections. With both the Radicals and the Democrats making a rather poor showing and other decentralist parties, such as Anton Korošec's Slovene People's Party (SLS) and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation (JMO), faring extremely well outside Serbia proper, it seemed as though federal Yugoslavia was something of an accomplished fact. What really helped support such claims, however, was the triumph of the Croat People's Peasant Party (HPSS) under the leadership of Stjepan Radić. Advocating for a Croatian peasant republic within the framework of a Yugoslav (con)federation, the HPSS emerged as the third largest and the only majority party in the country, winning over half of all votes in Croatia-Slavonia.[248] Though doubts persisted over Radić's temperament and 'communism' (which was, in fact, a misinterpretation of his politics of peasantism), British officials greeted this turn of events.[249] On the one hand, there was certainly sympathy for Radić. His tremendous success was generally seen as a positive development, with most if not all British observers interpreting it as a sign that a federal settlement would inevitably be implemented in Yugoslavia. By this point, the South Slav Kingdom had existed for almost two years but was no more politically stable or consolidated than it was on the eve of its unification. Since this was commonly blamed on the existing centralist system, it was generally assumed that Radić with his anti-centralist platform could only improve this sorry state of affairs. The success of the HPSS, as Adam noted, corroborated the belief that ‘only by a slow process of federation under the King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes can the Yugoslav races achieve unity’.[250] It was probable, he likewise speculated, that the existing Government’s draft of the constitution would have to be modified ‘in the direction of establishing five or six provinces with executive autonomy in local affairs’ in the light of these events.[251] At any rate, ‘local devolution of power’, Temperley concurred, was ‘inevitable’.[252]

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[246] TNA, FO 371/4670/13669, Young to Curzon, 7 December 1920. Here, Young is referring to the assurances Crowe made to the French Ambassador, stating that the Foreign Office had no doubts that 'the Assembly would in due course work out a federal scheme'. TNA, FO 371/4669/12186, Minute by Adam, 27 November 1920.

[247] TNA, FO 371/4662/14502, Minute by Adam, 24 December 1920.

[248] In English, see Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party, and the Politics of Mass Mobilization, 1904–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000).

[249] Prior to these elections, the Foreign Office did not concern itself much with Radić (especially given that he spent much time in prison) and had little to no knowledge of the HPSS. On several occasions, Temperley described the party 'as parochial and local Bolshevik' and its leader as someone who 'hardly constitutes a serious danger, whether in prison or out of it'. TNA, FO 371/3508/59886, Report by Temperley, 31 March 1919.

On the other, Radić's talk of an independent peasant republic was not looked upon kindly by even the most understanding British officials for the simple fact that it smacked too much of the Irish Question.[253] According to Adam, Radić’s Party had ‘combined much of the spirit of the earlier Sinn Fein movement with a taste for “oaths” and “covenants” that Ulster might envy’.[254] In his reports to the Foreign Office, Young also often remarked that Radić was to Belgrade what Eamon de Valera was to London. He desired to ‘negotiate for the union of Croatia with a Southern Slav state on the basis of equality, just as Mr. de Valera appears to desire in the case of Ireland and her relations with the British Empire’.[255] These parallels did not escape the Yugoslavs either. The use of the phrase Black–Yellows (after the Habsburg black eagle on a yellow background) in Serbia to describe the inhabitants of the western provinces who hankered after Austrian rule sounded ‘ominously like […] Black and Tans’.[256] In Zagreb, on the other hand, the Croat opposition was actively comparing its activities in the Constitutional Assembly in Belgrade to ‘the struggle of the Irish for freedom from English imperialism’.[257] The HRSS’ entire policy of abstention, Seton-Watson later argued, was precisely based on the calculation that they could do ‘what the Sinn Fein party was then doing in Ireland’.[258]

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[250] TNA, FO 371/4670/13888, Minute by Adam, 16 December 1920.
[251] TNA, FO 371/4670/13587, Minute by Adam, 11 December 1920.
[252] Emphasis in original. TNA, FO 371/4670/13311, Minute by Temperley, 9 December 1920. This solution, Adam added, was both ‘in our interest and in that of the Serbs themselves’. Ibid.
[253] FO 371/4670/13888.
[254] Ibid.
[255] TNA, FO 371/6193/1414, Young to Curzon, 14 January 1921.
[256] TNA, FO 371/6193/3773, Young to Curzon, 18 February 1921.

Nevertheless, though not all his activities were condoned, Radić was not treated as a really serious threat. The whole idea of an independent Croat republic seemed so far-fetched that Young remarked sarcastically that if Radić did manage to ‘successfully entwine a Croatian Peasant Republic into a united Yugoslavia [sic] Monarchy, he will accomplish a feat which we should no doubt like to emulate at home’.[259] Furthermore, Temperley noted, there was no evidence Radić was a separatist. His republicanism was ‘very probably a “beau geste” to insure [sic] definite autonomy on a federal basis’’.[260] Adam agreed; it was ‘an immature expression of the trend of Croatia in a federal direction’.[261] Radić’s movement had three key aspects: ‘(a) republican as against the King of the S.C.S. State; (b) peasant as against the artisans; and (c) Croat as against the Serbs’. [262] The last feature, he suspected, was the only one that was both ‘permanent and genuine’ and presumably played an important role in fostering Radić’s republicanism. That is, since the Karađorđević dynasty was perceived to be an exclusively Serbian institution, the HRSS’ demand for a republic was simply another expression of this anti-Serb sentiment which could be mitigated ‘by granting some form of autonomy to a Diet or Council for Croatia’.[263] ‘To Radić’, Temperley added, ‘a monarch stands for unity and a republic for federalism’.[264]

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[257] Ibid. Following the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, Radić enthusiastically announced that 'if the Belgrade people are wise, they can treat with us as England is treating with Ireland'. Accordingly, Young reported that the treaty itself was not given much attention by the Belgrade press given their awareness of 'what an arm it given [sic] to the new provinces who seek independence of the Serbian capital'. TNA, FO 371/6195/23650, Young to Curzon, 13 December 1921.

[258] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'Jugoslavia and Croatia', *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs,* 8. 2 (1929), 117-33 (p. 120).

[259] FO 371/4670/13311.

[260] TNA, FO 371/4670/13424, Minute by Temperley, 10 December 1920.

[261] FO 371/4670/13815.

[262] FO 371/4670/13888.

[263] Ibid.

[264] TNA, FO 371/6193/4669, Memorandum on the Internal Conditions in the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, 7 March 1921.

Even the publication of the Government's constitutional proposal — which would, after some minor changes, evolve into the infamous Vidovdan Constitution — could not persuade the Foreign Office that the process of federalisation in Yugoslavia was not well-underway. Though it was acknowledged that 'by taking no account of racial differences', this draft cut 'at the root of any federal system', British officials maintained that such a system was not likely to take hold in practice.[265] This was primarily down to a complete lack of understanding of the Serbian position. Whereas to the Foreign Office, federalisation represented the stabilisation of Yugoslavia, to the elites in Belgrade, it was akin to complete disintegration. Indeed, what British officials repeatedly failed to comprehend was that for Pašić and the rest of the Radicals, one of the greatest merits of Yugoslavia was the fact that it brought all Serbs together into one joint state; centralisation was a way of ensuring this ethnic unity was maintained and preserved.[266] Moreover, federalisation, particularly on the basis of ancient provinces that the Croats and Slovenes advocated for, would not only fragment the Serbs but also reduce them to a political minority in those units.[267] The failure to understand the importance that some Serbian parties awarded to the belief that all Serbs should be united within one centralised state drastically skewed British understanding of the situation. Indeed, the Foreign Office seemingly operated under the assumption that the only reason Pašić had not already granted extensive autonomy was primarily stubbornness. As such, many were also convinced that the only thing that stood in a way of a decentralised Yugoslavia was a simple change in leadership. The talk of centralisation, Adam adamantly claimed, was bound to die down as soon as 'wiser and more moderate counsels are able to obtain a hearing'.[268] Here, he hoped that the country would turn to Ante Trumbić, 'the only Yugoslav statesman whose views are broad and moderate'.[269] Though Trumbić was generally perceived in a positive light due to his wartime activities in London, such praise was not merely gratuitous. Instead, it stemmed from the fact that Trumbić's proposed solution to the constitutional problem was virtually identical to that of the Foreign Office. Just like the British, Adam explained, Trumbić was in favour of the administrative decentralisation of historic regions and was well aware of the futility of the Government's plan to parcel out 'four or five ancient provinces, each strong in racial prejudice and radical pride, into arbitrary administrative divisions'.[270]

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[265] TNA, FO 371/4670/13815, Minute by Adam, 14 December 1920.
[266] Banac, p. 166.
[267] Ibid.
[268] FO 371/4670/13815.
[269] Ibid.

Indeed, British officials had a fairly clear picture of what this federation and its provinces should look like in practice. A truly federal system, which would resemble that of the United States, was ruled out largely due to how it was perceived by some Yugoslavs. William Strang, Third Secretary of the British Legation in Yugoslavia asserted that even though regionalism and devolution might have constituted a ‘forward movement in Western countries’, the two were nevertheless regarded as reactionary concepts back in Belgrade.[271] Many Yugoslavs, Strang argued, believed federalism was anathema to South Slav unity as a form of government that promoted divisions rather than amalgamation. As such, they were inclined to look to France and Italy as examples to emulate — stable, solid polities which, like Yugoslavia, originally evolved from a number of small states. Accordingly, since neither centralism nor extreme federalism were options, Temperley concluded that the most ideal solution was ‘large administrative devolution but legislative unity’.[272] In essence, Adam likewise argued, this meant that the future constitution should be worked out on a ‘federal basis’,

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[270] Ibid. This was, of course, a slight over-simplification of Trumbić's views, who actually did advocate for the break-up of historic provinces in favour of the creation of four large units with centres in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Sarajevo. However, since his proposal would to a large extent retain the historical frontiers and was based on racial divisions, it certainly seemed preferable to Radić’s independent republic or Pašić’s inflexible centralism. See Trumbić’s Speech (analysis by Dr Slobodan Jovanović), enclosed in TNA, FO 371/6194/9607, Young to Curzon, 6 May 1921.

[271] TNA, FO 371/4668/307, Memorandum by Strang, 6 June 1920. Furthermore, as Agnes Headlam-Morley asserted, East Central European leaders favoured centralisation for two reasons. Firstly (and more obviously) it was seen as more conducive to fostering the sense of national unity and solidarity. Secondly, however, she suggested that it was a response to the growing popularity of state socialism which favoured ‘the interference of the Government in every sphere of life’ and discouraged individualism, ‘whether on the part of isolated citizens or of separate sections of the nation’. See Agnes Headlam-Morley, *The New Democratic Constitutions of Europe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), p. 88.

[272] TNA, FO 371/4668/307, Minute by Temperley, 7 July 1920.

> reserving to the central Government the general functions of legislature, while devolving on Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Old Serbia and Montenegro the duties of executive provincial administration.[273]

Here, Temperley's and Adam's suggestions captured the essence of what Foreign Office officials meant when they spoke of a South Slav federation for the entirety of the interwar period. It was decentralisation, not federalism, that was the optimal solution for Yugoslavia. This can be inferred from briefly looking at Adam, who, on the one hand, repeatedly lamented the absence of any federal measures whilst in the same breath asserting that the Serb-Croat-Slovene Government could not 'admit a republic in Croatia any more than we could admit a republic in Ireland'.[274] Indeed, London never actually envisaged a system where sovereignty would be divided between different levels of government. As discussed in the introductory chapter, this owed much to the prevalent belief at the time that divisible sovereignty that was inherent to a federal mode of governance inevitably weakened the central authority and made countries susceptible to disintegration. Instead, the term federal itself was loosely used to refer to any form of government that was not inherently centralist. In other words, Yugoslavia was to be federal in the sense that the existing historic provinces would have a significant amount of autonomy in dealing with political matters which did not concern the entire polity. Simultaneously, it was to be centralised in the sense that the sovereignty of the state would not be divided but would rest in one supreme legislative body in Belgrade. Such a solution, argued Temperley, was 'indispensable'.[275] If Croatia and Slovenia — 'which are politically, at any rate, states nearly equal to Serbia proper' — were to become merely two out of nine provinces, it was paramount that they obtained as much administrative independence as possible; otherwise, 'you will never get an assembly at Belgrade interested in the fishermen of Dalmatia or the miners in Slovenia'.[276]

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[273] FO 371/4670/13815.

[274] FO 371/4670/13888.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Ibid.

By the spring of 1921, however, it was becoming increasingly evident that such an outcome was fairly unlikely. Indeed, in a memorandum from March, Temperley finally acknowledged that the Yugoslavs had achieved nothing in terms of the practical application of devolutionary measures since the unification of December 1918.[277] This, he noted, was not likely to change. With the Radicals and the Democrats commanding the majority in the Skupština, it appeared they would have no problem driving through their programme 'which is really a disguised centralisation'.[278] As Agnes Headlam-Morley observed some years later, though the belief that a centralist constitution would be more conducive to strengthening the unity of state might seem logical on paper, in practice, it had achieved nothing but 'aroused violent opposition'.[279] This gloomy assessment of the situation was substantiated in 1921 barely a few weeks later when the Constitutional Assembly finally carried through a motion concerning the administrative division of Yugoslavia. According to this scheme, the country was to be divided into more than 20 provinces, whose boundaries were to be determined 'according to natural, social and economic features' with no province exceeding 800,000 inhabitants.[280] 'All historic divisions', Temperley concluded, were thus 'quite clearly obliterated'.[281]

The actual ratification of the Vidovdan Constitution on 28 June (St. Vitus Day) was received rather pessimistically by British officials. As Strang pointed out, the reservations that London had about the unification of southern Habsburg lands with Serbia since before the War were finally realised. In little over two years, the Serbs had effectively managed

> to destroy everything, whether good or bad, that savours of the bureaucratic, autocratic, aristocratic spirit of Austria-Hungary, and to put in its place the simplicity and democracy of which they are so proud, and the easy-going inefficiency which to them is the mark of a free spirit.[282]

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[277] TNA, FO 371/6193/4669, Memorandum on the Internal Conditions in the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, 7 March 1921.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Headlam-Morley, *Constitutions*, p. 59.

[280] TNA, FO 371/6194/6414, Minute by Temperley, 31 March 1921.

[281] Ibid.

[282] TNA, FO 371/6194/14658, Strang to Curzon, 12 July 1921.

The constitution divided the country into thirty-three provinces (*oblasti*), completely devoid of any historic meaning and defined according to natural, social or economic features with a proviso that no *oblast* can have more than 800,000 inhabitants.[283] Its provisions in effect eliminated any possibility of autonomism since the only aspect that helped keep the now-abolished historic provinces together was their reliance on the centralised state organs in Belgrade.[284] This, as Young astutely explained, was clearly done with the purpose of reducing the status of Zagreb, Sarajevo, Split and Ljubljana to that of mere 'provincial towns with no authority beyond their own particular small region'.[285] Under the aegis of the Vidovdan Constitution, 'the millenary, if somewhat mythical' Triune Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia and the Banovina of Croatia were bound to 'receive their final death blow'.[286]

Though there was still a chance that the new system of local administration might eventually 'prove unworkable and break itself down into a provincial system', the prospect was not bright by any measure.[287] Such sentiments were also echoed by Seton-Watson. 'The situation in Yugoslavia', he wrote privately in December, 'reduces me to despair'.[288] Like the Foreign Office, he favoured a decentralisation for historic provinces and was profoundly disappointed by the centralist framework. This, he now feared, made it no different from its Austro-Hungarian predecessor. By pushing for centralisation, the Yugoslavs likewise fell into the trap of trying to 'absorb and assimilate all rival elements and to enforce a dull uniformity of type' rather than adopting 'the British conception of citizenship' that promoted unity without stifling diversity.[289] However, he was even less impressed by the Yugoslav statesmen. 'I do not know which is most distasteful to me — the unholy alliance between radicals and democrats [sic] or the childish Croat policy of sulking in a corner, whose only serious effect is to leave the worst elements in the control of the situation'.[290] He was particularly disappointed about Radić, largely blaming his policy of abstention and unwillingness to moderate his unrealistic demands for enabling Pašić to pass 'a far more centralist constitution than he could ever have hoped to obtain if the Croats [...] had presented a united front'.[291] In the Foreign Office, on the other hand, most agreed with the assessment offered by *The Times:* Yugoslavia's future, the article noted and one official highlighted, 'seems doomed to political instability'; the overall outlook was 'not as bright as the friends of the new Kingdom could wish'.[292] All in all, Harold Nicolson concluded, 'the sooner the Constitution is re-made under a man like Trumbić (or even Protić) the better'.[293] For Yugoslavia, the only way forward was decentralisation.

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[283] Hrvoje Matković, *Povijest Jugoslavije – hrvatski pogled* (Zagreb: Naklada Pavičić, 1998), p. 96.
[284] Ibid.
[285] TNA, FO 371/7686/5308, Young to Curzon, 6 April 1922.
[286] Ibid. For an overview of the provisions of the Vidovdan Constitution, see Hodimir Sirotković and Lujo Margetić, *Povijest država i prava naroda SFR Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1988).
[287] FO 371/6194/14658.
[288] R. W. Seton-Watson to Milan Čurčin, 2 December 1921 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, ed. by Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, p. 97.
[289] Seton-Watson, *Southern Slav,* p. 340.

3.3 The dynamics of centralism, 1922–1926

The mid-1920s saw British attitudes towards the Slovak and Croat Questions grow increasingly less sympathetic. Aside from an occasional off-handed remark which lamented the growing tensions between the Czechs and Slovaks and the Serbs and Croats, there was very little interest in finding a suitable solution to address these issues.[294] Indeed, when it came to Czechoslovakia, the Foreign Office had shown no interest in pursuing the subject any further, as demonstrated by the complete absence of any internal discussions concerning the Slovaks or Czechoslovak constitutional framework. Clerk's assurances that the First Republic was making great headways in preserving national unity, remarked Alexander Cadogan of the Central Department, had 'set our minds at rest'.[295] It was an attitude that was primarily influenced by how Czechoslovakia itself was perceived. Given that most of the successor states at the time were dealt by the same department, it was inevitable that British officials would make comparisons between them. Accordingly, the First Republic — in spite of its problems — often seemed to be well ahead of other countries in the region. Despite a large number of political parties, its parliamentary system was seemingly functioning effectively (if not perfectly), and its economic sector enjoyed a fair amount of prosperity.[296] As Kárník points out, not only did the country never manage to each pre-war production levels to justify this optimism, but this period was also far from "golden" in the field of politics, characterised by various internal party crises, inter-party disputes as well as the always-simmering nationality problem.[297] Nevertheless, when contrasted to its less successful neighbours, these seemed like minor problems to British officials, and hardly big enough to dispel the belief that Czechoslovakia was an oasis of democracy in East Central Europe. Moreover, geopolitically, it was also seen as relatively secure.[298] Though it was perhaps not always on excellent terms with all of its neighbours, it was also not a spot where any sort of conflagration seemed likely any time soon. Of course, this is not to say that the Czech statesmen were completely oblivious to the danger that Germany could pose to its integrity, but in the mid-1920s, a weakened Weimar Republic was not seen as a great threat.[299] Instead, it was primarily with Hungary that Czechoslovakia had consistently tense relations during this period, though even that never materialised into an actual armed conflict.[300]

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[290] Seton-Watson to Čurčin in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, ed. by Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, p. 97. In another letter, he explicitly argued that centralism cannot solely be blamed on 'the reactionary Balkan group' in Belgrade, pointing out that Pribićević was in fact a Serb from Croatia. R. W. Seton-Watson to T. P. Conwil-Evans, 3 November 1921 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, ed. by Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, pp. 92-93.

[291] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Background of the Jugoslav Dictatorship', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 10. 29 (1931), 363-76 (p. 366).

[292] The article, John Troutbeck minuted, put 'the situation admirably' and, as such, 'is not likely to be popular in SCS Government circles'. 'Constitution Framing', *The Times,* 20 July 1921 in FO 371/6194/14606.

[293] TNA, FO 371/6194/22132, Minute by Nicolson, 26 November 1921.

[294] For Czech-Slovak relations, see TNA, FO 371/7390/15534, Minute by Lampson, 15 November 1922; FO 371/9675/1552, Clerk to MacDonald, 25 January 1924; FO 371/10675/16575, Dodd to Chamberlain, 22 December 1925. For Serb-Croat relations, see TNA, FO 371/8902/6031, Young to Curzon, 29 March 1923; FO 371/9956/17346, Minute by Howard Smith, 21 November 1924; FO 371/9956/18473, Minute by Bateman, 12 December 1924; FO 371/10793/9925, Kennard to Chamberlain, 27 July 1925.

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[295] TNA, FO 371/4721/14280, Minute by Cadogan, 23 December 1920.

[296] Drahomír Jančík and Ľudovít Hallon, 'Hospodářský a sociální vývoj meziválečného Československa', in *Československo: Dějiny Státu*, ed. by Jindřich Dejmek et al (Praha: Nakladatelství Libri, 2018), pp. 196-236.

[297] Zdenek Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918-1938),* 3 vols, vol. 1 (Praha: Nakadatelství Libri, 2000), pp. 369-415.

[298] For a brief overview of Czechoslovakia's foreign policy during this period, see Paul E. Zinner, 'Czechoslovakia: The Diplomacy of Eduard Beneš', in *The Diplomats 1919–1939*, ed. by Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 100-22.

[299] For the evolution of Czechoslovak-German relations from the 1920s, see 'Obtížné sousedství: Československo a německé státy', in Dejmek, *Československo*, pp. 45-87.

[300] See 'Politické vztahy mezi Československem a Maďarskem', in Dejmek, *Československo,* pp. 197-230.

All in all, to virtually all British observers, the Czechoslovak state looked like a stable, solid democratic country in a sea of what were (at least by comparison) fairly problematic new states.[301] However, as a consequence of this relatively speedy consolidation of the country, Whitehall generally began to lose interest in the Czech-Slovak conflict which they largely concurred was completely immaterial for the integrity of the country.[302] Such attitudes, of course, also meant that the topic of possible restructuring the Czechoslovak state was not taken seriously in London. For the most part, British officials agreed that there was no need to amend the centralised system when it seemingly had no detrimental impact on the stability of Czechoslovakia. Even those that did believe some changes should be implemented to calm the Slovaks down argued that minor and gradual changes to the existing administrative system would be able to successfully iron out the minor disagreements between the Czechs and Slovaks. Even autonomy was seen as too extreme, not only untenable but outright dangerous. Slovakia, they argued, was too dependent on the Czech lands; its industry was corrupt, its food production insufficient, and the country too poor to even maintain its administration and its share of the army.[303] This, unfortunately, was not too far from the truth, as Slovakia was still economically reliant on the Czech lands, having lost its traditional markets following the collapse of Austria-Hungary.[304] Accordingly, Clerk explained, if Hlinka’s programme was to succeed under such circumstances, Slovakia would most likely find itself ‘unable to stand on its legs’.[305] Besides, Robert Smallbones, British representative in Bratislava, alleged Slovak autonomism was largely contrived and affected. Such movements existed across Europe and were ‘probably a reaction against the rigid centralisation practised during the war and, of necessity, when the new states were formed'.[306] If anything, in Slovakia, the autonomist movement was particularly insignificant, since it has been 'retarded by the low type of politicians who have championed it'.[307] More importantly, Clerk also believed that it was in Britain's interest for Czechoslovakia to be stable and prosperous; 'political stability of the Republic', he explained, 'makes for peace in Central Europe'.[308] As such, any forces that sought to disturb this were to be actively discouraged. This desire for autonomy — feared to be merely undercover separatism — could simply not be 'looked upon with friendly unconcern if it developed into an attempt to destroy the Republic'.[309]

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[301] See text on page 87, and footnotes 317 and 318.

[302] Furthermore, Bátonyi argues that by 1925, Britain had entirely lost its interest in the countries of East Central Europe (Czechoslovakia included), a move largely prompted by the failed attempts at prompting Central European integration in the immediate years following the First World War. Bátonyi, pp. 206-21.

[303] TNA, FO 371/8582/20041, Smallbones to Clerk, 27 October 1923; FO 371/9675/18154, Smallbones to Clerk, 21 November 1924.

[304] See Ľudovít Hallon, ‘Príčiny, priebeh a dôsledky štrukturálnych zmien v hospodárstve medzivojnového Slovenska‘, in *Slovensko*, ed. by Zemko and Bystrický, pp. 293-364.

[305] TNA, FO 371/9675/18154, Clerk to Beneš, 28 November 1924.

Additionally, what further helped solidify this dismissive view of the Slovak cause was an extremely positive view of Czech politicians who perpetuated the idea of a centralised Czechoslovakia.[310] Here, Masaryk and Beneš's reputations played a particularly important role in fostering a negative image of Slovak autonomists.[311] Indeed, their high standing among British policymakers often resulted in their statements concerning the Slovak Question being taken at face value.[312] Often described as 'a man who stands far removed from the petty meannesses' with 'extremely sensible and broad' and 'detached and erudite' views, President Masaryk's assertions that the autonomist movement was supported by no one save a small Slovak faction was taken as an accurate assessment of the situation.[313] Likewise, Beneš — described by Clerk as 'one of the ablest statesmen of Central Europe' — argued that the autonomists sought nothing but to undermine Czechoslovakia from within.[314] 'Separatist dreams', he argued, found their expression in Slovak autonomism, a programme pursued by 'short-sighted politicians' who obeyed 'the dictates of local, provincial, factional and individualistic interests'.[315] Furthermore, the fact that Masaryk and other prominent figures such as Šrobár, Štefan Osuský, Czechoslovak Minister to France, and Ivan Dérer of the Social Democratic Party were themselves Slovaks and pro-centralists further detracted from the SL'S's cause.[316] Against such eulogies, it is perhaps obvious why Hlinka, better known as 'the turbulent priest' and 'a violent Home-Ruler', struggled to get British officials to sympathise with his point of view.[317]

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[306] FO 371/8582/20041.

[307] Ibid.

[308] Likewise, Clerk claimed that Czechoslovakia was 'a factor of peace and stability in Central Europe'. TNA, FO 371/9675/18154, Smallbones to Clerk, 21 November 1924. Lampson, on the other hand, noted that it was 'the most solid asset gained in the reshuffle of Europe'. TNA, FO 371/9676/5075, Minute by Lampson, 31 March 1924.

[309] TNA, FO 371/8582/19073, Smallbones to Clerk, 19 October 1923. The belief that autonomy was a smokescreen for separatism was largely due to the fact that it was a movement headed by the Catholic clergy who was suspected to be collaborating with the Magyar irredentists. TNA, FO 371/10677/820, Minute by Aveling, 21 January 1925. This was a very cynical interpretation of the SL'S's demands. As Thomas Lorman notes, the SL'S played an overall constructive role, always seeking to work within the Czechoslovak legislative framework. The fact that the Foreign Office equated their demands with separatism highlights not only how little they understood Hlinka's programme but also the extent to which they believed the SL'S was influenced by the Magyar irredentists. Thomas Lorman, *The Making of the Slovak People's Party: Religion, Nationalism and the Culture War in Early 20th-century Europe* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 159-60.

[310] See 'Attitudes' in Hanak, *T.G.Masaryk*, pp. 125-48.

[311] For more on how Prague and their close associates influenced the discourse on the Slovak Question in America and Britain, see Michael Cude, *The Slovak Question: A Transatlantic Perspective, 1914–1918* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022).

[312] Czechoslovakia, noted a Central Department memo, was 'fortunate' to have both Masaryk and Beneš, 'two statesmen of a calibre different from that of the leaders of other successor states'. TNA, FO 371/8575/18727, On President Masaryk, 18 October 1923.

Though perhaps a short-sighted approach, it is not hard to see why the Foreign Office did not support the federal option for Czechoslovakia for the greater part of the decade. Despite some minor internal disturbances, all factors pointed to the fact that the centralised system was working effectively. Compared to the rest of the region, the First Republic looked like an extraordinarily stable state in political terms — a presumption which was not only confirmed by the British legation in the Czechoslovak capital but was also regularly reiterated in all major newspapers and endorsed by Seton-Watson, 'a champion of the Slovak cause'.[318] This, of course, was not entirely true; as Peter Bugge points out, there were substantial deficits in Czechoslovakia that would allow us to classify it as an epitome of a stable country, with the government regularly encroaching on many basic principles of democratic governance to help maintain such an outward appearance.[319] These failures, however, never came out in the Foreign Office reports at the time. Blinded by the belief that, as Andrea Orzoff puts it, ‘the Czechs […] were as Western in their values and in their political inclinations as the Westerners themselves’, the narrative that was perpetuated in Britain for the vast majority of the 1920s was one of Czechoslovakia being a state ‘that was dedicated to tolerance, egalitarianism, and human rights’.[320] It was, Clerk asserted in his first annual report, was ‘a centre of relative decency and good order’, ‘an example to their neighbours’.[321] Furthermore, though Whitehall was well-informed about the discontent in Slovakia, the autonomist movement was nevertheless treated as marginal and fringe extremism, spearheaded by the *ľudáci* and ignored by everyone else. Once again, it is easy to see why this was the case. Not only was Šrobár’s regime (albeit incorrectly) viewed as already having implemented a satisfactory degree of autonomy in 1919, but British observers generally argued that the 1920 elections themselves largely clarified that the majority of Slovaks did not share Hlinka’s vision.[322] As such, promoting federal reorganisation of the state was at best regarded as unnecessary since centralism, at least as far as the Foreign Office was concerned, did not in any way hinder the smooth development of Czechoslovakia.

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[313] FO 371/8574/10604; TNA, FO 371/85/74/9697, Minute by Butler, 6 June 1923; FO 371/10674/8043, Minute by Nicolson, 17 June 1925; Tomáš G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State: Memories and Observations, 1914–1918* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969), pp. 208-11.

[314] TNA, FO 371/5830/14612, Clerk to Curzon, Annual Report for 1920, 14 July 1921.

[315] He delivered this speech in 1933 in London at the opening session of the Czechoslovak Parliamentary Council. Edvard Beneš, 'Of Czechoslovak Unity', in *We Were and We Shall Be: The Czechoslovak Spirit Through the Centuries*, ed. by Zdenka and Jan Munzer (New York: Fredrick Ungar, 1933), pp. 164-66 (p. 164).

[316] For an example of other pro-centralist Slovak arguments, see Vavro Šrobár, 'Československá otázka a 'hlasisti' (k 60. narodeninám dra. P. Blahu)', *Prúdy XI,* 5 (1927), 257-76; Štefan Osuský, 'Why Czechoslovakia?', *Foreign Affairs,* 15. 3 (1937), 455-71; Ivan Dérer, *The Unity of the Czechs and Slovaks: Has the Pittsburgh Declaration Been Carried Out?*, (Prague: Orbis, 1938).

[317] TNA, FO 371/9675/16480, Minute by Aveling, 29 October 1924; FO 371/12866/759, Minute by Howard Smith, 1 February 1928.

[318] TNA, FO 371/9678/4053, Clerk to MacDonald, Annual Report for 1923, 6 March 1924.

In terms of Yugoslavia, on the other hand, this loss of interest in the question of its administrative organisation owed much to both British disillusionment with the highly centralised state system that the country adopted in 1921 and the fact the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom never came close to revising the existing constitutional system. In fact, with the exception of the 1923 negotiations between the Radicals and the HRSS which quickly collapsed over the question of Croatia's status, the problem of state organisation was left firmly unresolved for the first half of the decade.[323] Even the formation of a joint Pašić–Radić (P–R) Government in July 1925 did not result in any attempts to seriously tackle this volatile issue, its tenure defined by internal conflicts between the two parties and prominent corruption scandals.[324] The positions largely remained unchanged; the establishment in Belgrade still insisted that centralisation provided the best method of keeping the country together whilst Radić, Mehmed Spaho's JMO and other autonomist parties in Croatia and Slovenia kept insisting that different political and state traditions needed to be reflected in the way the country itself was organised. The dispute between centralists and decentralists would continue to not only define the course of Yugoslav history but also British attitudes towards the country. Indeed, as a consequence of the complete absence of any meaningful developments related to the constitutional system, there was also the absence of in-depth discussions in London.

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[319] As he points out, the Constitution was regularly violated, including those concerning the civil rights and freedom of press, the Parliament was far from independent, and the already-limited local self-government granted to different regional organs was regularly encroached upon. See Peter Bugge, ‘Czech Democracy 1918–1938: Paragon or Parody?, *Boh*, 47. 1 (2006–2007), 3–28.

[320] Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 24.

[321] FO 371/5830/14612.

[322] As C. A. Macartney pointed out, however, the fact that the Slovaks did not overwhelmingly support the SL’S did not necessarily translate into support for centralist form of government. Instead, Macartney argues that many Slovaks only voted for pro-centralist, Government parties for opportunistic reasons. Election results on their own can thus hardly be indicative of the real strength of the autonomist movement. C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors: The Treaty of Trianon and Its Consequences, 1919–1937* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 145.

For the most part, the views of Foreign Office officials did not change substantially after 1921, with many continuing to argue in favour of a quasi-federal, devolutionary settlement. Partly, this was because of the genuine belief that this would set Yugoslavia on the path to stability. So long as 'the present constitution of the country is maintained', posited Charles Howard Smith, a member of the Central Department, the country would remain divided between different parties that refuse to work together ‘peaceably’.[325] Even though it was understood that decentralisation had the potential of strenghtening centrifugal forces, it was also recognised that this was the only option that would firmly bring the Croats and Slovenes into the Yugoslav fold. Their current dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in the South Slav state was certainly considered to pose a far greater threat to the country's unity than them potentially seeking to separate if a decentralist system was implemented.[326] Yugoslavia's future hinged on Belgrade appeasing Zagreb, and there was seemingly no other way to do it than to give in as much as possible to the demands of autonomist parties. 'The only real solution', Howard Smith thus confidently concluded, 'seems to be [that] a federation will probably come in the end'.[327] This attutude was also largely down to the fact that this was a system which virtually everyone in Whitehall thought would inevitably be implemented during the first three years of Yugoslavia's existence. In other words, it was not necessarily a product of sustained analysis of the present circumstances in Yugoslavia but simply a tendency to stick to the same, familiar prescriptions, as indicated by the fact that such arguments and their practical implications were never fully fleshed out after the proclamation of the Vidodvan Constitution.[328]

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[323] For the failed 1923 negotiations, see Ferdo Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata* (Zagreb: Izdavački zavod Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, 1961), pp. 412-422.
[324] For the split of the P–R Government, see Čulinović, *Jugoslavija,* pp. 484-486.
[325] TNA, FO 371/9955/11282, Minute by Howard Smith, 16 July 1924.

There were, of course, some members of the Foreign Office who came to argue that federalism was not a sufficient remedy for the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, particularly those members who had not been involved with Yugoslav affairs from the very beginning. Having entered the Central Department in the years following the Vidovdan Constitution, many of the newer staff never experienced the wistful optimism which permeated the discussions on Yugoslavia prior to 1921, and therefore had a far less rosy view of the country and its politicians. From their perspective, the events of 1922–1926 had quite clearly demonstrated that Yugoslavia's troubles stemmed not from its constitutional order, but from the behaviour of its leaders who devoted more time to 'petty party and personal intrigues' than to the creation of a more effective administrative system.[329] Yugoslavia's politicians, complained a memorandum on British policy in the Balkans, lacked 'any genuine impulse towards constructive leadership'.[330] Indeed, both Pašić and Radić, as the two most influential political figures at the time, were seen as equally culpable for fanning the flames of instability in Yugoslavia. As one of the architects of the Vidovdan system, the former was widely regarded as the chief obstacle to constitutional revision, 'the deadly upas tree under whose branches no healthy young plant could grow up'.[331] The latter, on the other hand, was simply too volatile for pragmatic British tastes. His inflammatory attacks on the Yugoslav political order and continued boycott of the Parliament, it was argued, did as much to aid the survival of the centralist system as those parties which actively helped build it.[332] Radić, Charles H. Bateman of the Central Department concurred, was 'such an ass that the sooner the Croats throw him over for good and all, the better for all concerned.'[333] Indeed, the dislike for Yugoslav statesmen was so prevalent that following Pašić's death in December 1926, some officials even began to advocate for the establishment of a military dictatorship as a way of 'at last' bringing some stability to the country.[334] Such an outcome, Bateman noted, was in any case 'preferable' to 'these absurd political pantomimes', particularly given that many British officials doubted that the HRSS would do a better job in administering the country than the Radicals.[335] What Yugoslavia, a country

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[326] Even this was somewhat doubtful as it was quite clearly understood that the threat of Italy and Hungary would not make Croatia and Slovenia comfortable with the idea of independence. Indeed, throughout the period, the autonomist bloc kept stressing their determination to remain a part of the Yugoslav state, albeit not a centralist one. Čulinović, *Jugoslavija,* p. 414. See also Bogdan Križman, *Vanjska politika.*

[327] FO 371/9955/11282.

[328] Furthermore, as Bakić points out, when it came to Yugoslavia in the mid-1920s, British officials were primarily concerned about its external position. The dispute with Italy over the Adriatic and the dispute with Bulgaria over Macedonia were seen as a far greater threat to Balkan stability than the Serb-Croat internal conflict over state organisation, therefore naturally ranking higher on the Foreign Office's list of priorities in the region. See Chapter Two in Bakić, *Britain*, pp. 31-74.

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[329] TNA, FO 371/10793/9251, Minute by Nicolson, 13 July 1925.

[330] *Documents of British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939*, ed. by W. N. Medlicott and Douglas Dakin (London: HMSO, 1966), Series 1a, vol. 1, No. 129, Memorandum Respecting the Balkan Problem and British Policy in the Balkans, 4 December 1925.

[331] Seton-Watson, 'Background', p. 365. Similar comments can be found in TNA, FO 371/7685/3689, Minute by Nicolson, 16 March 1922; FO 371/10792/235, Minute by Howard Smith, 6 January 1925.

[332] Seton-Watson, 'Background', pp. 365-66.; TNA, FO 371/7675/2481, Young to Curzon, 16 February 1922; FO 371/8902/7268, Young to Curzon, 16 April 1923. Radić was perceived so negatively that even Trumbić's reputation slightly suffered after he openly supported the HRSS' policy. Though Bateman asserted that he was still 'far more of a statesman than Radić', Trumbić's 'tirades against Belgrade hardly bear comparison with his activities in 1917–1919 when he was all for the Triune Kingdom'. TNA, FO 371/12211/7571, Minute by Bateman, 12 September 1927.

[333] TNA, FO 371/11405/4750, Minute by Bateman, 20 April 1926.

[334] TNA, FO 371/12210/1126, Kennard to Chamberlain, 02 February 1927; FO 371/12981/1316, Minute by Bateman, 21 February 1928.

[335] TNA, FO 371/12210/1126, Minute by Bateman, 08 February 1927; FO 371/11410/1288, Kennard to Chamberlain, 26 January 1926. Mussolini had many admirers in Britain at the time, and many thought that his heavy-handed methods were something to be emulated by the leader of the countries which did not have long history of constitutionalism and parliamentary democracy. See R. J. B. Bosworth, 'The British Press, the Conservatives, and Mussolini, 1920–34', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 5. 2 (1970), 163-82.

‘abound in short-sighted and obstinate men’, really ‘wants and needs urgently — is a Mussolini.’[336]

Though a degree of decentralisation could perhaps help the Serb-Croat-Slovene state achieve greater levels of national cohesion, it was believed that this was simply not enough to treat all the maladies that plagued its political landscape. As Howard Kennard, Young’s successor as Britain’s minister to Belgrade, noted, federalism was hardly ‘the real remedy’ to this permanent impasse; a much better solution was for Croatia and Slovenia to ‘find more serious leaders than Radić and Korošec to come down here and put more energy and honesty into the Government’.[337] Though the central authorities were far from ‘efficient or blameless’, Kennard stressed that ‘it was not easy for Belgrade to co-operate with Zagreb and Ljubljana’ and their representatives — ‘an irresponsible demagogue’ and ‘an ultramontane priest’.[338] Accordingly, he opined that a mere structural re-organisation would do little to resolve various socio-economic problems and mend ethnic divisions. Centralism, in other words, was no longer seen as the crux of the problem, but simply another extremely divisive issue that need not have been as destructive had it not been exacerbated from the outset by poor leadership. This is, of course, not to say that centralism came to be seen as somehow viable. Decentralisation for historic provinces still remained the order of the day, as it was regarded as the only long-term solution to the administrative problem the Kingdom faced. This newly found obsession with a Mussolini-like Yugoslav was simply a product of the belief that for the country to be effectively consolidated, the constitutional revision would have to be instituted and sponsored by a “strong man” character. As Bateman noted in the 1925 memo, Yugoslavia was ‘the force conducing most to the preservation of law and order in the Balkans’ whose authority in the region would be safe to support ‘if she were not given to sabre-rattling and to administrative corruption’.[339] As such, any method which could bring about the decentralisation of the existing system and finally stabilise its internal affairs was welcomed — even if it meant the death of parliamentary democracy.

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[336] TNA, FO 371/12211/8597, Minute by Bateman, 25 October 1927; FO 371/12211/7195, Minute by Bateman, 30 September 1927.
[337] TNA, FO 371/11406/11787, Kennard to Sargent, 5 November 1926.
[338] TNA, FO 371/12981/1956, Kennard to Chamberlain, 7 March 1928.
[339] DBFP, Memo Respecting the Balkan Problem and British Policy in the Balkans, 4 December 1925.

3.4 Slovak autonomy and Yugoslav dictatorship, 1927-1929

The last years of the 1920s marked a major turning point for the internal structure of both Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Since their creation almost a decade earlier, the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional orders were relatively similar; they were both strictly centralised and their administration was seemingly immutable, often to the detriment of the relations between their constitutive nationalities. Starting with 1927, however, the two states would go in completely opposite directions — one opting for a slightly greater degree of decentralisation (albeit primarily in theory) and the other for even stricter centralist control. In Czechoslovakia, this shift towards autonomism was largely a consequence of the SL'S finally joining the government in January 1927. This sudden volte-face primarily came as a result of the new Government agreeing to adopt a new law on provincial administration.[340] Indeed, Hlinka was only willing to participate under the condition that the existing 1920 administrative law which divided Slovakia into six counties (*župy*) each headed by an official appointed by Prague be scrapped and the Ministry for the Administration of Slovakia abolished. He finally got his wish in July 1927, when a new provincial system was instituted, making Slovakia one of four provinces, equal in status to Bohemia, Moravia-Silesia and Ruthenia, with its own president, assembly and executive committee. Though greeted by Hlinka as 'a tactical step towards autonomy', in practice, it was far from it.[341] Though the new reform did meet Hlinka's minimum requirement, in practice, it did not achieve much in terms of granting greater self-government, since the central government retained the power to name one-third of representatives in the regional assemblies with regional presidents being directly appointed by the President rather than being voted in by the people.[342] The reform, as Beneš himself put it, merely created 'the impression that administration was being decentralised when in fact it was being further centralised'.[343] This, of course, was a tactical move, as this change in policy allowed Prague to appease the autonomists in Slovakia by conceding to some of their demands without ever properly putting the unity of the state at stake and setting a precent which other minority groups in the country could rely on when making similar demands, namely the Sudeten Germans.

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[340] See Eva Broklová, *Československá demokracie: Politický systém ČSR 1918 – 1938* (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 1992).

[341] TNA, FO 371/12867/2380, Macleay to Chamberlain, Annual Report for 1927, 12 March 1928. Not everyone agrees with this interpretation. For example, Lorman asserts that even though it was limited, this reform did give the Slovaks genuine autonomy on the basis that the assembly and the Provincial Office were the first nationwide Slovak institutions. See Lorman, p. 159.

Nevertheless, whilst Czechoslovakia took its first steps towards introducing some sort of autonomy, no matter how flawed or limited, Yugoslavia was speeding towards the collapse of its parliamentary democracy. Following the 1927 September elections, which failed to produce a mandate for any of the parties, the unrelenting conflict between the Radicals and the Peasant-Democratic Coalition (SDK) — the alliance between Radić and Pribićević formed in November 1927 — helped keep the political atmosphere at a fever pitch.[344] The activities of the Parliament were completely paralysed, and its proceedings were largely reduced to a steady barrage of insults, accusations and threats.[345] For the most part, the SDK continued pushing for greater regional autonomy, often putting forth such absurd demands that even they knew Belgrade would never have accepted, including completely re-organising the Yugoslav administration (and drastically expanding Croatia's territory at the expense of Serbia).[346] Indeed, the debates in the parliament over administration, taxation and foreign policy got so heated that Radić even went as far as extending an invitation to the King to appoint a non-parliamentary figure, such as a retired army officer, as the head of government until the inter-party fighting subsided.[347] These were simultaneously followed by a wave of demonstrations in big cities across the countries, including a bloody quelling of student protests in Belgrade.[348]

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[342] Kárník, vol. 1, p. 405.

[343] Victor S. Mamatey, 'The Development of Czechoslovak Democracy, 1920–1938', in *History*, ed. by Mamatey and Luža, pp. 99-166 (p. 134).

[344] For a very detailed summary of the parliamentary proceedings leading up to the *Skupština* murders, see Čulinović, *Jugoslavija*, pp. 524-531. In English, see John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 158-62.

[345] Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Co, 2007), p. 66.

[346] Radić proposed the establishment of four large districts: an Adriatic–Danubian one, composed of Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Vojvodina, one encompassing Serbia proper, another southern and Old Serbia, which included Macedonia and Kosovo, and Slovenia. Biondich, p. 234.

Under such circumstances, it was not long before the situation reached its boiling point. On 20 June 1928, following a fiery verbal confrontation with the opposition, Puniša Račić, a Montenegrin Radical deputy, fired shots in the National Assembly, wounding Radić and two HSS deputies as well as killing two others, including Radić's nephew, Pavle. The political fallout of the shooting was immediate. The SDK promptly withdrew from Skupština and retreated to Zagreb in protest, calling for the dissolution of the present Government and renewing their demands for the complete revision of the Vidovdan Constitution and the federal re-organisation of the state on the basis of historic provinces.[349] For the SDK, as Pribićević would later explain, the renewed push for a federation stemmed from their conviction that

> maybe the South Slavs today would be much closer to true unitarism, had they started with federal organisation of the state that would have reflected their diverse historical pasts, rather than starting with unitarism which the leading elements in Belgrade saw and realised as the hegemony of Serbia, whose population and territory comprise little more than one fifth of the entire state.[350]

Back in Belgrade, however, all efforts were made to maintain appearances. The Government refused to take any responsibility for these developments, with the Prime Minister Velimir Vukičević refusing to tender his resignation for almost two weeks. Once he finally did, the King offered Radić a mandate to form a new government at hopes this would somewhat calm the situation down. This, however, was rejected on the grounds that the SDK would not work with any central institution until fundamental revision of the constitutional system was seriously on the cards.[351] Instead, the Cabinet comprising the SLS, JMO, the Democrats and the Radicals was formed under Anton Korošec with the hope that the latter could perhaps bring Pribićević and the HSS to the negotiating table. This, however, was not the case, if only because this new government was composed of almost identical members to the one that oversaw the Skupština murders.[352] Having failed to facilitate any sort of dialogue that could have helped Zagreb and Belgrade find common ground, it too quickly collapsed, giving Alexander free rein to proclaim a royal dictatorship on 6 January 1929.

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[347] Biondich, p. 233.

[348] Čulinović, *Jugoslavija*, p. 521-523.

[349] As Pribićević would later explain in his book that he published in 1933, the SDK pushed for a federation on the basis of ‘political-historic individualities’, not only because it would not artificially divide the ethnically mixed population but also because many people identified not only with their ethnicity, but also with their historic region, be it Slovenia, Serbia proper or Dalmatia. Svetozar Pribićević, *Diktatura Kralja Aleksandra* (Zagreb: Globus, 1990), p. 122.

[350] Pribićević, p. 80.

In Britain, the reaction to the events in the two countries could not have been more different. As far as the revision of the Czechoslovak administration was concerned, the reception was lacklustre. For the most part, London simply reiterated the same old conclusions as to why this new provincial system could not have been implemented earlier, quoting either the lack of available officials or financial issues.[353] Indeed, British officials were far more enthused about the SL'S entry into the Government.[354] It was, as Ronald Macleay, Clerk's successor, put it, 'one of the most important inner political events in the history of Czechoslovakia'.[355] Whilst the gradual loosening of centralist control was acknowledged, it was not seen as either a positive or negative development in its own right. Instead, this formative move towards limited autonomy was largely viewed from the perspective of the political consolidation of Czechoslovak society.[356] Generally unconcerned about Czechoslovak domestic politics, the Foreign Office did not pay attention to any long-term benefits that these measures could bring; all that was celebrated was the fact that the SL'S had — at least on the surface of it — finally been mollified.[357] British officials, however, were rather misguided in their attitudes. Though the new regional system was, as Ferdinand Peroutka puts it, 'seen as a suitable opportunity to relegate autonomist slogans to the harmless language of merely administrative regional autonomy', in the end, it only ended up strenghtening the Slovak resolve to demand even more concessions, seeing this as a first step towards federalisation and a far greater measure of self-governance.[358]

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[351] Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia: Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), p. 54.
[352] Čulinović, *Jugoslavija,* p. 534.
[353] TNA, FO 371/12094/685, Dodd to Chamberlain, 17 January 1927; FO 371/12094/6299, Macleay to Chamberlain, 18 July 1927.
[354] TNA, FO 371/12094/685, Minute by Aveling, 27 January 1927.
[355] FO 371/12867/2380; 'The Czechoslovak Cabinet', *The Times,* 17 January 1927, p. 11.; 'Reforms in Czecho-Slovakia', *The Observer,* 20 February 1927, p. 10.
[356] FO 371/12867/2380.
[357] Zorach even suggests that the fact that Macleay — an experienced, but not very prominent diplomat — was appointed to Prague demonstrates just how unimportant Czechoslovakia was to the Foreign Office at the time. Zorach, 'The British View', p. 58.

To Whitehall, however, the long-term implications behind this development did not matter. Though the apparent resolution of the Slovak Question — 'a spectre which has long haunted the rulers of this country' — was welcomed as a way of further stabilising Czechoslovakia, it was not treated as a true watershed moment because the troubles in Slovakia were never regarded as an actual threat to Czechoslovak unity and survival.[359] Likewise, though Macleay praised Hlinka for abandoning his politics of opposition and not becoming 'a Slovak Stefan Raditch', his autonomist programme still did not command much support in Britain.[360] Despite an awareness that the concessions given by the Prague authorities did not entirely satisfy Slovak demands, they were regarded as more than sufficient. This reaction of the British authorities was nothing out of the ordinary; quite the contrary, it was a perfectly natural continuation of the ignorance and apathy that had shaped British policy towards the Slovaks since the very beginning. Even ten years after the unification of the country, the belief that the Slovaks were simply incapable of governing themselves persisted. Out of the two, London still heavily favoured the Czechs, seeing Czechoslovakia as a country built around Czech, not Czech-Slovak, identity and as such, justifiably governed and administered by Prague. The Slovaks, concluded one Central Department official, were simply 'not yet fit for autonomy'.[361]

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[358] Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování Státu,* vol. 3 (Praha: Lidové Noviny, 1991), p. 1022.

[359] TNA, FO 371/12865/5641, Macleay to Chamberlain, 19 July 1928. 'The Slovak grievances to-day', reported *The Daily Telegraph,* 'are practically non-existent'. 'Croats & Serbs', *The Daily Telegraph,* 14 November 1928, p. 7.

[360] FO 371/12867/2380.

[361] TNA, FO 371/12866/1560, Minute by an unknown FO official, 28 February 1928. Macartney, for example, argued that the Slovak programme for political autonomy was 'almost arrogant' in its assumption that Slovakia was capable to 'hold its own' against the Magyars and other national minorities. Macartney, p. 143.

The indifference displayed by British policymakers particularly comes to the fore when compared to Seton-Watson's reaction. He largely saw the new administrative law as a happy medium — simultaneously satisfying the Slovaks whilst preserving the unity of the country.[362] Indeed, he praised these changes precisely for their ability to seriously tackle the issue of self-government without creating 'any revolutionary precedent and without disturbing the progress of the other provinces'.[363] Like his counterparts in Whitehall, he also believed that the provincial system was an adequate first step; only time would tell whether more concessions would be necessary or even prudent.[364] At the same time, however, he was far more enthusiastic about the fact that Czechoslovakia had finally reached 'convalescence from the worst disease of post-war Europe, the disease of centralism' and began moving along 'the path of reasonable decentralisation'.[365] Indeed, whereas Foreign Office officials were primarily interested in the short-term solution — that is, the appeasement of the SL'S — Seton-Watson was much more aware of the importance of addressing Slovak grievances in the long run and remedying the problem until it was no more. This, he understood, could not be done by minor concessions but by gradually changing the entire system. Just as he had once argued that some form of federal re-organisation could help resolve the Austro-Hungarian nationality problems, he now believed that only through gradual decentralisation could Czechoslovakia ensure that it did not eventually find itself facing the same ethnic tensions that tore apart its imperial predecessor. Furthermore, aside from effectively tackling a domestic problem, he also argued that the First Republic had set an admirable example for Yugoslavia and Romania, both of whom he hoped would follow in the footsteps of their neighbour to the north. Though consolidation was still 'a relative term in Europe today', he concluded, the Czechoslovak leaders had successfully ensured that there would be 'no country to which the word [consolidation]' could 'more justly and confidently be applied than Czechoslovakia'.[366]

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[362] See also Robert Machray, 'Czechoslovakia a Pioneer in Central European Politics', *Current History (New York),* 25. 6 (1927), 839; H. Charles Woods, 'Ten Years of New Czechoslovakia', *The English Review, 1908-1937,* (1929), 693-702.

[363] See 'Introduction: Czechoslovakia and the Slovak Problem' in R. W. Seton-Watson, in *Slovakia Then and Now: A Political Survey by Many Slovak Authors* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), pp. 5-63.

[364] SSEES, SEW 10/1/1, R. W. Seton-Watson, 'Czechoslovakia After Ten Years', 1928.

[365] Ibid.

In contrast, whereas the subject of Czechoslovak administrative organisation attracted minimal British attention, the Skupština murders did much to revive London’s interest in the Yugoslav constitutional question, if only because Whitehall began to seriously fear that the disintegration of the South Slav union was unavoidable.[367] Though the complete separation of Croatia was dismissed as unlikely given the Italian threat on the Adriatic, there was nevertheless a consensus in the Foreign Office that certain concessions to the Croats would have to be made soon if Yugoslavia was going to survive.[368] Barely two weeks after the attacks, *The Economist* was already warning of the difficulties that preserving the existing system could create in the Balkans:

> The process of devolution can now no longer be delayed without risk to the recently achieved unity of the Yugoslav State. It is to be hoped that the Serbs will realise this in time, for an upheaval in Yugoslavia would imperil the stability of South-Eastern Europe, and would thereby threaten the peace of Europe as a whole.[369]

This echoed the thoughts of British officials. These doubts were not unfounded. The country was deeply divided, with Zagreb completely unwilling to work together with Belgrade and demonstrations erupting across the country.[370] ‘The demand for Croatian autonomy, if neglected’, observed James Headlam-Morley, Historical Adviser to the Foreign Office, ‘might bring about the dissolution of the new State'.[371] Indeed, Whitehall repeatedly deplored the 'remarkable callousness' of the Government, its 'complete failure to recognise the gravity of the situation', and unwillingness to take the demands of the opposition seriously.[372] Given that Vukičević's Cabinet took two weeks to even consider officially resigning and disbanding the Parliament, Headlam-Morley's assessment was perhaps not too far off the mark. What made the behaviour of the Government seem even worse in the eyes of British officials was the fact that many were convinced that Belgrade did not even have to go as far as agreeing to all of the SDK's demands to appease them. The bare minimum, it was thought, would have sufficed (a rather sanguine view, given that the relations between Zagreb and Belgrade had arguably reached a new low in the summer of 1928). The Belgrade politicians, posited Patrick Roberts, First Secretary in Belgrade, did not even need to fully commit to a federal system, but simply 'display some reasonable degree of sympathy' to placate the opposition.[373] Once the Croats were 'brought up against hard facts', they would probably agree to 'far less sweeping changes than they at present tend to indicate'.[374] 'Much could be done to satisfy the Croatians' demands for decentralisation by administrative orders, and more again by legislation'; only if the central authorities continued to antagonise them would 'certain modification of the Constitution […] be found inevitable' in the end.[375]

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[366] Ibid.

[367] Though they certainly did not condone the shootings, many British observers argued that Radić brought this upon himself; in fact, Bateman bluntly expressed his disappointment at the fact that 'the excitable Radical got the wrong Radić’. Roberts argued that though Račić’s crimes need to be ‘universally condemned in the strongest terms’, it was worth taking into account ‘the incredible provocation which the members of the majority have had to undergo for the past fortnight’. Even Seton-Watson noted that the Skupština murders were only a reflection (albeit, of 'an extreme and criminal' nature) of 'the growing exasperation felt in many serious circles at the erratic tactics of Radić and his followers’. TNA, FO 371/12982/4799, Minute by Bateman, 21 June 1928; FO 371/12982/4939, Roberts to Chamberlain, 20 June 1928; Seton-Watson, ‘Jugoslavia and Croatia’, p. 125.

[368] Officially, the SDK claimed they were committed to keeping the Yugoslav boundaries unchanged and negated any desire to leave its fold. However, as James Sadkovich points out, after the shootings, the HSS did seriously contemplate separation of Croatia from the Yugoslav Kingdom, going even as far as looking to Italy and Hungary for support in their struggle against Belgrade. See James J. Sadkovich, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism, 1927-1937* (New York: Gardland Publishing, Inc., 1987), pp. 57-77.

[369] ‘The Serbo-Croat Crisis’, *The Economist,* 30 June 1928, pp.1328-29.

[370] Čulinović, *Jugoslavija*, p. 531.

This critique of the SDK's federalist demands was in line with British late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century writings on federalism. Even though the survival of Yugoslavia had never seemed more under threat, an actual federal settlement with its divisible sovereignty continued to be seen as dangerous, as it was believed that it would help weaken the central authority and inevitably lead to the dissolution of the South Slav union. Instead, when the Foreign Office spoke of Serbo-Croat reconciliation, they invariably did so with a decentralist solution in mind. This tendency was also encouraged by Kennard who believed it to be a more practical solution, quicker to implement and with the potential of ensuring ‘a greater regard for the interests of non-Serb elements in the Triune Kingdom’.[376] Such a scheme, he added, was also supported by ‘the more serious’ Croat leaders.[377] Those who supported Radić and his successor, Vladko Maček, in their calls for the creation of a true federation — whereby the central authority would only control foreign affairs and defence — were just ‘opening their mouths very wide’.[378] The rest only aimed to ‘secure a greater degree of autonomy, a redistribution of the provinces with administrative, financial and judicial independence from Belgrade’.[379] The talk of “serious realists” as opposed to federally-inclined “dreamers” is rather noteworthy here, given that two of the largest parties in Croatia-Slavonia — Ante Pavelić’s Croat Party of Right and Ante Trumbić's Croat Federalist Peasant Party — were quick to join the Croat wing of the SDK after Radić’s death.[380] Such thinking was arguably an extension of the same tendency the Foreign Office displayed during the pre-Vidovdan discussions: the over-exaggeration of popular support in Yugoslavia for a solution they themselves favoured because it seemed to be the most pragmatic one. Indeed, once “extreme” federalism was discounted, the exact details of other decentralist schemes did not matter much in London. In a letter to King Alexander in September 1928, Steed precisely stressed that British ‘well-wishers’ only cared about ‘the strengthening of Yugoslav unity, no matter in how decentralised an administrative form’.[381]

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[371] TNA, FO 371/12982/6315, Minute by Headlam-Morley, 31 August 1928.
[372] TNA, FO 371/12982/5103, Minute by unknown FO official, 9 July 1928.
[373] TNA, FO 371/12982/5464, Roberts to Chamberlain, 11 July 1928.
[374] Ibid.
[375] Ibid.

It was also for this reason that Alexander's dictatorship received a relatively warm welcome. As previously discussed, this development was certainly not a surprise but something that Whitehall had speculated about for a while. Though ‘time alone’ would show whether the decision to abolish the Constitution and dissolve the parliament ‘has been wise or not’, it was agreed that the

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[376] TNA, FO 371/12982/5842, Kennard to Chamberlain, 26 June 1928.
[377] TNA, FO 371/12982/6315, Kennard to Cushendun, 16 August 1928.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.
[380] Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), p. 62.
[381] TNA, FO 371/12983/7221, H. Wickham Steed to King Alexander, The Future of Yugoslavia, 1 September 1928.

King had 'very little choice' but to 'take the matter into his own hands'.[382] This apparent British enthusiasm for the abolition of democracy, however, was also down to a misinterpretation of the King's intentions, with most British officials maintaining that Alexander was committed to the idea of decentralisation of the Yugoslav system.[383] 'Decentralisation', Seton-Watson optimistically asserted in January 1929, was 'openly proclaimed by the King to be one of the first necessities of the Yugoslav State'.[384] It was generally assumed that the King was simply less likely to alienate the Serb peasantry when trying to appease the Croats.[385] The fact that Alexander himself was 'a Serb and of peasant stock', Howard Smith argued, should enable him to gauge just 'how far he can go […] in concessions to the Croats'.[386] This royal measure, in other words, was seen as a temporary remedy to be abolished as soon as the political situation in the country stabilised. Even after a decade-long demonstration that such an outcome was at best unlikely to be realised, British observers continued to hold on to the belief that only by a process of decentralisation could permanent peace in Yugoslavia be ensured; the dictatorship was merely a steppingstone.

3.5 Conclusion

The discussions in Britain concerning Czechoslovak and Yugoslav internal structures that took place in the formative years following the creation of the two countries closely followed the blueprint that was already established during the war. Whereas decentralisation — albeit often incorrectly described as federalism — was seen as an ideal option for the South Slav Kingdom, the majority of the Foreign Office supported the centralist system that was implemented by the Czechoslovak authorities. Despite the similar relations between the state-constitutive nations and the obvious parallels between the Slovak and Croat Questions, this differing approach was primarily a product of overall perceptions of the internal stability of the two states. Indeed, even though they were aware that the Slovaks had many reservations about the unitary, centralist framework that had been established, to British officials, the First Republic looked like the most consolidated country east of the Rhine. It was, as Lord Curzon would point out in 1923, ‘the one solid element of stability in Central Europe’.[387] At the same time, Yugoslavia had demonstrated from the very start that the Serb-Croat failure to reach a compromise hindered not only the country’s internal political developments but posed a considerable threat to its ability to help maintain peace in the Balkans. It was understood that the stability of the entire region partially depended upon the resolution of the contentious South Slav national question; it was a matter that went beyond mere domestic consequences.

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[382] TNA, FO 371/13706/97, Minute by Howard Smith, 7 January 1929.

[383] This could not be further from the truth; as Pribićević notes, during the discussions immediately following the Skupština shootings, the King was more open to the idea of 'amputating' Croatia (that is, severing Croatia proper and Slovenia from the state whilst Slavonia and Dalmatia, areas where there was a significant Serb population, would remain in Yugoslavia) than to federation. Pribićević, p. 68.

[384] Seton-Watson, 'Jugoslavia and Croatia', p. 133.

[385] TNA, FO 371/13706/153, Minute by Bateman, 8 January 1929.

[386] TNA, FO 371/13706/153, Minute by Howard Smith, 8 January 1929.

Furthermore, as already discussed in the previous chapter, general prejudices continued to play an equally important role in influencing Whitehall's support for any particular constitutional settlement. In fact, the Foreign Office's response to Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional changes sheds much light on the potency of pre-1918 preconceptions. The impressions created prior to and during the First World War not only survived the first half of the interwar period but continued to thrive. Almost ten years after the two states were created, the belief that the Slovaks were politically underdeveloped and therefore in desperate need of Czech guidance, and the Serbs too oriental to be controlling the westernised Croats and Slovenes continued to exercise much influence on British attitudes towards the Slovak and Croat questions. Furthermore, the British attitude towards decentralist movements in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was not only shaped by a variety of stereotypes concerning the national characteristics of Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs and Croats but also by British view of their political leaders. This was particularly notable in the Czechoslovak case, where the activities of friendly pro-centralist figures did much to shape the Foreign Office's stance towards the movement for Slovak autonomy and reinforce the belief that the Slovaks were not ready for autonomy.

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[387] TNA, FO 371/8575/18224, Curzon to Peter, 22 October 1923.

Lastly, this differing approach towards Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional problems suggests much about how federalism was conceptualised in British governmental circles at the time. When it came to Czechoslovakia, whose relatively stable political developments provided a good cause for optimism throughout the 1920s, federal-like re-arrangement did not command much support in British governmental circles. This was largely due to the fact that there was virtually no evidence to suggest that any major internal problems in Czechoslovakia were caused exclusively by the existence of a centralist system. Though both German and Slovak complaints were noted, even the more legitimate ones were regularly dismissed as either exaggerated or dismissed on the grounds that they were simply a cover for separatism. When it came to Yugoslavia, on the other hand, it was quite clear that the root cause of all domestic instability was Belgrade's refusal to grant a greater degree of autonomy to Croats and Slovenes. Centralism, as such, had to be replaced by any system which would ensure that the two nationalities remained firmly within the South Slav fold. What this suggests, however, is that federalism was not always seen as a suitable constitutional option for all multi-national states. Quite the contrary. Rather than being a cure for all illnesses related to internal ethnic conflicts, it was instead treated as a last resort in the instances when minor concessions would simply no longer do.

Chapter 4 New diplomats, new perceptions: Britain and the re-organisation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, 1930-1937

4.1 Introduction

In his annual overview of the political events that had taken place across the globe over the previous twelve months, Arnold Toynbee described 1931 as 'the *annus terribilis*', a year when 'men and women all over the world were seriously contemplating and frankly discussing the possibility that the Western system of Society might break down and cease to work'.[388] As we know, such an extreme scenario did not come to pass by the time these words were penned in 1932. And yet, though 1931 might not have spelt complete societal collapse, with everything that followed it can be argued that Toynbee's men and women were not too delusional. Characterised by the Great Depression, and the strengthening of Germany under its new Reichskanzler and later *Führer* Adolf Hitler that followed closely behind, the period between 1930 and 1937 was one of uncertainty, instability, and change. Indeed, it was precisely during this time that the new political order established in Paris in 1919 had started to show some major cracks, culminating with the first substantial re-write of the existing map of Europe — the 1936 German occupation of the Rhineland. No country in the world remained immune to such economic, geopolitical, and military developments, affecting not only their external standing but also their internal affairs.

This particularly rings true for the countries that emerged out of the fallen empires in 1918, including Yugoslavia and especially Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak domestic affairs at the time were primarily shaped by the emerging problem of the Sudeten Germans which now started occupying much of British attention, almost completely sidelining the Slovak Question. Though always precarious, Czech-German relations began to completely deteriorate during the 1930s, as the economic slump and the growth of the Nazi threat across the border helped aggravate the resentment and enmity buried just underneath the surface. From there, it was not long before these tensions found a political outlet in the Henlein movement and transformed into a struggle for Sudeten German self-determination. Furthermore, given that this problem also implicated Germany, it very quickly transcended Czechoslovakia's national borders, becoming a subject of heated international debate that would culminate a few years later with the notorious Munich Agreement. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, entered the 1930s as a full-fledged dictatorship. Not only did King Alexander officially change the country's name, but also radically altered its administrative system and passed numerous measures targeted at completing the process of converting the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from so-called tribes into full-fledged Yugoslavs that had left their previous regional identities behind. Even following the King's assassination in Marseilles in 1934, the situation would in practice stay unchanged, ensuring that the dichotomy between federalism and centralism firmly remained the interminable feature of Yugoslav politics throughout the 1930s.

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[388] Arnold Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1931* (London: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1932), p. 1.

Given that in both cases, these developments touched closely upon the issue of Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic stability, they also became the main lens through which British officials discussed their constitutional orders in the early 1930s. Accordingly, this chapter examines how British diplomats reacted to these changes in the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav political landscapes and how this informed the debates on their internal structures. The first section looks at Czechoslovakia, focusing largely on British discussions on the Henlein movement and the activities of the government in Prague. More specifically, it analyses how British perceptions of the Sudeten German problem influenced the wider discussions concerning the re-organisation of the Czechoslovak state and it explores the reasons behind London's endorsement of an autonomist solution. Here, the focus shifts from the Slovaks to the Germans precisely because British officials firmly approached the topic of Czechoslovak constitutional issues from the perspective of Sudeten German, not Slovak, grievances.

Furthermore, by contrasting the official Foreign Office response to German as opposed to Slovak demands, it also assesses the extent to which anti-Slav prejudice influenced the British conceptualisation of the most viable constitutional order for Czechoslovakia. The rest of the chapter then turns to Yugoslavia and its royal dictatorship. Since British attitudes on the necessity of decentralising Yugoslavia remained unchanged throughout the period, this section primarily examines the change in language used to discuss Yugoslav state organisation and the impact that the new British Minister to Belgrade, Sir Nevile Henderson, had on the shaping of this discourse. It demonstrates that there was a clear shift in semantics since the 1920s, caused by an erroneous tendency to equate a certain type of administrative division with a certain form of political organisation.

4.2 Decentralising Czechoslovakia: The question of the Sudeten Germans

During the first fifteen or so years of Czechoslovakia's existence, London only occasionally considered the country's German minority and its relationship with the Czechs. The Foreign Office was fairly indifferent to the question of Sudeten Germans in the 1920s. This was primarily down to two reasons. Firstly, there was a tendency to argue at the time that most German grievances were vastly exaggerated.[389] Indeed, when they did not dismiss their complaints outright, British officials tended to excuse any legitimate reports of discrimination against the German minority as a perfectly normal occurrence in the country that was in the middle of the process of national consolidation. As Clerk himself noted in his first annual report, 'although there have been many inexcusable acts of petty persecution, the Czech was obliged to act harshly, if he was to establish himself'.[390] Secondly, there was also a prevalent belief that the Czechs and Germans — all minor disagreements aside — were on friendly terms. Already in 1920, Clerk asserted that 'a mutual spirit of greater tolerance' was gradually growing and that the Germans had, for the most part, resigned themselves to working with the Czechs within the bounds of the state.[391] This assessment, however, has less to do with reality and more with the fact that British diplomats generally tended to report on this issue through Prague's eyes. Indeed, the vast majority of Germans in Czechoslovakia were completely disengaged from parliamentary politics, tending to instead gather around various nationalist societies and networks (such as the *Turnverband,* a German gymnastic society which numbered over 100,000 men, to name but one) that placed great focus on the idea of German national and spiritual unity.[392] Yet, as Cornwall points out, these were never discussed in British reports coming from Thun Palace, who tended to exclusively focus on party politics and thereby paint a far more positive picture of Czech-German relations for the first decade of Czechoslovakia's existence.[393]

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[389] See Mark Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien,* ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 313-33 (pp. 316-317) and Chapter Four in Dejmek, *Nenaplněné,* pp. 311-344.

[390] FO 371/5830/14612.

Yet, following the election of Adolf Hitler as the new German chancellor and the greater politicisation of the Sudeten German population that came with it, even Whitehall began to realise not everything was as harmonious as they had previously assumed. This is not to say that the first signs of trouble immediately changed British opinion on the matter. Indeed, British attitudes towards the whole problem might have been completely different had this shift in Czech-German relations not also coincided with the appointment of Sir Joseph Addison as British Minister to Prague. Though regarded by some in the Foreign Office as 'a "professional pessimist"', Addison was generally held in high regard, seen as 'an acute and well-informed observer'.[394] His reputation as a diplomat whose views accurately reflected the situation on ground would however have a profound impact on Czechoslovakia's diminishing standing in the eyes of British policy makers during his tenure there. In stark contrast to his predecessors, Addison was a staunch Czechophobe (or at the very least, a big Germanophile) who did not attempt to hide his distaste for the Czechoslovak establishment. This stance would seep into virtually all his reports, influencing not only British views of Czech-German relations but of Czechoslovakia as a whole. For him, the First Republic was far from 'the best justification of the Peace Conference'.[395] Instead, he argued that Czechoslovakia was an 'artificial country', 'a patchwork quilt, sewn together by an impatient "Hausfrau" out of materials which she happened to find at hand'.[396] He adamantly claimed that the Czechoslovak state was an irrelevant factor — a mere 'pawn in the game' of European politics.[397] Indeed, he openly advocated for the re-adjustment of territorial borders that were established at Paris which he believed to be the best way for ensuring long-lasting stability in Central Europe. 'You will have no peace, no confidence and no economic co-operation', he noted in a letter to Sargent as early as 1932, 'until the frontiers of 1914 are, more or less, restored' — a re-arrangement which by definition precluded the destruction of Czechoslovakia.[398]

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[391] Ibid.
[392] See Chapter Five in Mark Cornwall, *The Devil's Wall: The Nationalist Youth Mission of Heinz Rutha* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 104-135.
[393] Ibid.
[394] TNA, FO 371/16659/10012, Minute by O'Malley, 21 November 1933. Jonathan Zorach, for example, suggests that Addison was precisely replaced at the end of 1936 because he was too pessimistic and his advice for dealing with the problem of Sudeten Germans not constructive enough. Zorach, 'The British View', p. 61. See also Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien,* ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 321-22.

As Cornwall points out, Addison's view of Czechoslovakia was shaped as much by his anti-Slav attitudes as it was by his pro-German leanings.[399] 'The Czechs', Addison argued, 'are Slavs, with whom it is an instinct to dislike everything German'.[400] Qualities such as 'order, method, punctuality, honesty in dealing with one's fellow human beings' that were innate to the Germans were 'as alien to the Slav character as water to a cat'.[401] Even the Czech leaders — much admired by Clerk and the Foreign Office during the 1920s — were now described as conceited and complacent, 'too dull and suspicious' to know anything 'worth hearing with regard to general problems'.[402] Far from being 'an international genius', the new Minister at the Thun Palace argued that Beneš was merely 'a very sly and shrewd politician', 'the "Little Jack Horner" of Europe'.[403] The ageing Czechoslovak President, on the other hand, was reported to be increasingly irrelevant; not only did Addison believe that Masaryk's influence was drastically waning but he actually described him as "gaga".[404] At the same time, he did not report much on the exact activities of Konrad Henlein, the *de facto* representative of the Sudeten Germans post-1935, instead opting to mainly supply the Foreign Office with his impression of his character. Henlein, Addison asserted, was 'a man of his word', a loyal Czechoslovak and a believer in democracy whose moderate and amiable nature was apparent to everyone save the Czech authorities.[405] Indeed, reading the reports sent from Prague during this time, one gets the impression that the worsening Czech-German relations could only be ascribed to Czech determination to 'maintain themselves as the dominating cast'.[406] He firmly believed that the Czechs and their minority policy were the core of the whole problem, and he was bent on demonstrating this to the Foreign Office. Such prejudice, as is to be expected, profoundly shaped how he viewed the construction of the state. For Addison, the centralisation enforced by what he believed to be an inherently inferior nationality was yet another proof that some form of autonomy that would bring the Germans on an equal footing needed to be instituted immediately, and just another aspect that showed Czechoslovakia was not a state fit for survival.[407]

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[395] TNA, FO 371/9678/4053, Clerk to MacDonald, Annual Report for 1923, 6 March 1924.
[396] TNA, FO 371/15900/1088, Addison to Sargent, 25 January 1932; FO 371/16659/100012, Addison to Simon, 11 November 1933. See also TNA, FO 371/15179/2362, Addison to Henderson, 28 March 1931; FO 371/16662/4123, Addison to Simon, 1 May 1933.
[397] FO 371/16659/10012. See also TNA, FO 371/19495/6800, Addison to Hoare, 11 November 1935.
[398] TNA, FO 371/15900/1088, Addison to Sargent, 25 January 1932.
[399] Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien,* ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 322-24.
[400] TNA, FO 371/18382/4479, Addison to Simon, 7 August 1934.
[401] Ibid. For his anti-Czech attitude, see FO 371/15900/1088; FO 371/15179/2362; FO 371/16659/10012. For other examples of his pro-German orientation, see TNA, FO 371/18383/1574, Addison to Simon, Annual Report for 1933, 26 February 1933; FO 371/18382/4479, Addison to Simon, 7 August 1934.

This anti-Czech spirit also informed his view of the situation in Slovakia. For the most part, Addison was uninterested in their affairs and rarely commented on Slovak political developments. In this, admittedly, he did not differ much from his predecessors. Yet, in rather stark contrast to both Clerk and Macleay, the new British Minister painted a far more favourable picture of the Slovaks. Rebuking the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks were one people, he deplored what he claimed to be the invasion and occupation of Slovakia 'by crowds of Czech policemen and officials'.[408] Indeed, Addison and his equally Czechophobe deputy Robert Hadow incorrectly stated on multiple occasions that the Slovaks were not a state-constitutive national group but a 'discontented and sullen minority' — a sentiment which predominantly stemmed from the belief that there was no such thing as the Czechoslovak people.[409] Expecting Czechoslovakia to resemble 'a partnership in which they would enjoy "autonomy" [...] with some sort of nebulous connexion with Prague', British diplomats essentially began to reiterate Hlinka's point of view in their reports, repeatedly claiming that Slovakia was subjugated to a policy of forced Czechization which they had actively rejected ever since.[410] Though Addison believed that they did not have as many reasons to oppose Czech rule as their German counterparts, he still thought the Slovaks had to be 'counted among the "noes" however weak the voice which utters that monosyllable'.[411] This apparent sympathy for the Slovaks, of course, had much less to do with actual concern for their complaints and much more with his determination to promote the narrative of repressive Czechs. Indeed, he did not actually make any explicit mention of the SL'S's autonomist movement, nor did he ever insinuate that London should back their cause as he did with the Sudeten Germans. Nevertheless, even if the reasons for presenting the Slovak programme in a far more favourable light were covert, the repeated assertions that even those who on paper comprised the Czechoslovak nation alongside the Czechs were dissatisfied with the current state of affairs certainly influenced the Foreign Office's outlook on the urgency of decentralising the existing state system.

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[402] FO 371/16659/10012. See also FO 371/15900/1088.
[403] FO 371/15900/1088; FO 371/19494/2362. See also TNA, FO 371/15900/1660, Addison to Simon, Annual Report for 1931, 30 January 1932. Bátonyi does demonstrate, however, that Beneš's reputation in London had already begun to diminish as early as 1922. See Chapter Sixteen in Bátonyi, pp. 185-205.
[404] TNA, FO 371/19492/4368, Addison to Sargent, 8 July 1935. See also FO 371/15179/2362.
[405] TNA, FO 371/19493/7759, Addison to Hoare, 21 December 1925.
[406] FO 371/15900/1088. See also TNA, FO 371/20374/4743, Addison to Eden, 3 August 1936.
[407] Though Addison never explicitly stated what he thought that autonomous arrangement should look like, his staunch support of Henlein suggests that he supported the idea of territorial autonomy for the Sudetenland as was advocated by the SdP during his tenure in Prague.

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[408] TNA, FO 371/20375/5216, Addison to Eden, 25 August 1936.

[409] Ibid. See also TNA, FO 371/18382/6410, Addison to Simon, 13 November 1934; FO 371/20378/6032, Hadow to Eden, Memorandum on Czechoslovak Internal Policy: Minorities, 8 October 1936; FO 371/21134/5853, Hadow to Eden, 23 August 1937. For more on Hadow's time in Czechoslovakia, see Chapter Three in Lindsay Michie Eades, *Portrait of an appeaser: Robert Hadow, First Secretary in the British Foreign Office, 1931-1939* (Westport, C.T.: Praeger, 1996), pp. 29-56.

[410] FO 371/20375/5216. For more on Slovak autonomism, see Jan Ryclík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: Česko-slovenské vztahu 1914-1945* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press Bratislava and Ústav T. G. Masaryka Praha, 1997) and Alena Bartlová, 'Návrhy slovenských politických strán na zmenu štatoprávneho usporiadania ČSR a v rokoch 1918-1935 a zapojenie HSL'S do vládnej koalície v rokoch 1927-1929' in *Slovensko v Československu (1918-1939)*, ed. by Milan Zemko and Valerián Bystrický (Bratislava: VEDA, 2004), pp. 123-164.

[411] Ibid.

Indeed, the reports coming from the Thun Palace were so persuasive that by 1936 Czechoslovakia had almost entirely fallen out of London's good graces. Following in Addison's footsteps, British officials had made a complete volte-face on their stance towards the Czechoslovak state, and its 'chauvinist' and 'short-sighted' leaders.[412] For the most part, they had now come to side with the Germans; so much so, in fact, that when Jan Masaryk, the Czechoslovak Minister to Britain, complained of Henlein's activities, he was dismissed on the basis that Addison's and Hadow's despatches tended 'to support the thesis of the minority rather than that of the Administration'.[413] The First Republic, it was now argued, was 'racially [...] a hotch-potch' which quite clearly should not have been put together to begin with.[414] 'Czechoslovakia's only raison d'etre and justification', Orme Sargent, Central Department official, argued, 'is that she is a state created by self-determination out of racial unity'.[415] Had this racial unity actually existed, the authorities would have been able to easily assimilate both the Slovaks and the Germans into 'a common Germano-Czecho-Slovak nationality'.[416] After eighteen years, it was posited, there should have been no such thing as minorities in Czechoslovakia; their survival also was enough to prove the entire country was 'misbegotten'.[417]

At the same time, London likewise condemned 'the ceaseless attempts of the Czech Government to Czechify the whole country' and their policy of 'petty persecution of the Germans'.[418] The Czech authorities, in other words, were to blame both for failing to assimilate various national groups and for forcing assimilation upon them. Whether caused by idleness or blatant discrimination, the problem in Bohemia consequently came to be regarded as trouble of Prague's own making; for better or for worse, it was widely agreed that the Czechs deserved whatever was coming their way.[419] As N. J. Cheetham, Foreign Office official in London, remarked, if Nazi Germany decided to intervene, the Czechs would have 'to bear the chief responsibility for the dangerous situation hereby created'.[420] All this, in other words, was pointing British officials to the fact that decentralisation was urgently needed, for the German and Slovak troubles had proven the existing state structure to be entirely unfit for the Czechoslovak state.

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[412] TNA, Foreign Office: Confidential Print: Czechoslovakia [hereafter FO 470], FO 470/13/581, Newton to Eden, Annual Report for 1937, 13 January 1937; FO 371/21125/3703, Minute by Bramwell, 9 June 1937.
[413] TNA, FO 371/20374/4460, Eden to Addison, 5 August 1936.
[414] TNA, FO 371/20376/971, Memorandum of The German Minority in Czechoslovakia, 8 April 1936.
[415] TNA, FO 371/20375/7125, Minute by Sargent, 4 December 1936.
[416] Ibid.
[417] Ibid.
[418] FO 371/20376/971; TNA, FO 371/19492/5987, Minute by Cheetham, 7 October 1935.

Unsurprisingly, such prejudices also coloured London's view of the most suitable constitutional order for Czechoslovakia. This issue, however, was not properly addressed until 1935, the year when Henlein's *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP) secured a sweeping victory in the fourth parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia.[421] Surpassing even the most generous expectations, the SdP won two-thirds of the German vote, emerging as the strongest party in the entire Republic. Henlein's electoral platform rested, in large part, upon the demand for decentralisation. As Erin K. Jenne notes, what the SdP's leadership essentially had in mind was similar to what the Croats meant when they spoke of federalism in the 1920s — they did not call for the creation of a separate parliament or legislative body for the Sudeten Germans but wide regional autonomy whereby they would be able to self-administer their own affairs, including education and local government.[422] Henlein and his SdP were the culmination of the process of nationalisation of the German minority. Though there were German parties that did participate in Czechoslovak politics during the 1920s, there still existed an underlying opposition to the new state. This included the secret nationalist society, the *Kameradschaftsbund* (KB), a movement developed amongst

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[419] See TNA, FO 371/19495/3805, Minute by Gallop, 9 July 1935; FO 371/20373/750, Minute by Cheetham, 18 February 1936; FO 371/20373/1302, Minute by Carr, 18 March 1936.
[420] TNA, FO 371/20373/1819, Minute by Cheetham, 1 April 1936. See also TNA, FO 371/21130/5854, Hadow to Eden, 24 August 1937.
[421] For more on Henlein, see Mark Cornwall, 'A Leap into Ice-Cold Water': The Manoeuvres of the Henlein Movement in Czechoslovakia, 1933–1938', in *Czechoslovakia*, eds Cornwall and Evans, pp. 123-42.
[422] See 'A Full Cycle of Ethnic Bargaining: Sudeten Germans in Interwar Czechoslovakia' in Erin K. Jenne, *Ethnic Bargaining: The Paradox of Minority Empowerment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 54-90 (p. 79).

Bohemian German war veterans and youth leaders that sought to reclaim a more dominating role for the Germans in the Czechoslovak state.[423] Their ideology heavily drew on the teachings of Othmar Spann, a sociologist at the University of Vienna, whereby the Sudeten Germans would obtain complete territorial autonomy within Czechoslovakia but would spiritually belong to the transnational and 'pan-German' culture of which they saw themselves a part.[424] This movement finally found its political expression in Henlein's SdP, who from the very start demanded the Sudetenland be granted autonomy over local affairs and education.[425]

Henlein's success, and by extension his demands, garnered a lot of attention in Britain. Not only did this result definitively corroborate Addison's reports about the horrid state of Czech-German relations, but it placed further emphasis on the necessity of seriously addressing the contentious debate between federalism and centralisation. In fact, following Henlein's visits to London in December 1935 and July 1936, the Sudeten German question would gradually come to occupy centre stage in British foreign politics, dragging alongside it the question of Czechoslovak constitutional re-organisation.[426] The historian Elizabeth Wiskemann would later remark that

> we know that when he [Henlein] was assuring the world he wanted nothing but autonomy within Czechoslovakia for Sudeten Germans, he was assuring Hitler that he was longing to incorporate them within Nazi Germany,

but during this period, Henlein (albeit for opportunistic and pragmatic reasons) was opposed to uniting Bohemia with Germany.[427] He also expressed this sentiment in most of the private conversations he had with prominent British policymakers, arguing in favour of keeping the

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[423] For more on the KB, see Cornwall, *Wall,* pp. 123-30.

[424] See Cornwall, 'Leap', in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. by Cornwall and Evans, p. 128.

[425] See Jenne, p. 79.

[426] For details of Henlein's visit, see Keith G. Robbins, 'Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten Question and British Foreign Policy', *The Historical Journal,* 12. 4 (1969), 674-97. and Novotný, pp. 105-10. For Seton-Watson's account of Henlein's visits, see Appendix V: Henlein in England in R. W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1943), pp. 393-94.

[427] Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Czechs and Germans*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. x. A lot has been said in the historiography about Henlein's tendency to adapt his argument depending on his audience. However, whilst it is true that Henlein would gradually begin to lean closer towards the Nazi position, as Cornwall points out, he would have still followed the more "moderate" line during this period. See also Cornwall, 'Leap', in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. by Cornwall and Evans, p. 138.

Sudetendeutsche in the Czechoslovak fold. This solution found quite a receptive audience in London, where most were convinced that this problem could simply be resolved through autonomist concessions to the Sudeten Germans.[428] The attempts to pressure the Czechoslovak Government to settle this issue internally by dealing with Henlein directly were certainly not new. For a while, as Sargent noted, British officials had been trying to compel Prague to put 'its own house in order' and become 'a more efficient ally' rather than 'a growing liability'.[429] Unlike Addison, however, the rest of the Foreign Office never went so far as to seriously contemplate the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. Even his successor in Prague, Sir Basil Newton, and Peter Pares, the British Consul at Liberec, argued that autonomy was the best remedy for Czechoslovakia's political troubles and the only buffer that stood between European peace and regional conflagration.[430] This was further corroborated by Heinrich Rutha, the unofficial foreign minister of the Sudeten Germans and Henlein's mentor, who expressed his belief that the most optimal solution was some sort of federal system based on the Swiss model, where certain powers would be devolved regionally whilst common matters would be dealt with by the parliament in Prague.[431]

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[428] FO 371/20376/971. See also TNA, FO 371/20374/3290, Note by O'Malley, 25 May 1936; FO 371/20374/3417Minute by Bramwell, 14 June 1936; FO 371/20374/3662, Christie to Sargent, Rough Notes on the Sudeten-Deutsche Minority Problem in Czechoslovakia, 19 June 1936.

[429] TNA, FO 371/21131/7107, Minute by Sargent, 26 October 1937. See also TNA, FO 371/21132/8249, Memo on Recent Action taken by His Majesty's Government in the Sudeten Problem, 26 November 1937.

[430] TNA, FO 371/21132/7807, Newton to Sargent, 22 November 1937. The extent to which Newton personally believed that autonomy was a viable option, however, is debatable, since he suggested in the same letter that the cause of European peace might best be served by granting concession to Germany's ambitions in the Danubian basin, shifting the region to 'a position of natural stability' rather than maintaining the present 'state of unstable equilibrium'. Furthermore, as Cornwall notes, the circumstances surrounding Newton's appointment to Prague further raise question about his objectivity. Not only did his time in Berlin (1930-1937) make him more predisposed to sympathise with the Germans, but virtually all of Newton's colleagues in both Prague and London were by this point convinced that the Czechs were the ones to hold responsible for the situation at hand. Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannie*n, ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 329-30.

[431] TNA, FO 371/20374/4460, Eden to Addison, 5 August 1936. The idea of re-organising Czechoslovakia according to the Swiss model actually originated with Beneš. In May 1919, he submitted a note to the Committee of Sucession States in which he basically asserted that the Czechoslovak authorities sought to create 'a sort of Switzerland, taking into consideration, of course, the special conditions in Bohemia'. What was meant by this is somewhat open to interpretation. The memo itself does not suggest anywhere that Czechoslovakia would actually institute a system similar to the Swiss canton but that it would simply introduce 'an extremely liberal régime, which will very much resemble that of Switzerland'. Yet, as Hadow explains, to those groups who were clamouring for self-governance in 1937, the Beneš memo provided a legal backing to their demands and served as evidence that their autonomy was well-overdue. TNA, FO

Given the vagueness as to exactly how this would work in practice, the Foreign Office largely took this to mean the desire to implement a decentralist system not unlike the British one. Autonomy, one Foreign Office memo noted, was a versatile term, and could be taken to mean everything from 'practical independence as enjoyed by the Dominions and [...] the Irish Free State' and full federal system of the United States and Switzerland to 'cultural and administrative autonomy of the King enjoyed by Scotland within the legislative framework of the United Kingdom'.[432] Despite their inability to once again settle on a definition of decentralisation, their reaction to the six draft bills Henlein published in April 1937 makes clear that British officials thought the English-Scottish union was the most suitable model. These bills went beyond mere territorial and administrative autonomy and argued that the Sudeten German problem should be addressed on a legislative level. In practice, what the SdP suggested was essentially "*völkisch* self-rule", whereby each of the national groups in Czechoslovakia would form its own corporation, effectively making each of them a separate legal entity and Czechoslovakia a corporate state.[433] This solution, which did resemble an actual ethnic federation, was rebuffed by London, as it was deemed either too vague to constitute a basis of discussion or too extreme for the Czechs to ever agree with.[434] Instead, British officials argued in favour of what they referred to as cultural autonomy, by which they meant nothing more than setting up distinctly Czech and German departments in the Ministry of Education and cultural institutions as well as ensuring that any governmental functions in the predominantly German areas were performed exclusively by the Germans. [435] For the Foreign

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371/21128/1525, Hadow to Eden, 25 February 1937. The Beneš memo can be found in Wiskemann, pp. 92-93.

[432] TNA, FO 371/21132/8248, The Foreign Office, Memorandum on the Sudetendeutsche Affairs, 26 November 1937.

[433] For a detailed overview of the six bills, see Andrej Tóth, Lukáš Novotný, and Michal Stehlík, *Národnostní menšiny v Československu 1918 - 1938: Od státu národního ke státu národnostnímu?* (Praha: Univerzira Karlova v Praze, 2012), pp. 356-67. For a discussion on the SdP's conception of non-territorial autonomy, see Oskar Mulej, 'Territorial and Non-territorial Aspects in the Autonomist Proposals of the Sudeten German Party, 1937–38', *Nationalities Papers,* (2022), 1-21.

[434] In a conversation Newton had with Beneš in May, Beneš explicitly stated that 'corporative rights and the creation of racial corporation for political purposes with extensive powers could not be tolerated in a democratic State based on the rights of the individual'. TNA, FO 371/21128/47, Newton to Eden, 13 May 1937. See also TNA, FO 371/21132/7807, Newton to Sargent, 22 November 1937; FO 371/21132/8248.

[435] TNA, FO 371/21132/7807, Pares to Newton, 20 November 1937; FO 371/21132/7807, Minute by Bramwell, 31 December 1937; FO 371/21132/8248.

Office, primarily concerned with maintaining any semblance of peace, this was a happy medium, the only form of autonomy they believed could satisfy both sides — even if only temporarily.[436] It was paramount that Prague found a common language with Henlein — not only for their own sake but for the sake of the entire Continent.

What certainly bolstered the sense of urgency was the picture that was being painted in the official newspapers.[437] The situation in Czechoslovakia was reported as being extremely disquieting, for which many blamed both the Czech authorities and Henlein.[438] Though it was predominantly argued that both parties were at fault for failing to reach a compromise, many took a keen dislike to Henlein, who they accused of collaborating with the Nazi regime for the break-up of the Czechoslovak state.[439] More specifically, this allegation followed his suggestion for the introduction of *völkisch* autonomy, which some took to be the first step in eroding the unity of Czechoslovakia.[440] Indeed, unlike the Foreign Office and its representatives in Prague, the common argument made in the newspapers at the time was that the preservation of the Czechoslovak state with only slightly amended system of governance was synonymous with peace-keeping and preventing Germany from having a monopoly on the Continent. Accordingly, most, if not all, articles that dealt with this issue advocated not only for a less extreme decentralist solution but called for the British Government to officially endorse its implementation.[441] This particular line was also taken by Arnold Toynbee in his article for *The Economist* which summarised his impressions of his visit to the Sudetenland. Resolving the Czechoslovak minority question, he argued, was ‘a British interest’, not only because it meant the ‘maintenance of the independence and integrity of Czechoslovakia’ but because its disappearance ‘would mean a change in the European balance of power which might end in putting Great Britain at Germany’s mercy’.[442]

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[436] FO 371/21132/7807.

[437] For a short overview of the British media and the Sudeten German question, see Anthony Adamthwaite, 'The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 18. 2 (1983), 281-297.

[438] There were, of course, those who solely laid the blame with the Czech authorities. See Rolf Gardiner, 'Germans in Czechoslovakia', *The Listener,* 15. 386 (June 1936), 1078-1079; Arnold Toynbee, 'Czechoslovakia's German Problem', *The Economist,* 28 (1937), 71-74; 'The Czechs' Minority Problem', *The Daily Telegraph,* 22 February 1937, p. 12; 'Czech and German', *The Times,* 2 March 1937, p. 17.

[439] *The Irish Times* even described him as 'a Nazi agent'. 'German and Czech', *The Irish Times,* 20 February 1937, p. 8. See also 'The Czechoslovak Elections', *The Economist,* 25 May 1935, p. 1187; 'Germans in Czechoslovakia', *The Manchester Guardian,* 1 March 1937, p. 12; Wedgwood Benn, 'Czechoslovakia, 'An Island in a Dictatorial Sea'', *The Listener,* 15. 384, (May 1936), 943-945; Lewis Einstein, 'The German Question in Czechoslovakia', *The Spectator,* 157. 5638 (June 1936), 135-136; 'German and Czech: II. Herr Henlein's Rise', *The Times,* 3 December 1937, pp. 17-18.

[440] 'Czechoslovakia's German Policy', *Manchester Guardian,* 23 December 1936, p. 9; H. C. Gill, 'Germans in Czechoslovakia', *The Listener,* 15. 388 (June 1936), p. 1171; 'Czechoslovakia's Germans', *The Spectator,* 158. 5672 (March 1937), p. 470; 'The Czechoslovakian Germans', *The Economist,* 6 March 1936, p. 519.

This article received a lot of attention in official governmental circles and Toynbee’s assertion that Britain had to act now lest it was willing to risk having a German-controlled Central Europe was heeded seriously.[443] Indeed, by the end of 1937, the Foreign Office had grown so concerned about the situation in the region that they had actually considered the option of having Britain and France directly sponsor whatever solution based on greater autonomy the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans could agree upon.[444] As an inducement to the Czechs, the memo argued that the two Powers should guarantee not only the Republic’s independence but also the exact measure of autonomy that the Czechs would grant to the Sudetenland; ‘in other words, they would be responsible for the newly framed constitution of the Czechoslovak state’.[445] Given the sheer extent to which such a commitment would implicate Britain in a Czech-German dispute, this proposal, of course, was never actually put into practice.[446] Indeed, Newton was specifically advised to not even mention autonomy for the Sudeten Germans to Beneš since, as Sargent explained, London had still not firmly made up its mind on whether this was the policy they should officially endorse, as they were still not sure if this solution would be enough to satisfy Hitler and prevent Germany from interfering any further.[447] Nevertheless, the fact that the Foreign Office even toyed with the idea of going as far as inserting themselves in what was (at least in theory) a purely domestic matter demonstrates just how keen they were to see the introduction of gradual decentralisation in Czechoslovakia. Yet, none of these papers ever specifically addressed exactly how this autonomy would look in practice, which territorial concessions this would encompass, and which legislative measures should be passed to ensure it properly functioned. This further highlights not only the indecisiveness of the British political establishment when it came to the Czechoslovak question but also the general lack of knowledge that permeated official British discourse when it came to such terms as autonomy, decentralisation, devolution or federalism, particularly in ethnically diverse countries such as Czechoslovakia.

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[441] Toynbee, ‘German Problem’; ‘Germany’s Time-Table’, *Daily Mail,* 7 September 1936, p. 16; L. B. Meredith, ‘Revision of Frontiers in Central Europe’, *The Scotsman,* 24 October 1936, p. 15; Robert Machray, ‘Separatism in Czechoslovakia’, *The Daily Telegraph,* 22 February 1937, p. 11; Alan Houghton Broderick, ‘Germans and Czechs’, *The Sunday Times,* 4 April 1937, p. 19

[442] Toynbee, ‘German Problem’, p. 71.

[443] For comments on Toynbee’s article, see TNA, FO 371/21130/5361, Minute by Bramwell, 9 August 1937 and Hadow to the Southern Department, 3 August 1937.

[444] FO 371/21132/8248.

[445] Ibid.

[446] The Foreign Office had some serious scruples about interfering with the Czech-German dispute. Despite its regional implications, it was understood that this was primarily a Czechoslovak internal problem and that Britain, as per Addison’s recommendations, should merely ‘hold a watching brief’. The concern here was that too much involvement would simply internationalise the issue, giving Hitler an excuse to interfere directly and inevitably extinguishing any chance of preserving Czechoslovakia in whatever form. As Cornwall points out, however, having met Henlein twice and openly expressed their sympathies with his cause, it can be argued that by 1937 British officials had achieved just that. TNA, FO 371/29375/5216, Minute by Cheetham, 5 September 1936. Cornwall, 'Barometer', in *Grossbritannien,* ed. by Schmidt-Hartmann and Winters, pp. 330-31.

As a consequence of this pro-decentralist turn, the Foreign Office now came to openly support the programme they spent the greater part of the 1920s dismissing as impractical or dangerous — Slovak autonomism. Whilst old prejudices did not fade overnight (as Hadow noted, 'the Slovaks were, and still remain, politically primitive'), there was nevertheless a drastic tonal shift in how the Slovak Question was now discussed.[448] The Slovaks were no longer described as a petulant and persistent source of annoyance for the Czechs but as 'victims of discrimination'.[449] Their complaints, one official noted, were just as judicious as those of the Sudeten Germans.[450] Indeed, the only reason that the Czechs and other international observers took the German demands more seriously was because the Slovaks had no ‘larger “parent body” eager for the restoration of the severed member’ who could provide them with moral and political support.[451] At the same time, however, it was also stressed that despite the linguistic, cultural, or political differences, the Slovaks were aware that ‘they belong to the same family of peoples as Czechs’, and they therefore did not want to either separate from Czechoslovakia, unite with another nation or become fully independent at the fear of falling into ‘the clutches [...] of the Magyars, their hated masters of the past’.[452] The obvious corollary of the two was thus the extension of autonomy to the Slovaks along similar lines to what the Foreign Office thought should be granted to the German minority as a way of further strengthening the country internally.

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[447] TNA, FO 371/21131/7357, Sargent to Newton, 11 November 1937; CAB 24/271/905, Eden to Henderson, 15 July 1937.

[448] TNA, FO 371/21125/7198, Hadow to Eden, 20 October 1937.

[449] TNA, FO 371/21127/842, Minute by Ross, 29 January 1937.

[450] TNA, FO 371/21125/6533, Minute by an unknown official, 6 October 1937. For the SL'S's view of Henlein, see Felak, pp. 180-84.

This is not to say that the Slovaks all of a sudden ranked any higher on the totem pole of British interests in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, whereas the German problem prompted numerous enquiries, memoranda, and in-depth discussions about exactly how Czechoslovakia could be restructured to address the majority of their complaints and demands, Slovakia was still not treated as a relevant factor in the Czechoslovak equation. Indeed, if and when the question of its administrative organisation and constitutional standing was raised, it was done so primarily with reference to the Sudetenland, and how the granting of autonomy to the Germans might necessitate the extension of the same concessions to the Slovaks.[453] On the one hand, the fact that the German case took such precedence can certainly be ascribed to anti-Slav prejudices that were greatly exacerbated following Addison’s arrival to Prague. On the other, in the light of the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the topic, the behaviour of British officials can also be explained as a product of *Realpolitik* calculations. As noted above, this was primarily down to the Slovaks not having a Reich of their own across the borders which would have supported their cause or considered meddling with another country’s internal affairs on their behalf. At the same time, it was also a product of the belief that despite their complaints about Prague, the Slovaks had no real desire to separate.

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[451] FO 371/21127/842.
[452] Ibid.
[453] FO 470/13/581.

In other words, there was nothing that Hlinka and his SL'S could do that would compare to the threat that Nazi Germany posed to the integrity of the Czechoslovak state, and the Foreign Office was well aware of that.

Indeed, this continued disregard of the Slovak Question highlights more than just pro-German attitudes of the British ruling elites; it helps shed light on the priorities of British policymakers at the time. The fact that the struggle to decentralise the Czechoslovak state was ignored when it was championed most loudly by the Slovak leaders clearly illustrates that from the very start, the main concern for the Foreign Office was to keep peace and order in East Central Europe. Maintaining stability always came before addressing the issues related to national self-determination. Although many in London openly sympathised with the SdP and believed that they were right to be asking for more concessions for Czechoslovakia's German population on the basis that the Germans were entitled to greater control over their political destiny, the primary reason British diplomats even thought about interfering with the issue more directly was because the question of Sudeten Germans posed a serious security risk — primarily for the region, but also for Britain, if the parties involved decided to resolve the dispute militarily. Indeed, their support for a decentralist solution was almost exclusively phrased in the language of peacekeeping, further underlining how little the principle of self-determination factored in British discourse on Czechoslovakia. Moreover, decentralisation was arguably a far less radical solution to outright federalisation; by this point, this was the Foreign Office stance towards Yugoslavia, a country which they fully expected to become a federation in 1918. It is thus hardly surprising this would be their approach to the First Republic, the one state that British officials so long believed was functioning normally under a centralised system of governance.

4.3 Yugoslavism versus federalism: The confusing language of state organisation

When Sir Nevile Henderson arrived in Belgrade at the end of 1929 to take Howard Kennard's place as the head of the British Legation, the royal dictatorship was already in full swing. By that point, the King had already abolished the Constitution and all political parties, as well as placed severe restrictions on the press, closed down a number of newspapers and journals, and appointed a new “non-partisan” government where he himself became the Minister of Internal Affairs.[454] As Charles Bateman of the Central Department noted, the dictatorship ‘may not make the King absolutely perfect but at least it makes him perfectly absolute’.[455] Alexander’s most controversial measure, however, was that concerning the name and the administration of the South Slav state. The cumbersome Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was now changed into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, simplifying the official state nomenclature but also signifying a shift from “tribal” to integral Yugoslavism.[456] At the same time, the thirty-three provinces instituted by the Vidovdan Constitution were now replaced by nine administrative units called *banovinas*. Named after topographical features and entirely devoid of any historic meaning, the new units not only cut across the old boundaries — essentially attempting to erase all sub-national features — but were also very centralised, pushing the country even further away from the decentralisation that the Foreign Office expected to see in January 1929.[457]

For Henderson, however, this was not an issue. Unlike his predecessor, who spent the majority of his last year in Yugoslavia lamenting the absence of ‘any real effort to simplify and decentralise the Administration’, Henderson was a big supporter of the attempts to consolidate the South Slav state through a combination of unitarist and centralising reforms.[458] The British Minister was generally fond of Yugoslavia, describing his time in Belgrade as ‘the five happiest and [...] politically, five of the most interesting years of my life’.[459] He was, however, an even greater admirer of the King himself.[460] Indeed, Henderson was one of the most vocal defenders of the royal dictatorship and was especially critical of those back in Britain who disliked Alexander whilst being 'quite oblivious of the special circumstances which may have created a dictator in "less happier lands" than ours'.[461] The King, he argued in his autobiography, was at heart democratically minded. Concerned only with 'the unity, future welfare, and happiness of Yugoslavia as a whole', the King only instituted a dictatorship because it was in his country's best interest.[462] As far as Yugoslavia itself was concerned, Henderson firmly believed that its existence offered the best guarantee not only for protecting British interests in the region but for maintaining peace in East Central Europe and keeping both Germany and Russia at bay.[463] As such, he also defended the King's decision to introduce centralist measures. 'The question of a federation of Yugoslav State or of a centralised Government at Belgrade was one which time alone could solve', he argued, and one could hardly say whether the King was right or wrong in believing that 'the course most likely to promote union rather than tend to disunion was centralisation'.[464]

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[454] For more details on the developments during the first years of the royal dictatorship, see Nielsen, pp. 77-134. See also Branislav Gligorijević, *Kralj Aleksandar Karađorđević: srpsko-hrvatski spor* (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010).
[455] TNA, FO 371/13706/322, Minute by Bateman, 16 January 1929.
[456] See Ivana Dobrivojević, *Državna represije u doba diktature Kralja Aleksandra, 1929-1935* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istroiju, 2006). For an good overview in English, see Pieter Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia: Education, Yugoslavism and the Balkans before World War II* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
[457] Nielsen, pp. 102-08.
[458] TNA, FO 371/13707/7092, Kennard to Henderson, 10 September 1929.
[459] Henderson, *Water,* p. 169.

He presented the same arguments in his reports back to London, holding a far rosier view of the South Slav Kingdom than both Young and Kennard did before him. 'There is nothing really rotten in the state of Yugoslavia', he reported.[465] Though its economy was unsound and political landscape volatile, the country was no different and certainly no worse than that of some of its neighbours.[466] Social unrest and political malcontent were widespread but that was not unusual for a young state; ‘a day’, he remarked, ‘was not enough for the building of Rome’ and nor can it be for unifying ‘such a new and complicated concern as Yugoslavia’.[467] In fact, Henderson asserted multiple times that the new regime was making good progress in consolidating the state and rendering its bureaucracy more efficient and less corrupt.[468] The royal dictatorship was the only thing still keeping the country together. It was ‘a premature return to the gâchis of a parliamentary regime’, he told Sargent, that would have a far worse impact on the country’s unity.[469] He likewise glorified the King — ‘the button between the shirt of Serbia and the trousers of Croatia and Slovenia’ — and his doctrine of integral Yugoslavism.[470] Aside from extolling ‘its breadth of vision and idealism’, Henderson believed a policy tending towards centralisation and unitarism was far more conducive to stability than any ‘tribal and regional “isms” (Slovenism, Croatism, Serbism)’ or what he most commonly referred to as federalism.[471]

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[460] In a letter to Sargent, he remarked that 'my relations with the late King were far too intimate and my personal liking for him far too sincere to permit complete objectivity'. TNA, Foreign Office: Records of Private Office and Private Papers: Various Ministers' and Officials' Papers [hereafter FO 800], FO 800/268/35/10, Henderson to Sargent, 19 January 1935.

[461] He was particularly hostile towards the Labour Party and the British press, whom he found to be unfairly critical towards the Yugoslav regime. Henderson, *Water,* p. 171.

[462] Henderson, *Water,* p. 181.

[463] Henderson, *Water,* p. 170.; TNA, FO 371/14441/5031, Henderson to Seton-Watson, 19 June 1930; FO 371/14442/7206, Henderson to Graves, 18 September 1930; FO 371/15273/1538, Henderson to Henderson, Annual Report for 1930, 3 March 1931; FO 371/15994/53, Henderson to Simon, Annual Report for 1931, 1 January 1932; FO 371/15996/5333, Henderson to Vansittart, 11 June 1932.

[464] Henderson, *Water,* p. 190.

[465] TNA, FO 371/14448/8787, Henderson to Henderson, 27 November 1930.

[466] Ibid.

Henderson’s view of the most appropriate constitutional arrangement for Yugoslavia was rather peculiar. Though he did not explicitly assert that federalism was a flawed solution, he nevertheless thought that it was simply more likely to ‘accentuate the old tribal differences and jealousies’ and therefore unfeasible.[472] This argument was by no means novel. In 1918, Paget, Nicolson and Leeper had raised this exact point, asserting that federalism was unnecessary since all South Slavs were already one people and as such, had no need to constitutionally protect their political particularities.[473] Though both arguments were couched in the same language, however, they did not mean the same. Whereas the 1918 PID memo suggested that the existence of a single Yugoslav nation dictated that centralism was an obvious solution because the Yugoslavs already existed, Henderson merely argued that this was the fastest way of commencing the process of converting Serbs, Croats and Slovenes *into* Yugoslavs as a prerequisite for eventually allowing them to 'think sectionally'.[474] In other word, centralism was not supposed to be a permanent solution nor was it designed to completely extinguish national or regional particularities amongst these groups; Henderson merely posited that these could only be safely articulated once Yugoslavism was accepted as the overarching, primary identity. Accordingly, he justified Alexander's drift towards purely as a short-term measure on the basis that this course was designed to be pursued only 'until the Yugoslav principle was more firmly established and generally understood'.[475] Likewise, he submitted numerous reports which endorsed the principles of Yugoslavism but at the same time complained about the fact that the new units were still not awarded a greater measure of local autonomy, particularly after the King passed a new quasi-democratic constitution in September 1931.[476] Indeed, not only did the British Minister believe that decentralisation was 'essential to an improved administration' but as a virtually unavoidable measure, given that he would later even go on to suggest that Bulgaria would one day also become a part of 'the Yugoslav federation'.[477]

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[467] FO 371/14442/7206. He also often dismissed any signs of internal discontent as ‘one of the pangs of childbirth’. TNA, FO 371/15996/5055, Henderson to Sargent, 11 June 1932.

[468] TNA, FO 371/14443/1141, Henderson to Henderson, Annual Report for 1929, 5 February 1930; FO 371/14440/363, Henderson to Sargent, 10 January 1930; FO 371/14441/4370, Henderson to Sargent, 29 May 1930; FO 371/14441/6627, Henderson to Sargent, 15 August 1930; FO 371/14448/8787; FO 371/19575/1483, Henderson to Simon, 1 March 1935. ‘No Slav State’, he noted in his 1930 annual report’, ‘has ever been welded together except by an autocrat’. FO 371/15273/1538.

[469] TNA, FO 371/14441/5030, Henderson to Sargent, 18 June 1930; FO 800/266/30/20, Henderson to Sargent, 26 July 1930.

[470] FO 371/15996/5333. See also TNA, FO 371/15996/4173, Smallbones to Henderson, 26 April 1932; FO 371/16830/747, Cowan to Simon, Annual Report for 1932, 15 January 1933.

[471] TNA, FO 371/14441/5658, Henderson to Sargent, 10 July 1930; FO 371/14441/5812, Henderson to Henderson, 13 July 1930; FO 371/15273/1538.

[472] FO 371/14441/5812.

[473] See text on page 56, and footnotes 171 and 172.

Even more telling of Henderson's belief that centralisation was not a permanent solution is the fact that his go-to example of a successful union was not another strictly centralist country but (again) the decentralised United Kingdom and more specifically, the relationship between England and Scotland. The Yugoslav unity, he often asserted, will be achieved 'just as the union of Scotland and England was achieved'.[478] Like Seton-Watson and the rest of the Foreign Office in the 1920s, he drew numerous parallels between Britain and the South Slav state. For example, he spurned those who argued that Yugoslavism was just a guise for the attempt to '"Serbianise" Croats', claiming that the King just wanted to 'make Yugoslavs of them just as once we made Britishers of the Scots, or Savoy made Italians of the Neapolitans, or the Prussians made Germans of the Bavarians'.[479] And though he did somewhat sympathise with the 'the higher cultured Croats' and their objection to being governed by 'the ruder, half-oriental Serb', he nevertheless thought the former complained too much.[480] They were, 'like the Irish, inveterate grumblers' and 'like the Slovaks, [...] always dissatisfied with everybody and everything except themselves'.[481] Yugoslavism, in other words, was not a threat to Croatian cultural identity; 'the Scotch', he explained, 'lose no opportunity on insisting on their Scotch origin [but] are none the less British for that'.[482] Furthermore, he also did not take the Croat demands very seriously. 'The essential issue', he often reported, was 'predominance, i.e. where the centre of gravity of the new State shall be'; 'the insistence on Europeanisation *versus* Balkanisation, or federalism *versus* centralism' was merely how this struggle manifested.[483] Thus, as far as Henderson was concerned, the solution to the Yugoslav problem was fairly straightforward: the Serbs and Croats should form a union resembling the one between England and Scotland where the term "Yugoslav" would carry the same meaning as the term "British" did for the latter. This would initially be achieved through centralisation which would allow both Serbs and Croats to happily adopt the Yugoslav identity before being granted a measure of decentralisation that would allow them to manage their own economy and local administration. In practice, this meant that the control over legislation and administration would remain in Belgrade's hands, though Croatia would be able to operate similarly to Scotland, exercising substantial autonomy over its own affairs.

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[474] FO 371/16830/747.
[475] Henderson, *Water,* p. 190. See also FO 371/15273/1538.
[476] See FO 371/14443/1141; FO 371/14441/5030; FO 371/14441/5812; FO 371/15996/9159, Henderson to Sargent, 22 October 1932; FO 371/16830/747; FO 371/19547/219, Henderson to Simon, 30 December 1934. For more on the September 1931 Constitution, see Chapter Six in Nielsen, pp. 207-38.
[477] Henderson, *Water,* p. 181.
[478] Ibid.

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[479] FO 371/15996/9159.
[480] FO 371/14440/363; FO 371/14443/1141. Similar comments can be found in Henderson, *Water,* p. 180.
[481] FO 371/14440/363. See also TNA, FO 371/18455/488, Henderson to Simon, Annual Report for 1933, 18 January 1934; FO 371/15996/4173, Henderson to Simon, 9 May 1932; FO 371/15996/1955, Henderson to Simon, 5 March 1932; FO 371/15996/8419, Henderson to Sargent, 3 October 1932; FO 371/15996/9159; FO 371/16828/6041, Henderson to Bartlett, 19 June 1933; FO 371/19547/219.
[482] TNA, FO 371/14442/7206, Henderson to Graves, 18 September 1930; FO 371/14441/5031.
[483] FO 371/18455/488. See also FO 371/16828/6041 and FO 371/19547/219.

However, what truly helps explain Henderson's distaste for federalism as opposed to decentralisation was his response to Seton-Watson's stance on the issue of Yugoslav internal organisation. Like Henderson, Seton-Watson advocated for a decentralist solution and was extremely critical of the King and his decision to continue pursuing a course of centralisation 'this time under cover of the Yugoslav name and under the aegis of the Crown itself'.[484] However, in contrast to the British Minister, who almost exclusively concerned himself with the Serb-Croat relationship and promptly ignored every other national group, Seton-Watson was convinced that this problem could not be solved merely by creating a Parliament in Zagreb. Though the Croat situation was certainly complex, he explained, the question of Slovenia, Bosnia, or Montenegro's status was 'scarcely less acute [...] than that of Croatia itself'; an arrangement resembling that of Austria-Hungary would simply not suffice as it would only address the Croat Question.[485] At the same time, Seton-Watson claimed that the greater degree of decentralisation for *banovinas* as advocated by Henderson was simply impracticable. Not only could the *banovinas* with their fabricated frontiers never adequately substitute the pre-existing historic identities but they were from the start designed with the idea of further centralisation of power in mind. Accordingly, he suggested that for decentralisation to effectively resolve the Yugoslav national question, it had to be accompanied by the restoration of historic provinces and the creation of a local Assembly for each one of them.[486] The Yugoslav state could not be built upon artificial grounds; the ancient regional units — grounded 'not only in history and sentiment but in geography, economics and cultural differences' — provided the 'only sound basis' for preserving unity.[487]

Though most historians nowadays agree that the *banovinas* were never intended as a corrective measure for the strict centralism of the 1920s, this did not sit well with Henderson, who proceeded to openly lambast Seton-Watson for his negative appraisal of the new administration.[488] In a private letter to Sargent, he described Seton-Watson as the 'second thorn in my flesh', 'a troublesome and [...] wrongheaded little beggar' who had become 'so much of a Yugoslav that he had become a Party politician' determined to look at 'everything through the eyes of that Party' which in his case happened to be a pro-federal one.[489] Though one of the key sources of his vexation was Seton-Watson's aversion to the royal dictatorship as a whole, it was also a product of a fundamental misunderstanding of Seton-Watson's argument. This had much to do with the fact that Henderson mistakenly equated the historic provinces with federalism on the basis that one could not exist without the other. Federalism, he argued, was in stark opposition to integral Yugoslavism which he believed provided the best available means for consolidating the South Slav state. However, Yugoslavism was also a doctrine that was entirely dependent on the breakdown of tribal divisions. As was discussed above, Henderson did not believe that the *banovina* system dictated that the country had to be strictly centralised. In fact, since these units were primarily designed to substitute the old provincial loyalties, they were fully capable of having a substantial amount of autonomy without ever threatening the unity of the state. Decentralised *banovinas* were thus something to aspire for, as they could exist separately from sub-national loyalties which he saw to be the root cause of Yugoslav internal troubles. Decentralisation for the historic provinces, on the other hand, was deemed dangerous as he felt they only promoted tribal divisions, as a constant reminder of separate political, cultural and religious traditions of the three main state-constitutive nationalities. Accordingly, the destruction of such provinces, he asserted, was 'an essential expedient if these somewhat turbulent sections are to be welded into a coherent whole'.[490]

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[484] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Yugoslav Dictatorship', *International Affairs,* 11. 1 (1932), 22-39 (p. 24).
[485] Seton-Watson, 'Background', p. 370.
[486] Seton-Watson, 'Jugoslavia and Croatia', p. 133.; R. W. Seton-Watson, 'The Yugoslav State: Centralism in Excess', *The Times,* 14 December 1929, p. 11.
[487] Seton-Watson, Memorandum on the Royal Dictatorship, May 1930 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, ed. by Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, 193-200 (p. 200).

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[488] See Mustafa Imamović, 'Normativna politika šestojanuarske dikakture', *Zbornik Pravnog fakulteta u Rijeci,* 12 (1991), 55-64; and Nielsen, pp. 100-09.

[489] The other thorn, he explained, was Phillip Graves, foreign correspondent of *The Times.* TNA, FO 800/266/30/26, Henderson to Sargent, 28 October 1931; FO 371/15272/9647, Henderson to Sargent, 24 December 1931; FO 371/14441/5304, Henderson to Sargent, 25 June 1930. See also TNA, FO 371/14441/5031, Henderson to Sargent, 19 June 1930.

[490] FO 371/14443/1141.

Furthermore, it also stems from this that Henderson failed to properly distinguish between ethnic and territorial federalism. As has been demonstrated throughout these chapters, though "federal" and other related terms were always carelessly employed by the Foreign Office in both Czechoslovak and Yugoslav cases, it was more or less clear from the way British officials in London spoke about Yugoslav administrative divisions that they envisaged a decentralised system where these provinces would form the backbone of state-organisation. On the other hand, Henderson's insistence that the preservation of old regional frontiers inherently posed a threat to integral Yugoslavism suggests that he was primarily concerned about creating an ethnic or, what could in this case be called, "tribal" federation. Here, the internal boundaries of Yugoslavia would have to be re-drawn in a way that there would exist separate Serb, Croat, and Slovene federal units, cutting across old provincial frontiers to create the new nationality- or ethnicity-based ones. In other words, when Seton-Watson spoke of the necessity of creating 'some form of federation', what the British Minister heard was not the extension of a degree of regional autonomy to various component parts but the preservation of tribal hatreds that the King was working hard to stomp out and that had hindered Yugoslavia's progress so far.[491] Though Henderson was perhaps right in arguing that such a federation would do much to preserve the national identities of the three state-constituent groups, this line of thinking also highlights just how little he knew about Yugoslavia, for a simple glance at how ethnically intermingled the population was would be enough to rule out an ethnic federation as opposed to one based on old historic provinces.

To the Foreign Office, however, none of this made much difference. As on the eve of the dictatorship, British officials continued to support a decentralised system of governance.[492]

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[491] In 1932, several British observers familiar with Yugoslav affairs issued a public statement, calling upon Britain and France to press for 'the revision of the whole Constitution of the new State' and to provide Yugoslavia with no financial support until some radical internal changes took place. The signatories included Lord Cushendun, Arthur Evans, H.A.L. Fisher, Noel Buxton, Seton-Watson and Steed. See 'The Dictatorship in Yugoslavia: A Menace to Europe's Peace', *Manchester Guardian,* 24 December 1932, p. 18.

[492] TNA, FO 371/15996/8810, Minute by Balfour, 19 October 1932; FO 371/15996/9640, Nicolson to Sargent, 19 November 1932; FO 371/18452/47, Minute by Sargent, 11 January 1934; FO 371/19576/6797, Minute by an unknown official, 15 November 1935.

However, with such an arrangement seemingly nowhere in sight, they did not pay close attention to the issue; as Rodney Gallop noted, the professions that this would be resolved soon had been made numerous times before and ‘they have not led to anything’.[493] This indifference had much to do with the fact that when it came to the South Slav Kingdom, the most pressing issue for Whitehall was Yugoslavia’s relationship with Italy. Worried about the impact that an Italo-Yugoslav conflict would have on the stability of the region, Whitehall abstained from publicly criticising the royal dictatorship, fearing that it would only encourage Mussolini to increase his efforts to undermine Yugoslavia.[494] At the same time, however, many officials shared Henderson’s positive view of the King’s regime and his attempts to convert the three constituent tribes into Yugoslavs. Like the British Minister, they had a profound dislike of the British press and in particular Seton-Watson, whose activities they saw as rather tactless and potentially harmful to Anglo-Yugoslav relations.[495] The King’s policy of Yugoslavism, it was commonly argued, provided the best means for keeping the country stable and the prospect of a revolution distant; its successful application, as John Simon, Foreign Secretary between 1931 and 1935, put it, was something as much in the British as in the Yugoslav interest.[496] The reports from Belgrade that stressed the need to recognise the unity of Yugoslav peoples ‘as a definite object of purely British policy’ were taken seriously, and the insistence that this could only be achieved by completely wiping out the historic provinces was largely taken at face value.[497] In fact, federalism now came to be associated with the existence of tribal identities, with John Balfour, the Legation's First Secretary, precisely asserting that federal re-organisation would achieve nothing but 'wreck any chance of Yugoslav national unity'.[498]

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[493] TNA, FO 371/18452/47, Minute by Gallop, 4 January 1934.

[494] For a detailed analysis of British response of Italo-Yugoslav dispute in the 1930s, see Chapter Four and Chapter Five in Bakić, *Britain*, pp. 105-176.

[495] See TNA, FO 371/14442/8201, Minute by Busk, 7 April 1930; FO 371/14441/5716, Minute by Sargent, 15 July 1930; FO 371/14441/6624, Minute by Balfour, 29 August 1930 and Minute by Gallop, 30 August 1930; FO 371/16827/45, Minute by Hankey, 4 January 1933; FO 371/16827/1395, Minute by Perowne, 13 February 1933. For the critiques of the dictatorship in the press, see ‘Croat Trial: Yugoslav Police Methods’, *The Times,* 17 June 1930, p. 13; ‘Dictatorship in Yugoslavia’, *The Times,* 9 September 1930, p. 11; ‘Acute Distress in Yugoslavia’, *Manchester Guardian,* 25 April 1932, p. 12; G. E. R. Gedye, ‘Critical Times in Yugoslavia’, *Daily Telegraph,* 3 June 1932, p. 12; H. J. Greenwall, ‘A King Holds Key to Situation’, *Daily Express,* 1 November 1932 in FO 371/15996/9639; Ben Riley, ‘The Dictatorship in Yugoslavia: Popular Leaders Arrested’, *Manchester Guardian,* 6 September 1933 in FO 371/16927/1869; Wickham Steed, ‘Europe Trembles at Assassin’s Shot’, *Boston Daily Globe,* 10 October 1934, p. 25; The “Tyranny” in Yugoslavia: Labour M.P. on Dictatorship’, *Manchester Guardian,* 18 October 1934, p. 11.

[496] R. W. Seton-Watson, Notes on the Possibility of a Serbo-Croat Détente, 10 November 1936 in FO 371/20434/6862. See also TNA, FO 371/15271/6856, Leigh-Smith to Marquess of Reading, 3 September 1931; FO 371/15272/9463, Minute by Balfour, 17 December 1931; FO 371/15996/9640.

Beyond that, however, the question of Yugoslav domestic organisation dropped so low on the list of British priorities that even King Alexander's assassination in October 1934 did not prompt any more meaningful debates — quite a striking difference to the response provoked by Stjepan Radić's murder only six years earlier. Whilst this could easily be ascribed to disillusionment with another failed attempt to resolve the problem of state organisation, it is also worth remembering that as far as the Yugoslav political landscape was concerned, not that much had changed in practice. Following the King's death, the country was taken over by a regency headed by Alexander's brother, Prince Pavle, until Alexander's son, Petar, came of age. That aside, the regime remained as oppressive as before. Pavle was adamant that no reforms could take place on the basis that it was his duty to hand the country over to Petar exactly as his father had left it, effectively turning Yugoslavia into 'a dictatorship without a dictator'.[499] Furthermore, there were also no major developments regarding the Croat Question. The Croat Peasant Party, which has been under the leadership of Vladko Maček since 1928, continued to boycott the Skupština, refusing to follow the Slovene People's Party and the Yugoslav Muslim Organisation in joining the government of the newly elected Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović. Convinced that the Croat problem 'could not be settled by a stroke of a pen and would in fact only be settled by the passage of time', Stojadinović — like Prince Pavle — had no intention of radically changing the constitution and was at best willing to 'concede a progressive measure of autonomy' to the existing units.[500]

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[497] FO 371/15994/53.
[498] TNA, FO 371/19575/5402, Balfour to O'Malley, 29 August 1935.
[499] R. W. Seton-Watson, 'Jugoslavia and the Croat Problem', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 16. 46 (1937), 102-12 (p. 102).

This, unsurprisingly, was refused point-blank by Maček, who believed that such a solution was insufficient. Arguing that it was the Regency's responsibility to further consolidate the country before it was entrusted to the King, he instead called for constitutional revision whereby Yugoslavia would become a federation composed of seven federal units: Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia-Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina, and Slovenia.[501] This suggestion, however, was universally criticised. To Stojadinović and other Serbian leaders, this plan was unacceptable, not only because it meant the separation of the historic regions of Macedonia and Montenegro from Serbia, but because it would essentially reduce the Serb population to the position of a minority in all other units.[502] The Serbs, reported Ronald Campbell, Henderson's successor, could comprehend that Maček would want to unite all Croats into one province; they could not, however, tolerate his attempt to 'divide the Serbs by making separate provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina and of the Vojvodina'.[503] As such, Stojadinović insisted that Maček's federal programme could never receive official backing, leaving the Croat leader with no choice but to compromise. As Stojadinović noted, though a four-legged chair was both safer and more comfortable, 'one can sit quite comfortably and safely [...] in a chair with three legs'.[504] In the same vein, he continued, though having the Croats join the government would certainly be beneficial, the Serbs under Stojadinović, the Slovenes under Korošec and the Bosnians under Spaho could manage quite well without them.[505]

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[500] TNA, FO 371/21196/4041, Campbell to Eden, 4 June 1937; FO 371/21196/1111, Campbell to Eden, 15 February 1937.

[501] Seton-Watson, Notes in FO 371/20434/6862. For more on the Croat Peasant Party under Maček, see Ljubo Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke 1928-1941: Iz povijesti hrvatskog pitanja*, 2 vols (Zagreb: Liber, 1974).

[502] That Stojadinović was not solely concerned about Montenegro and Macedonia is also clear from the fact that Maček's suggestion that they should create a dualist system, where the lands to the south would become a part of the Serbian sphere and the lands that used to belong to Austria-Hungary a part of the Croatian sphere, was also not taken seriously into consideration. See Boban, *Maček*, pp. 217-23. and Seton-Watson, 'The Croat Problem', pp. 108-109.

[503] FO 371/21196/4041.

[504] TNA, FO 371/21196/175, Campbell to Eden, 4 January 1937. By 'three legs', the Yugoslav Prime Minister was referring to the coalition between his own party, Slovenian SLS and Bosnian JMO.

British officials in both Belgrade and London agreed with this approach. Extremely well-disposed to Stojadinović, Campbell was particularly supportive of his efforts to appease the Croats. The Prime Minister, he reported, was 'the ablest of all Yugoslav politicians' and 'the only Serb I know who has a twinkle in his eye and with whom one can discuss any matter on terms of easy friendship'.[506] This image of Stojadinović was in stark contrast to one that was being painted of Maček. The leader of the Croat peasants was often described as a ‘narrow-minded [...] doctrinaire’, ‘a vain and foolish demagogue’, and ‘too feeble and too silly to fulfil the role which has fallen to him’.[507] It was predominantly in this light that his plan for a federal Yugoslavia was also discussed. Not only was federalisation ‘a dangerous experiment’ but an entirely unnecessary one.[508] Building upon Henderson’s legacy, Campbell likewise suggested that the Croat complaints were not entirely justified. The key to understanding their position was to remember that ‘like the Irish’, they were ‘happier with a grievance than without one’.[509] And though he acknowledged that living in Belgrade also meant he was prone to seeing things from the perspective of the Serbs, he nevertheless believed that the Croat complaints were ‘for the most part, more imaginary than real’.[510] Accordingly, minor measures as proposed by Stojadinović were seen as far more constructive and effective in the long term. The Croats, Gallop complained, were being unreasonably obstinate.[511] Rejecting 'the rather tentative conciliatory moves' of the regime, they were 'hopelessly negative', failing to recognise in their bitterness that 'half a loaf is better than no bread'.[512]

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[505] Ibid.

[506] TNA, FO 371/20434/6709, Campbell to Eden, 7 November 1936. For similar comments, see TNA, FO 371/20436/2165, Campbell to Eden, Annual Report for 1935, 13 April 1936; Foreign Office: Confidential Print Yugoslavia and Albania [hereafter FO 504], FO 504/11/1496, Campbell to Eden, Annual Report for 1936, 26 February 1937; FO 504/11/2048, Campbell to Eden, Annual Report for 1937, 24 February 1938.

[507] TNA, FO 371/20434/4412, Balfour to Eden, 20 July 1936; FO 371/19547/219; FO 371/19547/222, Macrae to Henderson, 3 January 1935.

[508] FO 371/21196/175.

[509] TNA, FO 371/20434/1288, Campbell to Eden, 2 March 1936.

[510] Ibid.

[511] TNA, FO 371/19576/5647, Minute by Gallop, 23 September 1935.

It can thus be argued that even though little changed in terms of both Yugoslav constitutional order and British attitudes towards it in the first half of the 1930s, an examination of the discussions take took place during these years does illuminate just how much the concept of decentralisation shaped British imagery of the Yugoslav state organisation. Such a solution received plaudits from all quarters of British society, from the Foreign Office to non-governmental observers. Even those who did admire the King and his Yugoslavist ideology simultaneously criticised his failure to gradually decentralise the South Slav Kingdom and continued to argue that this move was essential not only for maintaining the country’s stability but for ensuring the country’s survival. Yet, by this point, this was no longer a subject of much controversy or discussion, as most British observers agreed that decentralisation was the correct answer to the Yugoslav problem. Instead, the new point of contention was the nature of the territorial units. When British officials spoke of a decentralist system prior to 1929, what they primarily had in mind was the extension of self-governance in the form of territorial autonomy to various historic provinces that came together to form Yugoslavia in the first place. Following the introduction of the royal dictatorship, however, this provincial system was quickly abandoned in favour of the newly created *banovinas*. As a consequence of Henderson’s reports, the new administrative units came to be regarded by British officials as far more compatible with the ideal of Yugoslav unity. With the exception of Seton-Watson, who recognised from the very start that the *banovinas* would never replace the firmly established historic and regional loyalties, the rest began to blame the ethnic tensions that characterised the 1920s on the failure to foster a strong, overarching Yugoslav identity that could overcome Serb, Croat, and Slovene political and regional differences.

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[512] TNA, FO 371/19575/5313, Minute by Gallop, 2 September 1935.

4.4 Conclusion

When it came to the First Czechoslovak Republic in the 1930s, Whitehall faced an entirely different landscape from the one they had become used to in the previous decade. In just a few short years, the Czechoslovak state went from one of the most consolidated units in the region to one seemingly on the verge of disintegration. Though primarily a consequence of the economic crisis that was exacerbated by Hitler's rise to power, for the new British Minister to Czechoslovakia, this drastic shift was no more than a well-overdue reaction to the decade-long oppression of the Germans that found themselves within the Czechoslovak borders. Holding a far more negative view of the Czechs, Addison exclusively blamed Prague for the increasingly deteriorating situation, often exaggerating their wrongdoing whilst simultaneously extolling the activities of those such as Konrad Henlein. Convinced that the creation of the Czechoslovak state was a mishap, he often went so far as to suggest that the entire country should be dismantled and was most certainly in favour of it being decentralised in line with SdP demands. As the Foreign Office gradually adopted this stance, this appeasement of the Sudeten Germans as advocated by Addison would come to form the backbone of British policy by 1937.

Although the question of the Sudeten Germans forced British officials to finally reckon with the contentious problem of the Czechoslovak constitutional and administrative system, the way they dealt with it does demonstrate some consistency in how Whitehall thought about the subject of internal organisation of multi-national states. Just as most officials concurred in the 1920s that the only way for Yugoslavia to tackle the internal conflict between its national groups was through some form of federalisation, so too did they believe this would be the best option for Czechoslovakia as well. The analysis of the discussions concerning the merit of this system of governance demonstrates the tendency of British policymakers to rely on decentralist measures when faced with an inter-ethnic dispute. At the same time, the fact that these debates were almost exclusively restricted to the Sudetenland — and, indeed, only emerged following Henlein's electoral success in 1935 — further drives home the point that London did not believe that decentralisation was the most optimal solution for Czechoslovakia because of the country's multi-national character, but rather because of its internally volatile situation. Though the Foreign Office did recognise that decentralisation's greatest merit laid in its ability to reconcile state unity with the articulation of national or cultural differences, they did not believe that this reason alone was enough to invoke it. So long as domestic affairs were stable, centralism remained the default, even in states that were extremely ethnically diverse. As the Czechoslovak example demonstrates, it was only when the internal relations between various groups began to affect the country's external position that the gradual decentralisation of the state came to be regarded as the most fitting model.

Unsurprisingly, the events in Czechoslovakia largely overshadowed the Yugoslav constitutional question during this period. Previously considered to be the far more dangerous of the two, the South Slav problem now largely fell into the background. First and foremost, despite the impact internal conflict in Yugoslavia could have potentially had on regional security, it was nevertheless an exclusively domestic issue which did not directly implicate any great powers. Secondly, the dramatic changes introduced by the royal dictatorship did not do much to address the existing centralist system, making it only more stringent. From this point of view, there was not much else to be analysed by British officials who still firmly stood by the old pro-decentralist discourse. The only point that was addressed in slightly more detail was that of the new administrative division, though its implications for the Croat Question and the long-term stability of the Yugoslav state were never seriously considered. With the Foreign Office preoccupied with other geopolitical concerns, all that effectively happened was that the simple dichotomy between centralism and decentralism, in which British debates on Yugoslav constitutional organisation used to be couched was now replaced by an equally reductive dichotomy between historic provinces and King Alexander's *banovinas.*

At the same time, these conversations about the administrative structure of the Yugoslav state should not be dismissed as entirely irrelevant, as they did have a profound impact on the language concerning state organisation, which became much more nuanced and complex. The previous chapter demonstrated that throughout the 1920s, terms such as federalism, decentralisation, devolution, home rule or autonomy were used almost interchangeably to denote some form of self-governance and delegation of certain powers to regional units. Yet, by the time Henderson left Belgrade in 1935, that was no longer the case. This change, however, had nothing to do with an increased understanding of how these notions differed in terms of dividing sovereignty or dispersing authority. Instead, this was primarily a product of Henderson's — and later Campbell's — tendency to incorrectly equate the word "federalism" with historic provinces, the stubborn Croat opposition and the preservation of tribal identities, and the word "decentralisation" with the *banovina* system, the King and the Yugoslav ideal. This view was quite readily adopted by British officials in London who —preoccupied with Italy and the increasingly volatile situation in Central Europe — did not stop to assess the plausibility of this argument and simply began to carelessly employ this distinction. In the eyes of the Foreign Office, 'decentralisation' now came to stand for stability, unity and consolidation; in contrast, 'federalism' — its former carelessly-employed synonym — became the bogeyman of separatism. It does not take much to recognise how flawed this conclusion was. Even by the 1930s, history has demonstrated time and time again that federalisation does not have to result in a break-up as much as centralisation does not necessarily lead to cohesion. Nevertheless, this belief that federalisation is a step that inevitably leads to disintegration that emerged during this period would be of particular importance during the following two years when peace in Europe would come to depend on the topic of internal constitutional organisation of Czechoslovakia.

Chapter 5 The failure of centralism: Independent Slovakia and autonomous Croatia in British political discourse, 1938-1939

5.1 Introduction

After about twenty years of domestic conflict, the last two years of the interwar period finally saw some of the most basic features of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional order undergo fundamental changes. Throughout 1938, the conflict between the government in Prague and the SdP continued to escalate, reaching a fever pitch in September with the signing of the Munich Agreement between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy. The Munich Diktat, as it was known in Czech, officially surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany in exchange for the latter promising that they would respect the territorial integrity of what remained of the Czechoslovak state. Though the Agreement was celebrated by many in Britain and France for helping preserve European stability and peace, the situation grew increasingly volatile in Czechoslovakia as the annexation of the Sudetenland further encouraged the Slovak nationalists gathered around the Hlinka party to push for complete territorial and legislative autonomy. Not long after, the First Republic became a federation of Czechs and Slovaks (Czecho-Slovakia), finally giving Slovak nationalists the self-government they had demanded for so long. This system, however, was short-lived, lasting barely six months before Hitler broke his promises, invading Czecho-Slovakia in March 1939, turning the Czech lands into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and Slovakia into an “independent” German puppet state.

By comparison, the changes in Yugoslavia were less drastic, because it still existed on the European map by the time Germany crossed into Poland in September 1939. However, for a country where inter-ethnic conflict was one of its main features since inception, this was nevertheless an important development. As Czechoslovakia began to collapse due to its unresolved nationalities problem, the Belgrade authorities and the Prince Regent faced additional pressure to address the Croat Question and appease the Croatian leaders before they decided to follow in the footsteps of their Slovak counterparts. After much debate over the spring and summer months, the government and the Croat Peasant Party finally managed to reach a compromise in August 1939 with the signing of the so-called *Sporazum*. As a provisional agreement, it was primarily designed to lay the foundations for the fundamental re-organisation of the entire state structure and settlement of the myriad of nationality questions that competed in the Yugoslav space. Its immediate purpose, however, was to unify and consolidate the country in order to avoid facing the same fate as its neighbour to the north. For the first time in its history, the Yugoslav regime decided that stability would be best achieved by doing away with the centralisation that had for so long defined the Serb-Croat-Slovene political landscape.

What is more, given the implications that the situation in East Central Europe and particularly the Sudetenland had on the prospects of European peace, this was also the period that saw Britain's involvement with the domestic affairs of these countries reach unprecedented levels. The reason for this was most aptly summarised by British author Lionel Curtis, in his February 1939 address to Chatham House: 'what one small country, a Serbia or a Czechoslovakia, does or leaves undone instantly affects the whole of human society'. [513] As the Second World War approached, the domestic problems of the Habsburg successor states gradually became Britain's. This held more truth for one successor state over the other. In spite of what Curtis's words might suggest, since the most seminal developments in Yugoslavia followed the dramatic disintegration of Czechoslovakia, and coincided with the invasion of Poland, the South Slav constitutional question unsurprisingly featured quite sparsely in Foreign Office reports between 1938 and 1939. With its problems capable of affecting the entire continent, the First Czechoslovak Republic was of far more interest to British officials during this time. Previously either completely ignorant or completely uninterested in the topic of Czechoslovakia's system of governance, the Prime Minister and Cabinet members, Foreign Office officials, journalists and academics alike all weighed in on the conversation around the internal re-organisation of Czechoslovakia. The nature of the Sudeten crisis finally demanded that Whitehall seriously broach autonomy, devolution, and federalism as possible solutions to the ‘Czechoslovak problem’.

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[513] Lionel Curtis, 'World Order', *International Affairs,* 18. 3 (1939), 301-320 (p. 305).

The analysis of these debates will form the backbone of this chapter. Given the strategic impact the escalation of this conflict would have on Britain, the conversations concerning Czechoslovakia were far more common, fruitful, and insightful than those concerning Yugoslavia, whose internal dispute did not present an immediate threat to peacekeeping on the Continent. The first part looks at how the Foreign Office and unofficial observers reacted to Henlein’s demands and what solutions they themselves believed to be most optimal for the settlement of the Sudeten Question and by extension, Slovakia as a part of the Czechoslovak state. It particularly focuses on what constitutional arrangements were proposed and why some of those were considered to be more suitable than others. Additionally, it examines to what extent these views were informed by preconceived assumptions – either about a national group or about a system of governance – or by practical considerations as dictated by the extremely unstable situation in the region. The second part of the chapter tackles similar questions in the different Yugoslav setting. Here, it looks at how the events in Czechoslovakia influenced the debates on Yugoslavia’s existing political order, particularly those that concerned the gradual decentralisation of the existing system. It concludes that in both cases, the Foreign Office’s assessment of the most suitable solution was primarily driven by their preoccupation for stability and peacekeeping in Europe. In both cases, this generally manifested as a lack of care as to the exact details of the administrative or legislative organisation of each country so long as it prevented their complete disintegration and collapse. It ultimately suggests that British support for centralism, federalism, or anything in between was a product of pragmatism. Unlike in 1918-1921, it was not considerations about the actual state of relations between Czechs and Germans, Czechs and Slovaks, and Serbs and Croats, that determined the suitability of the constitutional arrangements; it was geopolitical calculations.

5.2 From decentralisation to disintegration: The break-up of Czecho-Slovakia

In July 1939, reflecting on the Munich Agreement, the *Daily Mail's* foreign correspondent George Ward Price noted that 'until the year 1938, not one Briton in a thousand had ever heard the word ''Sudeten" or burdened his mind with any exact information about the origin, composition and whereabouts of the Czecho-Slovak Republic.' [514] This would, as Price implies, completely change in a span of a few months in the spring and summer of 1938. Indeed, it would be an understatement to note that the Czech-German problem garnered the attention of the entire British establishment; as Vit Smetana has observed, 'never has Czech or Czechoslovak history been so much entangled with the British one as in the period between Munich and the end of the Second World War'.[515] Keen to see the Sudeten German question put to rest, Whitehall spent the months between March 1938 and the signing of the Munich Agreement in September eagerly searching for a solution that would be acceptable to the two primary parties involved in the dispute and above all else, Germany. As Henderson, now the Ambassador to Berlin, noted, Czechoslovakia at the time was 'the only real war-danger-spot' which needed to be removed at all costs if an armed conflict was to be avoided.[516] This became particularly apparent following the publication of Henlein's list of eight demands which were designed to be so humiliating that there was no way the Czechoslovak authorities would ever be able to agree to them in their entirety.[517] Whilst stopping short from requesting incorporation into Germany — which many observers optimistically took as another proof that Henlein was truly a moderate — this so-called Carlsbad Programme called for full autonomy for the Sudetenland, such as complete equality of status between Czechs and Germans, legally defining the German area within the state and granting it full self-government in all matters relating to public life, plus various special rights, including the right to profess and follow the principles of Nazism.[518] Though the Prague authorities initially rejected it firmly, beginning to partially mobilise their army in May, they ultimately had little choice but to resume their fruitless negotiations, intensifying their efforts to appease the SdP (not least owing to the pressure coming from London).

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[514] G. Ward Price, *Year of Reckoning,* 2nd edn (London: Cassell and Company Limited, 1939), p. 201.
[515] Smetana, p. 12.
[516] TNA, FO 800/269/38/35, Henderson to Halifax, 7 April 1938.
[517] See Ronald M. Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem, 1933-1938: Volkstumspolitik and the formulation of Nazi foreign policy* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1975).

Though there were internal disagreements about how this should be approached, the Foreign Office generally proceeded with pushing the Czechoslovaks to extend concessions to the Sudeten Germans.[519] The decision to almost put pressure exclusively on Prague was a combined product of the belief the Sudeten Germans were justified in their demands as well as calculations about Britain's ability to wage war. By that point, it was clear that a conflict could easily erupt over Sudetenland, forcing London to get involved in some capacity. The most suitable approach was accordingly the one that allowed Whitehall to occupy the middle ground: embroiled just enough to help perhaps bring about a peaceful resolution by urging concessions without completely entangling themselves with Central European affairs to the point they would explicitly become responsible for Czechoslovakia's future. When it came to what these concessions would actually look like in practice, however, deciding exactly what Britain would urge the Czechoslovaks to adopt was much more complicated. As always, there were of course those like Basil Newton who advocated outright for the state's dissolution.[520] Following Addison's example, he was always inclined to blame the Czechs for their predicament, arguing that Czechoslovakia's geography, history and national composition already made its position untenable; accordingly, Newton concluded, 'it will be no kindness in the long run to try to maintain her in it'.[521]

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[518] Keith Robbins, *Munich 1938* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd, 1968), pp. 218-219.

[519] Dejmek, *Nenaplněné*, p. 352. Both Sargent and Vansittart disagreed with the line advocated by Halifax, Chamberlain or Cadogan, who advocated for Britain to take a firmer stance on the Czechoslovak-German conflict and take more direct action to resolve it. See Paul Vyšný, *The Runciman Mission to Czechoslovakia, 1938,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 31-34.

[520] For the influence that Newton's anti-Czech leanings had on the formation of London's policy during 1938, see Peter Neville, 'Neville Henderson and Basil Newton: Two British Envoys in the Czech Crisis 1938' in *The Munich Crisis, 1938: Prelude to World War II*, ed. by Igor Lukes and Erik Goldstein (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1999), pp. 258-275.

[521] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 1, No. 86, Newton to Halifax, 15 March 1938. Sir John Simon, Chancellor of the Exchequer, likewise concurred that Czechoslovakia was 'a modern and very artificial creation with no real roots in the past' that even if Britain was to fight Germany over it, they could not justify recreating it in the

The majority in Whitehall did, however, hope that the Czechoslovak state would survive this crisis, believing that the answer lay with autonomy as the only solution that stood the slimmest chance of helping Czechoslovakia's nationalities reach a *modus vivendi*. As had usually been the case with Foreign Office discussions on constitutional arrangements in East Central Europe, what was meant by autonomy was rarely elaborated on but was instead a catchphrase used to encompass any organisational model that was not centralisation. Thus, for British officials, Henlein's Carlsbad Programme fit the bill, for nowhere did it explicitly demand separation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia whilst clearly proposing a plan for decentralisation of the state through territorial autonomy for the German lands. This is not to say London was completely oblivious to the flaws of this proposal. Indeed, seven months before Munich even happened, British officials already contemplated the idea that the eventual disintegration of the First Republic was precisely what Henlein — with Berlin's support — was working towards.[522] There was no doubt, the British Prime Minister remarked on one occasion, that the extension of significant autonomy to the Sudetenland would ultimately result in the German minority strengthening their demands for 'an out-and-out transfer' to Germany.[523] As Sargent gloomily concluded on one occasion,

> I think we must accept as a fact […] that Hitler will never be satisfied with a compromise solution, e.g. cultural, local autonomy, etc. Even if Hitler were to accept it as a pis aller for the time being, once he starts absorbing Central Europe, he cannot afford to have an independent and bitterly hostile Czech State on his flank […]. We must, I think therefore, take it that Hitler will be compelled in self-defence to break up Czechoslovakia as it is at present and to take control of the Czech nucleus himself. For this reason, I fear that no compromise solution to the Czech problem is by itself going to restore security and confidence.[524]

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aftermath of the war. TNA, FO 371/21674/1932, Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, 26th Meeting, 18 March 1938.

[522] In a memo he submitted to the Foreign Office in March, Orme Sargent was already firmly convinced that Germany was determined to territorially expand at the expense of other countries in the region. These conclusions were, however, rejected by Cadogan, arguing that incorporation of Austria and potentially Sudetenland did not mean that Hitler actually had expansionistic tendencies in East Central Europe. Moreover, he also added that even if that was Germany's aim, it was probably of economic nature, concluding that 'if Germany proves herself capable of developing that [Danubian] market, why should we (who have others) try to prevent her?'. TNA, FO 371/21674/1866, Orme Sargent, Memorandum on the effects of the Annexation of Austria by Germany on the General European Situation and on British Interests and Policy, 13 March 1938 and Alexander Cadogan, Memorandum on the Situation Created by the German Absorption of Austria and on the Possibility of German Action in Czechoslovakia, 17 March 1938.

[523] FO 371/21674/1932.

[524] Emphasis in original. TNA, FO 371/21674/1809, Minute by Sargent, 21 March 1938.

Yet, in spite of such rather accurate premonitions, territorial autonomy for Sudetenland was still widely considered to be the best option available as many hoped that this would be enough to appease both Hitler and the Sudeten Germans, making them more willing to drop the issue.[525] According to Neville Chamberlain's estimation, 'if Germany could obtain her *desiderata* by peaceable methods, there would be no reason to suppose that she would reject such a procedure in favour of one based on violence'.[526] Additionally, not only did autonomy offer the prospect of peaceful settlement of the problem, but as Henderson naively suggested, it also offered the possibility of 'the Sudeten even preferring freely and always to remain as co-citizens of the Czechs and Slovaks'.[527]

Moreover, it was commonly noted that aside from removing the risk of warfare, autonomy was also a just and almost a moral solution on the basis that the Germans were simply too advanced to not have the ability to properly govern themselves. As such, it was regarded as quite a reasonable demand. In fact, the case of the Sudeten Germans was explicitly related to that of Ireland, with it being commonly stated that Germany was justified in wanting to ensure its people outside of its borders had the ability to exercise some form of self-rule. The Irish example was certainly useful when it came to conceptualising the position of the Sudetenland to Germany and Czechoslovakia. As Noel Buxton (now Lord Noel-Buxton) observed, 'if we had lost the War and Germany had created an independent Ireland, we should of course have sympathised profoundly with the Northern Irish' and would have eventually demanded 'that at least autonomy should be given to Ulster'.[528] Indeed, the position of Northern Ireland and the Sudetenland was regarded as so similar that when in June, the Foreign Office was debating who to appoint as the leader of the mediatory mission to Czechoslovakia, Newton explicitly suggested it should be someone with 'experience of the problems of Ireland, French Canadians, Palestine or Danzig'.[529] Likewise, Henderson was particularly adamant that whatever arrangement was adopted, it had to be on Home Rule lines for even if the SdP agreed to less than that for the moment, it would not completely rule out the prospect of war, making it 'the most Pyrrhic of victories'.[530] For him, the Sudeten problem was essentially one of national self-determination, 'the only lastingly right moral principle'.[531] London, he explained, could not deny it to the Sudeten Germans for not only did Britain fight for this principle in the war but, as he noted, 'we are invoking it today in Northern Ireland'.[532] Since the direct violation of Czechoslovakia's territorial integrity to honour the principle was not a viable option that Whitehall could feasibly agree to, autonomy was certainly the next best thing.[533]

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[525] See TNA, FO 371/21674/1866, William Strang, Memorandum on Possible Measures to Avert German Action in Czechoslovakia, 17 March 1938; FO 371/21674/1932; FO 371/21715/2777, Minute by Mallet, 13 April 1938; FO 371/21578/3941, Minute by Maller, 11 May 1938; DBFP, Series 3, Volume II, Enclosure in No. 175, Lieutenant-Colonel Stronge to Newton, 29 August 1938.

[526] FO 371/21674/1932. The belief that Berlin also preferred a peaceful resolution was also corroborated by Henderson who reported that 'Germany is not ready for a long European war and does not therefore desire one'. TNA, FO 371/21674/1809, Henderson to the Foreign Office, 17 March 1938.

[527] TNA, FO 371/21715/2777, Henderson to Halifax, 1 April 1938. He himself, of course, did not actually believe this to be a genuine possibility. In a letter to Halifax, he noted that the Sudeten Germans could not be stopped from 'coming into the Reich if they wish and undoubtedly the majority to-day do so'. Likewise, he shared with Strang that he actually doubted whether it would even be possible to find a compromise. DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No. 613, Henderson to Halifax, 12 August 1938; No. 568, Henderson to Strang, 2 August 1938.

Naturally, given how desperate they were to settle this dispute, Whitehall did not only consider an autonomous approach to the issue. Centralisation, of course, was never even on the cards; twenty years of such an arrangement, it was widely agreed, had precisely led to the problems they were forced to tackle now. Among other alternatives considered — including neutralisation, a plebiscite and even, as Frank Roberts suggested, a 'solution savouring of Austro-Hungarian dualism' — British officials also considered federalism.[534] Indeed, despite Chamberlain's proclamations that the Sudeten question would be resolved 'within the framework of the Czechoslovak constitution', the Foreign Office was quite clear on the fact that they would also support the amendment of the said document if it meant preserving the Czechoslovak state.[535] In this case, a March 1938 memorandum on the German minority asserted, 'we should boldly tackle the problem from the base upwards and work for the reconstitution of Czechoslovakia on a federal basis'.[536] Even then, however, a federal system was not given a much better prognosis either but indeed, was also regarded as a solution that would ultimately spell doom for Czechoslovakia. Federalism, the memo explained, is under the most favourable circumstances a system which is very difficult to both create and maintain as it requires 'cement which will bind together the various federal units in a common patriotism'.[537] With this quite obviously lacking in the Czechoslovak state, it was believed with certainty that federalism would do nothing to protect the integrity of the state. In fact, the memo even speculated:

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[528] TNA, FO 800/269/38/62, Lord Noel-Buxton to Halifax, Memorandum on the Czechoslovak Crisis, 4 July 1938. See also Arnold Wilson, 'The Frontiers of Czechoslovakia', *The Times,* 9 September 1938, p. 7; Allen of Hurtwood, 'Germans and Czechs', *The Times,* 19 September 1938, p. 13; 'Sudetens' Case: Blackburn M.P. Broadcasts "Irishman's View"', *Manchester Guardian,* 22 September 1938, p. 15.
[529] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 1, No. 431, Newton to Halifax, 21 June 1938.
[530] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No. 613, Henderson to Halifax, 12 August 1938.
[531] Ibid.
[532] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No. 849, Henderson to Halifax, 13 September 1938.
[533] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No. 125, Henderson to Halifax, 5 April 1938.
[534] TNA, FO 371/21578/5998, Minute by Roberts, 23 June 1938.

> Are we not compelled to the conclusion that if Germany demands autonomy, it may be precisely because she counts upon the fact that the centrifugal force which would thereby be liberated would lead more or less quickly to the complete disintegration of the Czechoslovak State and thereby facilitate the partition of its members without violence and, above all, without affording the rest of Europe a pretext for accusing Germany of aggression.[538]

This exact point was also stressed by Elizabeth Wiskemann, a journalist and one of the most foremost authorities on Czechoslovakia, in her book *Czechs and Germans,* arguing that not only was a federation untenable due to the absence of 'some common political assumption as in Switzerland [or] the United States' but also because Czechoslovakia would quickly fall victim to its more powerful neighbour.[539] As she perceptively concluded, 'no one decentralises when war is in sight'.[540] Of course, neither Wiskemann nor Foreign Office officials were necessarily wrong when they feared that federalism would simply pave the way for the break-up of Czechoslovakia. And this possibility was also raised and acknowledged when it came to a concession of territorial autonomy to Henlein. But it nevertheless did not stop it from being entirely ruled out as a solution to be pursued. When it came to federalism, the British stance on the matter was predominantly informed not by the situation on the ground but by preconceptions about the inherent dangers of divided sovereignty, perpetually failing to consider whether a completely federal system truly posed a greater threat to the unity of the Czechoslovak state than decentralisation with a territorially autonomous Sudetenland. Even as the prospect of Czechoslovakia emerging out of this crisis with its borders intact grew thinner by the minute, the irrational fear that federalism was somehow more volatile and unsustainable nevertheless prevailed.

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[535] House of Commons, *20th Century House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers* (24 March 1938, vol. 333, cols. 1407-1408) (London: Hansard).

[536] TNA, FO 371/21714/2510, 'Memorandum on the German Minority in Czechoslovakia: The Next Step', 31 March 1938.

[537] Ibid.

[538] Ibid.

[539] Wiskemann, p. 275.

[540] Ibid.

With both federalism and centralisation ruled out, the only feasible option that remained was thus territorial autonomy whereby the Sudetenland would have complete control over all internal affairs with only some minor decisions reserved for the central government in Prague. Outside of the Foreign Office, however, opinions were divided. Though autonomy was generally endorsed by all parties, the extent of this autonomy quickly became a subject of contention. On the one hand, there were those, including R.W Seton-Watson and Henry Wickham Steed, who argued that Henlein's programme was so unreasonable and extensive that the Czechoslovak Government should have 'rejected these demands severally and *in toto*', conceding no more than 'perfect national equality and cultural autonomy for all'.[541] For Seton-Watson, this was primarily because he suspected Henlein was primarily Hitler's pawn and thus doubted the sincerity of his claims that all he sought was territorial autonomy within Czechoslovakia; as he noted in his 1938 book *Britain and the Dictators*, 'it is essential that foreign opinion should realise that of the minorities in Europe the Germans of Czechoslovakia have the fewest grievances'.[542] In other words, he considered Henlein's complaints of Czechoslovak oppression to be vastly exaggerated simply so that he could obtain the Sudetenland that he (and, as Seton-Watson suspected, the Reich) wanted. Indulging Henlein's demands, Seton-Watson demanded, was synonymous with the disintegration of the Czechoslovak state which in turn was synonymous with the downfall of the European order as the people of his time knew. 'Once [we] let the Czech fortress fall', he explained*,*

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[541] Edgar P. Young, *Czechoslovakia: Keystone of Peace and Democracy* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1938), p. 329; SSEES, SEW 10/6/1, R. W. Seton-Watson, 'Background to the Czech Problem', *The Listener,* 19. 492 (1938), 1265-1307 (p. 1307). See also Wickham Steed, 'The Czech Problem', *The Times,* 11 May 1938, p. 12; G. J. George, *They Betrayed Czechoslovakia* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1938) ; Alexander Henderson, *Eyewitness in Czecho-Slovakia* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1939); G. E. R. Gedye. *Fallen Bastions: The Central European Tragedy* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1939); G. M. Gathorne-Hardy, *A Short History of International Affairs, 1920 to 1938,* Revised edn (London: Humphrey Milford, 1939).

[542] R. W. Seton-Watson, *Britain and the Dictators: A Survey of Post-War British Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 328.

> the tide of totalitarian state doctrine will flood across the Danubian and Balkan area: Britain's negative policy, and her failure to give due encouragement to those democratic elements which are quite logically at one and the same time democratic, Francophil and Anglophil, will reap its fatal fruits.[543]

Seton-Watson's objection to the autonomous measures that would turn the Sudetenland into a separate legal and territorial entity were accordingly less based on his belief that autonomy or decentralisation were inherently dangerous to the stability of the state, but in the belief that these were merely cover-up phrases for separatism. He was not entirely alone in this view. As Shiela Grant Duff, a foreign correspondent in Prague at the time, asserted, no one argued that decentralisation was not 'a desirable measure'; however, with extensive territorial autonomy whereby frontier districts would *de facto* be controlled by pro-Berlin Nazis, it was clear that such an arrangement held 'very great danger for the coherence and continuation of the Czechoslovak State'.[544] Others disagreed, calling instead for territorial autonomy. Arnold Toynbee, for example, advocated for the adoption of 'the British and Swiss theory, which regards the State as a framework within which many nationalities and cultures [….] can live side by side'.[545] 'I have yet to meet', he explained, 'a Scotsman or a Welshman who would be satisfied with this kind of second-class citizenship'; how, he wondered, could it then be expected from the Germans.[546] For those like Toynbee who did favour decentralisation, the British model represented a justification for endorsing such an arrangement; after all, had Britain not been a stable country where various nationalities happily co-existed and indeed had a degree of self-governance? The fact that neither

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[543] R. W. Seton-Watson, *Dictators,* pp. 442-43.

[544] See S. Grant Duff, *Europe and the Czechs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Limited, 1938), p. 168.

[545] Alfred Zimmern, 'Czechoslovakia To-Day', *International Affairs,* 17. 4 (1938), 465-492 (p. 482).

[546] Zimmern, 'Czechoslovakia', p. 480.

Scotland nor Wales had another neighbouring great power which might annex them was casually overlooked in the attempt to find as a straightforward solution as possible that could help diffuse the crisis.

Similar views were also regularly repeated in all major newspapers.[547] In a letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian,* Noel-Buxton insisted that the extension of territorial autonomy to the Sudeten Germans was 'an essential safeguard to the peace of Europe'.[548] The *Sunday Times* likewise reported that the settlement of the problem lay 'in the Czech Government's willingness […] to give the Sudeten regions the autonomy they have long desired'. The *Daily Telegraph* sympathised with the German resentment of being ruled by 'their inferiors', comparing it to the Irish ruling over England, whilst the *Daily Mail* simply ran a piece entitled 'How Long Shall the Czechs Imperil Peace?'.[549] Whereas Seton-Watson and others saw in territorial autonomy the threat of German expansionism, these articles from conservative voices argued that in fact, the extension of concessions to the Sudeten Germans would precisely safeguard against that, for it would remove any grounds for Berlin to intervene to protect them against Czech rule.[550]

That His Majesty's Government sided with the British press over actual experts on Czechoslovak affairs is most obvious when looking at the plan produced in late August by the Runciman Mission, a British delegation that was sent over in the summer of 1938 to help mediate the dispute between the Prague government and the SdP.[551] Though the mission itself was named after its leader and the figurehead, Lord Runciman, the plan at hand was actually devised by Robert J. Stopford in response to yet another failed attempt of the Prague Government to produce a proposal that the SdP found satisfactory. Though a banker by trade, Stopford did possess some knowledge of Central European history and current affairs, and was also relatively well-versed in the topic of constitutional problems in general.[552] Armed with a volume printed by the Irish Government that contained copies of different constitutions (including the Austro-Hungarian one which Stopford found to be particularly valuable as it dealt with 'the same sort of racial problems'), Stopford took it upon himself to come up with a scheme that could simultaneously reconcile the Czechoslovak government's insistence on preserving the country's territorial integrity and the SdP's demands as contained in the Carlsbad Programme.[553] Aside from the provisions that granted the Germans full equality with the Czechs and recognised the Germans as a legal entity, the most important element of this proposal was the part that tackled the demand for self-government. Stopford suggested that each nationality that accounted for ten or more percent in any given province of Czechoslovakia should have its own diet, a separate administrative service and a president to oversee its internal administrative affairs.[554] The diets would be able to exercise significant self-rule and would have the power to legislate 'in detail' in the areas where the Central Government would only legislate 'in principle', such as 'finance, […] cultural, social, educational and economic matters'.[555] Moreover, though Prague was to retain control over the subjects that usually fell into the common sphere — foreign affairs, defence, and currency, to name but a few — Stopford also proposed that any legislation that had a bearing on

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[547] See 'British Move to End Czech Crisis', *The Sunday Times,* 1 May 1938, p. 19; 'Henlein's Proposals', *Daily Mail,* 27 May 1938, p. 12; Major F. Yeats Brown, 'On the Czech Frontier: Sudeten German Concern – Chances of Conciliation', *The Observer,* 29 May 1938, p. 20; J. L. Garvin, 'After Paris: Friendship for Peace – Herr Hitler States his Case – The Czech-German Crisis – A Turning-Point of History', *The Observer,* 24 July 1938, p. 14; 'Lord Runciman at Work', *The Times,* 8 August 1938. P. 11; Allen of Hurtwood, 'Germans and Czechs', *The Times,* 19 September 1938, p. 13; G. Ward Price, 'End Crisis Once for All', *Daily Mail,* 19 September 1938, pp. 13-14.

[548] Noel-Buxton, 'Autonomy for the Sudeten Germans: Lord Noel-Buxton's Argument', *Manchester Guardian,* 25 July 1938, p. 19.

[549] Virginia Cowles, 'The Czechs and the Germans', *The Sunday Times,* 12 June 1938, p. 18.; J. J. Saunders, 'Aspects of the Crisis', *The Daily Telegraph,* 22 September 1938, p. 17; Viscount Rothermere, 'How Long Shall the Czechs Imperial Peace?', *Daily Mail,* 18 July 1938, p. 10.

[550] 'Czech and German', *The Manchester Guardian,* 24 May 1938, p. 12.

[551] Desperate to ensure the Mission was truly seen as impartial by international observers, the Foreign Office deliberately excluded the likes of Seton-Watson, R. H. Bruce Lockhart or Wickham Steed whose

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attitudes, partialities or preferences would have been a matter of public knowledge given their status as well-known experts on East Central Europe and Czechoslovakia. With the exception of Stopford and John Munro Troutbeck, First Secretary of the Prague Legation, the Mission was thus composed of figures who had very little prior knowledge or understanding of Czech-German relations. Vyšný, p. 133-135.

[552] Vyšný, p. 131. As Donald Coffey notes, during the drafting process, the Irish constitution-makers had copies of the 1931 Spanish Constitution, those of Austria and the USSR, as well as the 1919 German one. Moreover, they also produced a summary of draft heads of different constitutions, including Portugal, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the United States. These would have presumably been contained in Stopford's volume. Donal K. Coffey, *Drafting the Irish Constitution, 1935-1937: Transnational Influences in Interwar Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 29-30.

[553] Imperial War Museum, The Papers of R J Stopford, RJS 2, Box 04/14/1, Final Draft of Prague 1938-1939.

[554] TNA, FO 800/304/4, Stopford Plan, 6 September 1938, pp. 345-351.

[555] Ibid.

one or more national groups would have to be referred to a national committee, each of which would be entirely composed of the members of the affected nationality.[556] This, he believed, would satisfy both parties. In an annexe addressed to the Sudeten Germans, he noted that one of the principal advantages of his scheme was that it gave 'the maximum of self-government to all Sudetens living in the three provinces'; at the same time, in the annexe for the Czechs, he extolled the proposal for preserving 'in full the unity, security and integrity of the State'.[557]

Though the plan, presented to Runciman and his deputy, Frank Ashton-Gwatkin, was extolled at the Foreign Office as 'a really brilliant effort' that they intended to use in case the Mission was called upon to produce a proposal, Stopford's conclusions and Runciman's approval ultimately had no bearing on what played out in the end.[558] In early September, the negotiations in Czechoslovakia collapsed entirely following a series of rather alarming events. In response to the publication of Beneš's Fourth Plan which accepted almost all the points of the Carlsbad Programme, the SdP — completely caught off guard by the government's generous proposal — orchestrated an incident which ended with a Czech policeman striking a SdP deputy with his whip and providing Henlein with a perfect excuse to break off talks.[559] The situation started escalating from there, and the fact that the British delegation abruptly left Prague on 16 September as Chamberlain went to privately meet with Hitler the day before certainly did not help.

Upon his return, Runciman did prepare a report where he summarised the conclusions of the Mission. Though expressing his disappointment that the problem could not be settled within the

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[556] Ibid.

[557] Ibid.

[558] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, Appendix III – Additional Letters on the Progress of the Negotiations, Ashton-Gwatkin to Strang, 6 September 1938. Runciman also shared this proposal with Halifax. DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No, 756, Newton to Halifax, 3 September 1938.

[559] In historiography, the concessions granted to the SdP by the Czechoslovak Government have often been summarised by the statement made by Karl Hermann Frank, the deputy leader of the Party, exclaiming: "My God, they have given us everything!". Not only did the Fourth Plan make provisions for language equality and recognised the Germans as a collective legal entity, but it also provided for territorial autonomy of the Sudetenland by agreeing to create cantons that would be as nationally homogeneous as possible. Frank's quote can be found in J. W. Wheeler-Bennet, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy (*New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 92. For the Fourth Plan, see DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, No. 789, Newton to Halifax, 6 September 1938.

Czechoslovak frontier, Runciman did not seem to linger on it; his official counsel seemed to point in precisely the opposite direction. His first recommendation essentially endorsed the complete severance of the Sudetenland, arguing that the districts located on the border 'should be at once transferred from Czechoslovakia to Germany', adding that holding a plebiscite or referendum would be 'a sheer formality' since the population there already desired to amalgamate with the Reich.[560] For those districts where a significant German minority would remain, he suggested 'an effort be made to find a basis for local autonomy […] on the lines of the 'Fourth Plan', modified so as to meet the new circumstance created by the transfer of the preponderantly German area'.[561] And lastly, if removing a sizeable portion of its territory was not enough, Runciman concluded that Czechoslovakia's 'own future existence' as well as the 'peace of Europe' greatly depended on it becoming a sort of Switzerland, which in this case meant banning policies antagonistic to Czechoslovakia's neighbours and abandoning its existing alliances with France and the Soviet Union so as to re-assure the bordering countries that she will not 'enter into any aggressive action against them arising from obligations to other States'.[562]

It was this appraisal that laid the foundation of the terms that Chamberlain put forward to Hitler. In his speech to the House of Commons, the Prime Minister made sure to highlight that the Government's policy was closely guided by the recommendations of their official mediator, summarising the details of Runciman's report, focusing in particular on his recommendations regarding the cession of the Sudetenland and the implementation of local autonomy in the areas where pockets of Germans remained.[563] This was also precisely what Chamberlain presented to Hitler during their meeting in Godesberg on 22 September which the latter promptly rejected on the basis that Britain failed to account for ‘the other nationalities within Czechoslovakia’ who ‘had the sincere sympathy of the German Reich’, adding ‘that peace could not be established in Central Europe until the claims of all these nationalities had been settled’.[564] Indeed, aside from insisting upon the immediate incorporation of the ‘German areas’ into the Reich, he also indicated that Germany would not abandon war as an option until the Polish and Hungarian claims were also settled, leading to the transfer of additional Czechoslovak territory. Though extremely extensive, these demands were more or less met in their entirety barely a week later at Munich, completing the annexation of the Sudetenland and commencing the process of dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

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[560] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 2, Appendix II, Letter IV, Runciman to President Beneš, 21 September 1938.

[561] Ibid.

[562] Ibid.

[563] Statement to the House of Commons, 28 September 1938 in Neville Chamberlain, *In Search of Peace* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 179-199 (p. 188). There is, however, evidence that Runciman (with Ashton-Gwatkin's assistance) slightly altered his original draft of the report to appeal more to the Prime Minister. The main point of contention seems to be not whether the Sudetenland should be ceded, but rather how that territory was to be defined. Whereas Runciman argued that an area would have to have over 80 per cent Germans to justify cession, the Government was already set on transfer everywhere that had over 50 per cent. For more details, see Vyšný, pp. 324-326.

5.3 The creation of an independent Slovakia

Amidst this turmoil, one might fail to notice that all of these extensive debates, which took place in Britain during 1938 on Czechoslovakia being a “state of Nationalities” rather than a “national state”, made no mention of the Slovaks. Yet, it is perhaps that fact alone that reveals more than enough about British official attitudes towards the position of Slovakia. Whilst Prague focused their attention on the Sudeten problem, the SL’S decided to follow the SdP’s example. As a result of the Munich Agreement, the position of the Czech ruling elite in Slovakia was significantly weakened as Hlinka’s party started strengthening its political ambitions.[565] In June 1938, they published a list of demands which, if accepted, would have effectively turned Czechoslovakia into a federation where Slovakia would have a separate diet, separate government and a right to veto any decision made by the Czechoslovak parliament on the matters concerning their joint affairs.[566] This was followed by the Žilina Agreement of 5 October 1938, signed by all of Slovak parties with the exception of the Communists and the Social Democrats, pledging to work together to see the Czecho-Slovak federation come into existence. They also passed a constitutional act on the autonomy of Slovakia, placing governmental and executive powers in the hands of an autonomous Slovak government under the leadership of Jozef Tiso. This was confirmed by Prague not a day later; autonomy was finally constitutionally enshrined, with the House of Deputies and the Senate passing a new law that turned the now-hyphenated Czecho-Slovakia into a loose federation.[567] For the most part, this change was greeted by a significant part of the population, many of whom greeted the slogans that promised Slovakia would finally be rid of all the wrong brought upon it by centralism.[568]

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[564] Quoted in Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study in the Politics of History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 148.

[565] Valerián Bystrický and Ladislav Deák, 'Od Mníchova k rozbitu Česko-Slovenska', in *Slovensko,* ed. by Zemko and Bystrický, pp. 199-240 (p. 213).

[566] Rychlík, '*Czech-Slovak*', in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. by Cornwall and Evans, p. 23.

Under this new autonomous agreement, the SL'S acquired such a wide range of powers that it was able to implement its own ideas and programmes regardless of any objections from Prague; at this point, the Czech authorities were so weakened they could do little to interfere with the developments in Slovakia, but were only left with the ability to respond to them.[569] With its own government and Diet in Bratislava in place, the new ruling elite now took up completely the reins of Slovakia's cultural, political and economic life, quickly turning it into a one-party, authoritarian and nationalist state.[570] Moreover, the already volatile situation was made drastically worse by the existing split between moderates and extremists in the SL'S leadership. Both these groups argued that independence was the ultimate goal but disagreed on when it should be obtained, the former arguing it should be achieved step-by-step through gradual reformation of the federal system and the latter claiming it was something that needed to be pursued immediately, regardless of any constitutional provisions or previous resolutions that would bind them to

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[567] See Kárník, vol. 3, pp. 630-631. See also Valerián Bystrický, 'Slovakia from the Munich Conference to the Declaration of Independence', in *Slovakia,* ed. by Teich, Kováč and Brown, pp. 157-174.

[568] Bystrický and Deák, 'Od Mníchova', in *Slovensko,* ed. by Zemko and Bystrický, p. 219. As Arpaš notes, however, this enthusiasm quickly began to wane when it became clear that self-government was traded for a one-party system. Robert Arpaš, *Autonómia: vit'azstvo alebo prehra? Vyvrcholenie politického zápasu HSL'S o autonómiu Slovenska* (Bratislava: VEDA, 2011), p. 169.

[569] Bystrický and Deák, 'Od Mníchova', in *Slovensko,* ed. by Zemko and Bystrický, p. 217.

[570] For more on the Hlinka Guard and its predecessor Rodobrana, see Yeshayahu Jelinek, 'Storm-Troopers in Slovakia: The Rodobrana and the Hlinka Guard', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 6. 3 (1971), 97-119.

Prague.[571] This, combined with the increasing pressure that Germany exercised on the Slovak leaders to completely break off their ties with the Czechs, helped successfully lay the ground for the autonomous government to begin pushing to become a national government. On 13 March 1939, Hitler summoned Tiso to Berlin and essentially instructed him to proclaim an independent Slovakia which the Slovak Diet did a day later, dealing an already diminished Czecho-Slovakia its final death blow.[572] By the 15th, as the German army began to pour across the border, the process of the disintegration was irreversibly completed: Slovakia became an independent republic, Bohemia and Moravia became a German protectorate, and the country that was described in 1919 as 'the rock and citadel of the new Europe' was no more.[573]

Despite its importance for Slovakia, the internal stability of Czecho-Slovakia and its overall survival in the end, this development did not make significant waves in Britain.[574] When the country first federalised, no one seemed to be taken aback, surprised or opposed to this — a rather noteworthy reaction (or lack thereof), given how firmly 'federation' was rejected as a solution in the spring of 1938. In fact, in the Foreign Office, the creation of a Czecho-Slovak federation was actually welcomed for having 'satisfactorily settled' the 'highly intractable' Slovak Question.[575] A positive aspect that was brought up most commonly was that at least federalism managed to keep Slovakia within the Czechoslovak fold. Indeed, even in late 1938, independence was still seen by Whitehall as an unrealistic and unviable option for Slovakia.[576] Though they often justified these views by referring to Slovakia's financial and economic landscape, British officials were primarily afraid of the impact this would have on the survival of Czechoslovakia, not only because it was still uncertain whether ‘Germany desires this country [Slovakia] to maintain its present form’ but also because it was clear the Slovaks, ‘in their eagerness to be rid of the Czech ideas […] turn with increased alacrity to German methods’.[577] This, combined with the age-old stereotype that the Slovaks were incapable of self-governance, certainly did not help allay the fear that an independent Slovakia equated to a gradual Germanisation of East Central Europe. Indeed, their alleged incompetence seemed to be the one thing that British officials still thought Prague was right about; as Frank Roberts noted in March 1939, the former were ‘completely unfit for any real degree of independence’.[578] In fact, he was so convinced of this that on 13 March, a day before the Slovak Diet proclaimed independence from Czecho-Slovakia, Roberts submitted a memo dismissing ‘a truly independent Slovakia’ as ‘unlikely’; instead, he anticipated it would either become ‘nominally independent or bound by even looser federal ties than at present to Prague and dominated in either event by German influence’.[579]

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[571] Bystrický, 'Slovakia', in *Slovakia,* ed. by Teich, Kováč and Brown, p. 170.

[572] Prochazka, 'Republic', in *History*, ed. by Mamatey and Luža, p. 268.

[573] 'Citadel of New Europe: Future of Czechoslovakia', *The Scotsman*, 23 October 1919, p. 5.

[574] Having said that, at least Slovakia was acknowledged. Ruthenia, which was also granted autonomy, was once again a victim of complete ignorance and received no attention for, as Newton put it, it was 'a small and intrinsically unimportant province representing more of a burden than an asset', 'a land of mystery about which we know, I fear, all too little'. TNA, FO 371/21789/15340, Newton to Halifax, 8 December 1938; FO 371/21579/12946, Newton to Strang, 22 October 1938.

[575] TNA, FO 371/21571/12625, David Stephens, Memorandum on Slovak autonomy, 12 October 1938; DBFP, Series 3, vol. 3, No. 124, Newton to Halifax, 5 October 1938.

[576] FO 371/21570/12133. For reactions outside Whitehall, see 'A Federal State', *The Irish Times,* 7 October 1938, p. 6; 'Czecho-Slovakia', *Manchester Guardian,* 8 March 1939, p. 10; 'Separatist Crises in Slovakia', *The Daily Telegraph,* 11 March 1938, p. 12; 'Troubled Waters', *Manchester Guardian,* 13 March 1938, p. 8;

Moreover, as one memo concluded, ‘now that Slovakia has got self-government, the voice of autonomists, Magyarophiles, and malcontents should be heard no more’.[580] There was a general belief that despite the opposition to centralism, the Slovaks were not as averse to the idea of remaining a part of Czecho-Slovakia as their Sudeten counterparts. Their problem simply did not require as extreme a remedy as the one prescribed at Munich but was one that could be resolved through federalisation: it gave the SL’S what it demanded whilst preserving the Czecho-Slovak state and thereby not completely re-drawing the map of East Central Europe once again in two decades. Not only that, but it was in Britain’s interest for the Czech-Slovak dispute to be settled whilst it could still firmly be classified as a strictly internal constitutional question. At the time, it was (incorrectly) assumed that keeping the *ľudáci* contented also meant they were less likely to look to Germany for help in achieving their national aspirations. This was vital from the British point of view, who feared that Berlin would take it upon itself to resolve this problem by marching upon Prague or annexing outright the Slovak lands, putting pressure on Britain to take some action and honour the guarantees given at Munich.[581] According to a Foreign Office document, the latter was Britain's 'chief concern', and if the Czechs granted extensive autonomy to the Slovaks, London was certainly not going to protest. [582]

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[577] FO 371/21570/12133.

[578] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 4, No. 230, F. K. Roberts, Memorandum on the Position of His Majesty’s Government in connexion with possible Developments of the Slovak Crisis, 13 March 1939. See also TNA, FO 371/21580/14188, Stopford to Halifax, 15 November 1938; FO 371/21789/15340; DBFP, Series, 3, vol. 3, No. 413, Newton to Halifax, 8 December 1938.

[579] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 4, No. 230, Roberts.

[580] Ibid.

None of this, however, meant that Whitehall all of a sudden considered federalism an acceptable or desirable solution. By that point, what Britain wanted or considered to be an optimal settlement mattered little; Czecho-Slovakia and the rest of its neighbours were left at the mercy of Nazi foreign policy.[583] Nevertheless, the discussion as to Czecho-Slovak domestic affairs did not cease just because the matter was entirely out of British control or influence. It is important to remember that a federal Czecho-Slovakia emerged and operated under a very specific set of circumstances which would have profoundly informed how Whitehall viewed its creation. By October 1938, the position of Czecho-Slovakia was already so precarious that it is easy to see how British officials thought that a change in constitutional organisation and a division of sovereignty between Prague and Bratislava could certainly not threaten the stability and unity of the Czecho-Slovak state any more than the annexation of the Sudetenland. In other words, there was no point in criticising the implementation of a federal system since the Foreign Office did not have much choice but to be content with whatever the Slovaks seemingly felt. As such, to debate the benefits and downfalls of devolution or centralisation as opposed to federalism (particularly when those terms were already used so interchangeably, and rarely properly differentiated between) would not only be a time-consuming activity but a rather arbitrary and unimportant one when the alternative was complete dissolution and further regional destabilisation.

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[581] As Watt points out, these fears were not too far-fetched as already in October 1938, there were discussions in Germany about how Slovakia could be used as a useful base for Nazi advance eastwards. D. C. Watt, *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939* (New York: Pantheon Books), pp. 141-142

[582] TNA, FO 371/21570/12133, The Foreign Office, Memorandum on the Future of Slovakia and Ruthenia, 11 October 1938; DBFP, Series 3, vol. 4, No. 230, Roberts.

[583] See Correlli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power* (Stroud : Alan Sutton, 1984) and Keith Middlemas, *Diplomacy of Illusion: The British Government and Germany, 1937-39* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972).

At the same time, Foreign Office officials, far more concerned about the geopolitics and external relations in East Central Europe, did not discuss what was essentially an exclusively internal problem enough for one to determine whether — and if so, to what extent — the attitudes on this matter actually evolved. Whilst the creation of a Czecho-Slovak federation was seen to have its positive side, the complaints about how 'the wine of newly acquired semi-independence' had gone to the 'easily turned Slovak heads' also indicate that independence was regarded as excessive and still something for which the Slovaks were not ready.[584] Indeed, given the traditional argument that Slovakia was not capable of self-governance and that Prague's centralised system was all that kept its economy and political landscape afloat, it is fair to speculate that British officials would not have been in favour of anything beyond a greater amount of autonomy had the international circumstances been less volatile. When it came to the Czecho-Slovak constitutional question, even in a post-Munich era, Britain's approach to Czecho-Slovak affairs did not change to any degree. Since the early 1920s, maintaining regional stability and keeping the peace were at the forefront, which always meant endorsing domestic policies that seemed to be most sensible, moderate, and conducive to British priorities — regardless of whether they were capable of securing such outcomes in the long-run. Pragmatism and the desire to find a quick solution to complex problems they themselves did not fully understand had been a cornerstone of British policy towards Czecho-Slovakia since its inception. It just so happened that as the sun set on the First Republic, it was a federal arrangement, not a unitary and centralised one, that came out on top as the most pragmatic solution.

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[584] DBFP, Series 3, vol. 4, No. 230, Roberts.

5.4 A compromise found: The Cvetković-Maček Agreement and the creation of the Banovina of Croatia

Whilst the events following the Munich Conference effectively led to a schism between the Czechs and Slovaks, Yugoslavia's state-constitutive nationalities responded to these events by starting to draw closer together during this period. The political landscape gradually began to shift in a more conciliatory direction following the downfall of Stojadinović in the aftermath of the December 1938 National Assembly elections. By that point, the existing government under the Yugoslav Radical Union had grown increasingly unpopular due to a combination of his increasingly authoritatian tactics as well as the failure to conclude a contentious agreement with the Vatican that would have regularised the position of Catholic clergy in the country. Consequentially, Stojadinović came to be disliked not only in the predominantly Croat *banovinas* of Primorje and Sava but also in Serbia, leading to the conclusion of a formal agreement between Maček and several Serbian parties who pledged to work together against his regime. This so-called Bloc of National Agreement won only 45% of the votes as opposed to Stojadinović's 54%, thereby failing to topple the Prime Minister. But given the sheer size of the opposition, and the fact they represented people from across the political spectrum and that they were not that far from claiming support of half the population, their strong showing at the elections was enough for Prince Pavle to start looking for a more popular leader who would be more willing to find a more tangible solution to the Croat problem.[585] At this point, Stojadinović still refused to agree to the HSS's demands for Croatian autonomy on the grounds that it posed a threat to the territorial integrity and economic stability of the Yugoslav state. The country's stability, as he noted in his programme, rested on a simple principle: 'One king, one nation, one state, prosperity at home, peace on the borders'.[586]

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[585] See Čulinović, *Jugoslavija,* pp. 133-134.

[586] Stojadinović's speech, 11 December 1938, quoted in Djokić, *Elusive,* p. 172.

Though the Prince Regent previously toed the same line, by late 1938 he gradually began to fear that if domestic relations between Belgrade and Zagreb were not soon mended, disintegration would befall Yugoslavia regardless of whether the Croats got their autonomy. The changing international situation, which profoundly affected one of Yugoslavia's closest allies, could not go unnoticed. Not only did the Anschluss make Nazi Germany its neighbour, but it also did much to further draw Yugoslavia into Germany's economic and political orbit.[587] Moreover, there was also no guarantee that the Kingdom was safe from suffering the same fate as Czecho-Slovakia: the country had a sizeable German minority which was increasingly Nazifying but also had large portions of its territory claimed by other countries friendly to Germany which – as far as the Yugoslav leaders were concerned – was given complete authority to rewrite East Central European borders as it pleased.[588] Though the Kingdom's official foreign policy during Stojadinović's premiership was one of neutrality, it was becoming increasingly apparent that such a stance would not be viable in the long run; the South Slavs would eventually have to choose a side.[589] Internal cohesion, Prince Pavel argued, was more important now than ever before. Accordingly, fearful of the impact that the continuation of the impasse could have on political stability — particularly in the light of broader European affairs — and aware that the HSS refused to come to Belgrade so long as the premiership was in Stojadinović's hands, the Prince Regent refused to allow the Prime Minister to appoint a new cabinet. The country needed a new direction which the former believed could not happen if rule remained in the hands of the same clique. In February 1939, Stojadinović's era came to an end and the reins of government were now taken up by a former minister of public health and social welfare, Dragiša Cvetković.

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[587] As David Kaiser notes, successive British governments displayed little interest prior to 1938 in investing significant capital into East Central European states as the area was fairly insignificant to British trade. Though the Anschluss made it clear it was paramount for Britain and France to attempt and contain Germany's economic influence in the region, by that point, it was already too late for Britain to combat Berlin's expansion. David E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World war: Germany, Britain, France, and Eastern Europe, 1930-1939* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 183.

[588] See Ljubo Boban, *Sporazum Cvetković-Maček* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka, 1964), p. 41.

[589] For an overview of Stojadinović's foreign policy, see Dragan Bakić, 'Milan Stojadinović, the Croat Question and the International Position of Yugoslavia, 1935-1939', *Acta Histriae,* 26. 1 (2018), 207-228 (pp. 212-216).

Given the circumstances that led to his being appointed Prime Minister, it was not unexpected that the determination to reach a compromise with the HSS would be at the heart of Cvetković's politics. His task, however, was quite formidable. Not long after he took up the leadership, Slovakia had officially proclaimed independence from Czecho-Slovakia, intensifying the urgency to resolve the Croat Question and sketch an agreement which both he and Maček would find agreeable before the international situation escalated even further. To the Croats who had been clamouring for greater self-rule for almost two decades, the events to the north solidified the belief their claims for territorial autonomy could no longer be rejected; 'it surprises me', Maček asserted in March 1939, 'that even after what has happened in the last few days [Slovakia declaring independence], the Serbs do not realise this is the twelfth hour'.[590] Indeed, the events in Czechoslovakia loomed over the new Government, forcing them to tackle the question whether a similar thing could happen to Yugoslavia given the strength and persistence of autonomist but also pro-separatist, fascist streams in Croatia.[591] Pacifying the Croats, however, was quite an undertaking, for Cvetković was only one of the 'three mutually incompatible irons' that Maček was heating in his 'political fire' to achieve territorial autonomy for Croatia.[592] Unwilling to put all his eggs in one basket, the leader of Croatian peasants did not immediately abandon his other options: to continue working together with his Serbian partners in the National Agreement Bloc for the implementation of a new, democratic constitution or to actively pursue Italian support for the creation of an independent Croatian state.[593] Moreover, even after the HSS officially decided to stick with Cvetković in April, the talks between the two were anything but plain sailing – and not only because they took place in the shadow of the break-up of Czecho-Slovakia. Internal pressures continuously mounted, as there grew opposition by Serb ultranationalists who did not believe anything should be ceded to the Croats, and by the Croat fascist movement (Ustaša) who advocated outright seccession.[594] The fact that the two could not agree on what territory this new Croatian unit would encompass – that is, where the boundary would be drawn when the Serb and Croat populations were so intermixed – was also an issue; it was, as Hugh Seton-Watson observed upon his return from Yugoslavia in April 1939, 'the most difficult question of all'.[595]

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[590] 'Yugoslavia Planning Proposals to Croats: Partition Suggestion and Fate of Czechs Sharpen Issue', *New York Times,* 18 March 1939, p. 2.
[591] Čulinović, *Jugoslavija*, p. 136.
[592] Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), p. 259.
[593] Boban, *Sporazum,* pp. 105-115.

In spite of such challenges, however, the increasingly grim international situation managed to bring about what decades of peace could not: the Serb and Croat political leaders – unlike all those that came before then – managed to find a common language and agree to certain concessions. Cvetković, for one, officially abandoned the ideology of integral Yugoslavism which was supported by every government since Pašić's days, finally recognising the existence of separate Yugoslav identities, including Croatian.[596] In return, Maček dropped the demand for the abolition of the 1931 Constitution, a point of contention not only between Zagreb and the political establishment in Belgrade but also between the Croatian autonomists and the Crown itself.[597] In the end, the two settled on what has regularly been compared to the 1867 Ausgleich between Austria and Hungary. Promulgated by royal decree rather than ratified in the Assembly, the so-called Cvetković-Maček Agreement or the *Sporazum* was supposed to be provisional, only providing a framework for further amending the existing internal order at a later date. Its temporary nature did not stop it from instituting some changes, having ushered into existence a new Banovina of Croatia. Swallowing up almost 30 per cent of the entire Kingdom's territory and around 4.4 million people, it not only encompassed the territory of present-day Croatia but also northern and south-eastern Bosnia.[598] Administratively, it received extensive autonomy in all matters concerning internal affairs; the only areas that remained under the control of the central government in Belgrade were foreign policy, foreign trade, defence, public security, customs, and finance.[599] Moreover, though the King would retain his legislative powers and had the authority to appoint the executive authority (the governor – *ban*), thereby still keeping some centralist measures in place, the Banovina was also to be governed by the democratically elected Diet (*sabor)*, wiped out of existence in 1918, to whom the *ban* would be responsible.[600] Even though it did not turn Yugoslavia into a federation, politically, this was a triumph for Croatian federalists, having not only turned Croatia into a separate territorial unit with a level of self-governance but also obtaining recognition of Croatian national idenity and doing away with the concept of integral Yugoslavism that had been the backbone of the country's nationality policy for years.

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[594] Ante Subašić, 'Sporazum Cvetković-Maček Agreement i uspostava Banovine Hrvatske', *Pleter,* 5.5 (2022), 147-170.
[595] TNA, Hugh Seton-Watson, The Position in Yugoslavia, 7 April 1939, FO 371/23875/2704.
[596] Djokić, *Elusive,* pp. 192-194.
[597] Ibid.
[598] Rothschild, p. 260.

The *Sporazum* did not bring an end to the Serb-Croat conflict by any means, nor was it universally popular even in Croatia, but at least for the time being, it represented a watershed moment of Yugoslav interwar history, for the first time reconciling the government in Belgrade and the biggest Croatian party, the HSS.[601] And yet, despite its coveted status as the first concrete initiative to resolve the problem that had plagued the Yugoslav political landscape since 1918, the negotiations leading to the *Sporazum* as well as its ratification received only passing attention from British governmental officials. Given that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed a few days before the Agreement and Hitler invaded Poland barely a week later, this lack of interest is hardly unexpected. Their indifference can be attributed to their preoccupation with the far more serious situation that was developing in Central Europe; a detailed inquiry on the state of Serb-Croat relations was hardly on a list of British priorities at the time. This becomes quite apparent when looking at papers and memoranda that were circulated to the Cabinet, where Yugoslavia was almost exclusively brought up in the context of its ability to wage war or its inclination to side with Britain in resisting Germany; absolutely no mention was made of its evolving internal situation.[602]

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[599] Djokić, *Elusive,* p. 208. As Čulinović notes, the only difference between the Banovina and federal units in well-known federations such as the United States or Canada is that the Banovina authorities did not have any input in managing joint affairs of the state with the Kingdom's central politicals organs. Ferdo Čulinović, *Razvitak jugoslavenskog federalizma* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1952), p. 123.

[600] For exact overview of the legislature and administrative position of the Banovina of Croatia, see Čulinović, *Razvitak,* pp. 120-124.

[601] In fact, the *Sporazum* exacerbated the dissatisfaction of other national groups, particularly the Slovenes, who were also pressing for autonomy for as long as the Croats were. Not only that, but it also prompted some of the Yugoslav Radical Union's Serb members to call for the creation of a Serbian *banovina* which was to incorporate the Serb-populated parts of the just-established Croatian one. For more on the reactions to the *Sporazum*, see Djokić, *Elusive,* pp. 212-222.

At the same time, when taking into consideration the discourse that pervaded British discussions on Yugoslav domestic affairs in the years preceding the *Sporazum*, one can see quite easily how this lack of enthusiasm was in reality entirely consistent with how the Foreign Office had viewed the constitutional problem in Yugoslavia for quite some time. It was a continuation of the attitude that already emerged during the mid-1930s where the multiple failed attempts to resolve the Croat Question during the 1920s resulted in the centralist system instituted by King Alexander and maintained by Stojadinović gradually coming to be accepted as the most practicable solution. Whilst it was perhaps not the system that British officials would have instituted themselves if they had a chance in the very beginning, by this point it was the one that was seemingly working — if nothing else, at least it had successfully managed to keep the South Slav state together for the past twenty years. As a memorandum from November 1938 had concluded, 'the present constitution of Yugoslavia provides a centralised form of Government which, if hardly ideal, at least represents a practical and not unsuccessful attempt to organise a country inhabited by many different people and races'.[603]

At the same time, this endorsement of centralism cannot solely be pinned on Belgrade and Zagreb's perpetual failure to settle their differences. Indeed, such attitudes are particularly interesting once the events that were unfolding in Europe at the time are taken into consideration. As such, any pro-centralist inclinations also have to be interpreted within the context of broader geopolitical circumstances. This November memo was published barely a few days after Czecho-Slovakia passed the constitutional act that turned it into a federation. It reveals perhaps as much about how Foreign Office officials saw Yugoslav centralism as it infers what they thought of federal Czecho-Slovakia. All of a sudden, it was argued that perhaps centralism did have its merits when it came to reconciling multiple ethnic groups, and Yugoslavia — in the past, certainly the more volatile of the two — was now seemingly the proof of that. Given how the events in Czechoslovakia continued to unfold after Slovakia was granted federal status, this attitude is not at all unexpected. Even if the creation of the Czechoslovak federation received a sanguine reception, its break-up certainly did not help dispel the belief that the division of central legislative powers inherently carried with it the danger of the fragmentation of the state. Accordingly, even though decentralisation was for the greater part of the interwar period the solution recommended for Yugoslavia (though often for different reasons, depending on the country's internal situation), British officials now went the opposite way, taking the dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia as evidence that centralisation was perhaps not as incompatible with the peaceful survival of multi-national states as was previously assumed.

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[602] TNA, CAB 24/280/257, Memorandum on Central and South-Eastern Europe, 10 November 1938; CAB 24/281/800, Memorandum of Relative Strategic Importance of Countries Requiring Arms from the United Kingdom, 1 December 1938; CAB 24/285/83, Visit of the Polish Foreign Minister, 4-6 April 1939; CAB 24/276/3687, Visit of French Ministers to London, 28 and 29 April 1939.

[603] TNA, FO 371/22476/9310, Foreign Office Memorandum, Yugoslavia: Brief Summary on the Present Internal and External Situation, 23 November 1938. This memo echoed the same conclusion made by the Belgrade Chancery in their report to the Southern Report. See TNA, FO 371/22473/8931, Belgrade Chancery to Southern Department, Intelligence Report on Yugoslavia, 6 November 1938.

In retrospect, the British approach to determining whether federalism would work in Yugoslavia based on how it played out in Slovakia was fairly flawed, completely failing to take into consideration a set of very different circumstances in which Slovak as opposed to Croat leaders operated in 1938 and 1939. Firstly, by the time Slovakia was granted a federal status in November 1938, Prague's authority was already significantly weakened following the loss of the Sudetenland, and it was simply not in a position to reject Slovak demands and risk having them separate completely.[604] Moreover, unlike the Croatian peasant leadership, who in 1939 struggled to obtain both German and Allied support for their cause, the *ľudáci* were actively encouraged by Berlin to separate from the Czechoslovak state.[605] If nothing else, Hitler's support offered some reassurances to the Slovak leaders as to the permanence and security of the country's frontiers; the Croats, on the other hand, did not have such backing extended to them by any major foreign power for them to be able to proclaim an independent Croatia without the fear of having more of its territory swallowed up by one of its neighbours. Nevertheless, in spite of these differences, the fear was real against the backdrop of a rapidly crumbling Versailles settlement that another national group whose arguments and complaints closely resembled those of the Slovaks — at least to the extent that British officials were familiar with them — would also come to demand independence when given a taste of complete political and legislative autonomy. Even R.W. Seton-Watson, who keenly observed the situation in Croatia, was uncertain whether Maček would be foolish enough to follow 'any such line as Slovakia's'.[606]

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[604] Rychlík, '*Czech-Slovak*', in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. by Cornwall and Evans, pp. 13-26 (p. 23).

[605] For a detailed analysis of Maček's activties abroad in the months leading up to the negotiations with Cvetković, see Boban, *Sporazum*, pp. 105-120.

Indeed, when taking into account the context within which Whitehall operated at the time, the anti-federal stance seems almost reasonable. In the eyes of the Foreign Office, the actions of the Slovak leaders demonstrated quite conclusively that British officials were correct when they argued that most Croats should be given a measure of autonomy to pacify them to the point that they would actively participate in the governance of the country. Anything more than that, and London feared that Croatia would firmly turn into Yugoslavia's Slovakia. As Terrance Shone, First Secretary of the Legation in Belgrade, asserted, the Czechoslovak example would hopefully not be lost on the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, encouraging them to draw together in the face of external danger.[607] In fact, the Slovak example was often brought up as a warning to the Croats who would not heed the advice about the need for national unity. *The Times,* for example, noted that those politicians who wanted to make 'exorbitant territorial demands' needed to be 'appositely reminded of the fate of Slovakia' — that is, its complete dependence on Germany.[608] This was particularly important, as it was recognised that the expectation that most Croats would prioritise the survival of the Yugoslav state over their national ambitions had to be set against ‘the feeling that Yugoslavia’s danger is Croatia’s opportunity’, and that there were political groups in Croatia that were more than willing to throw in their lot with the Germans ‘to avenge their wrongs, real as well as imaginary, at whatever blind cost to themselves’.[609] In fact, the only thing that still prevented Yugoslavia from going down the same path as the First Republic was the fact that Maček still sought to work within the Yugoslav framework, and unless he underwent a marked change in his attitudes or his popularity drastically declined, 'there would seem to be but little likelihood of Croatia being manouvered into a position resembling that of Slovakia'.[610]

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[606] R. W. Seton-Watson to Ivan Meštrović, 21 March 1939 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, eds Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, p. 355.

[607] FO 371/23876/6352.

[608] 'Serbs and Croats', *The Times,* 10 May 1939, p. 17.

It was primarily for this reason that British officials continued to endorse the existing system under Stojadinović. As Dragan Bakić points out, having come to a conclusion that he could not reach an agreement with Croatian peasants, by 1938 Stojadinović decided to bring Maček to heel by politically isolating him both internally and externally.[611] The former he accomplished early on by including in his cabinet some of the HSS's former allies — Korošec’s SLS and Spaho’s JMO. The latter, on the other hand, he achieved gradually by establishing close relations with leading figures in Italy and Germany, who demonstrated quite clearly they preferred to co-operate with Belgrade over Zagreb.[612] Maček was thus left stranded in the region, with no other choice but to plead with France and Britain. The efforts of his emissaries in London were, unfortunately, to no avail, as Whitehall had no interest in backing a cause they believed would only harm their relations with Belgrade and potentially push Yugoslavia into Germany’s embrace.[613] As usual, in a choice between supporting the opposition or the government, the British chose the latter.

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[609] Ibid.

[610] Ibid.

[611] Bakić, ‘Stojadinović’, p. 216.

[612] Here, Bakić refers to the occassion when Maček attempted to obtain German support for the cause of Croatian independence, but was unfortunately rebuffed, with Berlin quickly informing Belgrade of the HSS’s activities. Bakić, 'Stojadinović', p. 217.

[613] Maček’s representative in London, Juraj Krnjević, had tried to establish contacts in the Foreign Office multiple times and even had the likes of Wickham Steed plead on his behalf. These attempts were repeatedly scorned as it was generally argued the HSS would solely turn the fact they met with British officials into propaganda against the government in Belgrade. See TNA, FO 371/22476/3734, Minute by Noble, 12 April 1938.

Accordingly, in spite of the fact that Croat autonomy was often presented as an ideal solution to the Yugoslav domestic conundrum over the years, Stojadinović's unwillingness to simply entertain this idea barely provoked any reaction in the Foreign Office in 1938. Campbell did note that it

> might have been supposed that the liberation of some of the minorities in Czechoslovakia and the conferment of federal autonomy on others would have moved M. Stojadinović to make a sacrifice before this example led the Croats to create serious trouble.[614]

Nevertheless, he also solemnly concluded that the Prime Minister's policy of 'doing nothing' was at the very least successful at keeping Croat political passions from being inflamed.[615] Even his increasingly authoritarian behaviour and growing friendship with the Axis Powers did not seem to cause much alarm. Indeed, with the exception of Eden, who was convinced that Britain was 'being double-crossed, and taking a long time to perceive the fact', the rest of the Foreign Office seemed to believe that whatever its flaws, Stojadinović's regime offered the best prospect of stability to the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom.[616] 'Head and shoulders above any rival', Campbell wrote to Cadogan, the Yugoslav Prime Minister 'is the outstanding personality in Yugoslavia today. His elimination in present circumstances would plunge the country back into the chaos from which it is slowly emerging'.[617] He was even praised for ruling Yugoslavia 'with a fairly authoritarian hand'; as one official asserted, 'the efficient man in an inefficient country is naturally tempted to be autocratic'.[618]

Once again, this love for the former Yugoslav Prime Minister could hardly be divorced from the Foreign Office's persistent dislike for the Croat Peasant Party and its leader. In fact, even as the Stojadinović government was nearing collapse in late 1938, the Foreign Office and their Minister in Belgrade not only continued to argue in favour of his regime but insisted that Maček was to blame for the vast majority of Yugoslavia's domestic problems. There was a consensus that his party was one of the biggest threats to the unity of the state and the greatest obstacle to any and all agreement.[619] 'If Dr Maček', complained Campbell in July 1938, 'were a bigger man, he would moderate his demands and strive to obtain such a measure of administrative autonomy within the framework of the present constitution'.[620] These claims were almost entirely justifiable, if perhaps a bit hypocritical. At the time, a few hundred kilometres to the north, Konrad Henlein was making far more extortionate demands from Prague than what the HSS was asking from Belgrade; yet, whilst British officials constantly called upon the latter to moderate their wishes, they were for the most part more than happy to indulge the desires of the former. Having said that, the complaints about Maček stubbornly sticking to his stance in order to obtain as much as possible were warranted. Even as Czecho-Slovakia was crumbling right before everyone's eyes, the leader of Croatian peasants was still firmly unwilling to concede on anything less than either completely revising or entirely doing away with 1931 Constitution and granting Croatia extensive territorial autonomy.

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[614] TNA, FO 371/22476/8926, Campbell to Halifax, 6 November 1938.
[615] Ibid.
[616] TNA, FO 371/21199/8392, Minute by Eden, 21 December 1937.
[617] TNA, FO 371/22479/9558, Campbell to Cadogan, 21 November 1938. See also TNA, FO 371/22476/7633, Minute by Noble, 17 September 1938; FO 371/22473/8931; FO 371/22477/10183, Campbell to Halifax, 19 December 1938; FO 371/23875/629, Minute by Noble, 27 January 1939.
[618] TNA, FO 371/22477/9778, Minute by Brown, 13 December 1938; FO 371/22477/9778, Minute by unknown, 12 December 1938. See also TNA, FO 371/22476/960, Minute by Ross, 4 February 1938.

Unfortunately for him, the Government — then in Stojadinović's hands — had no intention of agreeing to such extensive demands. The most they were willing to offer was limited autonomy to the predominantly Croat-populated *banovinas* which the HSS would have found inadequate and offensive. From the British perspective, however, with everything that was going on beyond Yugoslavia's borders, this of course seemed to be a trivial issue. Maček, it was widely agreed should simply accept what was offered to him and make the best out of it, lest he be willing to bear full responsibility for promoting division at the time when European peace hung by a thread. As Seton-Watson put it, 'Croatia must act and act quickly in the sense of union, or disaster and enslavement will come'.[621] This was also echoed by Terence Rapp, the British Consul in Zagreb, who was aghast at the HSS's failure to grasp the seriousness of the situation and their refusal to reach a compromise with the Serbian parties as a way of politically strengthening Yugoslavia against the growing external threats.[622] The Croats, he argued, do not understand 'the essential difference between Turkish and totalitarian domination. A limited dose of the latter and the Croats would become a historical curiosity'.[623] In other words, Belgrade was certainly preferable to Berlin, and — as far as Whitehall was concerned — Maček was a fool for failing to grasp that reality and adjust his policy accordingly.

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[619] TNA, FO 371/22476/5193, Minute by Noble, 2 June 1938; FO 371/22473/8931; FO 371/22479/9558; FO 371/22477/10183; FO 371/23875/1090, Minute by Noble, 18 January 1939; FO 371/23875/1436, Campbell to Halifax, 27 February 1939.

[620] TNA, FO 371/22476/6426, Campbell to Halifax, 15 July 1938.

On the eve of 1939, London's official stance on the matter of federal re-organisation as advocated by the HSS was thus quite clear. As the situation in East Central Europe grew rapidly more volatile, such a drastic change was not something British officials were willing to risk in one of the largest countries in the region. Though far from an issue of particular importance for Whitehall, the resolution of the Croatian question was certainly welcomed but only as a way of uniting it internally and strengthening externally. Autonomy was tolerable, but federalism as demanded by Maček was a price not worth paying for the simple fact that they believed it had the potential of threatening the integrity of the Yugoslav state. As an article from *The Times* had concluded in late 1938, 'the time is certainly unpropitious for experimental policies in Yugoslavia' for 'the translation of separatist or federalist ideals into action' was not only certain to weaken the country internationally but also provoke further internal disagreements.[624] Strong, central authority was preferred over a system of dispersed powers, as was one authoritarian figure that could firmly keep the lid on internal disagreement over a divisive politician that kept perpetuating the said conflict. Moreover, there was also a very real concern that turning Yugoslavia into a federation would merely be a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul, appeasing the Croats only to end up provoking the Serbian political elites. Imposing a solution repugnant to Belgrade would be 'ill-advised', Campbell warned, as it would provide 'no real or lasting settlement of the problem'.[625] Not only would it do nothing for promoting the internal stability of the country, if the Croats were granted excessive concessions, it would merely result in the 'emergence of a Serbian problem instead of a Croatian one'.[626] Rather than pacifying the situation, the constitutional re-organisation of Yugoslavia would only divide the country even more and further perpetuate the inter-ethnic conflict, for the Serbs and Croats would essentially just swap places and arguments. All this would, in turn, achieve nothing but make the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom more susceptible to Italian or German intervention. The best way to avoid this, insisted Philip B. B. Nichols, the Head of the Southern Department between 1939 and 1941, was for the Croats 'to show utmost conciliation in reaching a solution', which in essence meant going along with whatever concession they could get and not pressing this issue any further.[627]

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[621] R. W. Seton-Watson to Ivan Meštrović, 21 March 1939 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, eds Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, p. 356.
[622] TNA, FO 371/22476/956, Rapp to Campbell, 20 January 1938.
[623] TNA, FO 371/22478/3555, Rapp to Campbell, 22 March 1938.
[624] 'Serbs and Croats', *The Times,* 24 December 1938, p. 11.

In any case, with Whitehall preoccupied with far more serious questions than that of Croatia's position, indifference would remain the most defining feature of the British approach to Yugoslav domestic affairs for the remainder of 1939. Not only were the reports that dealt with the Cvetković-Maček negotiations few and far between, but even the handful that were submitted offered no insightful commentary beyond an occasional half-hearted welcome for the attempts to put Serb-Croat differences to rest. Wickham Steed's urgings that Britain ought to 'lose no time in putting pressure on the Prince Regent' to resolve the Croat Question were for the most part ignored.[628] Even the signing of the *Sporazum* did not prompt a strong reaction from the Foreign Office. Whilst the British press was overwhelmingly positive, with the *Manchester Guardian* reporting that 'today, at the time when the whole of Europe is face with incalculable dangers, Yugoslavia stands united […] in a sense for the first time in her history', British officials were somewhat divided.[629] Campbell in Belgrade was rather sanguine. As he reported from Belgrade in April 1940, even though Serbia and Croatia still often found themselves at loggerheads with each other, it was important that such conflict now took place ‘against the background of the achievement of the *Sporazum* – a fact which can hardly fail to exert a mitigating influence’.[630] In spite of its shortcomings, he believed that it created an atmosphere more conducive to compromise and collaboration; ‘given time and peace’, the Minister concluded, ‘Yugoslavia should be able to find equilibrium between her component parts’.[631] His colleagues in Zagreb painted a completely different picture. Rapp’s reports that there was ‘very little excitement in Zagreb’ about the signing of the *Sporazum*, Shone’s warnings about the maltreatment of Serbs, and the growth of opposition of the Croat political right gathered around Ante Pavelić’s Ustaša movement – these certainly did not reassure anyone.[632]

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[625] TNA, FO 371/23875/3700, Campbell to the FO, 5 May 1939.
[626] TNA, FO 371/23876/6352, Shone to Halifax, 4 August 1939.
[627] TNA, FO 371/23875/2187, Interview with Nichols and Krnjević, 30 March 1939.
[628] TNA, FO 371/23875/2704, Wickham Steed to Vansittart, 7 April 1939.

Back in London, there were several concerns about whether the Agreement would actually be able to consolidate the country. There was not only some concern about the fact that it was provisional, but also about its vagueness, given that it was accompanied by a royal decree that asserted that the provisions granted to the Banovina of Croatia could later be extended to all other *banovinas*.[633] This was not necessarily regarded as a bad addition; even Seton-Watson, who always believed in greater decentralisation of Yugoslavia, believed a ‘special status for Croatia – Slavonia – Dalmatia’ to be an ‘unsound’ approach’.[634] Given his familiarity with the region and a far deeper understanding of the ethnic composition of Yugoslavia, Seton-Watson clearly understood that merely awarding territorial autonomy to the Croat lands would not solve the nationality problem in Yugoslavia, for this unit would also include a number of Serbs who would then begin to clamour for special rights. Moreover, it also neglected the fact that similar political streams existed in Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, all of whom would begin to press for similar concessions. In other words, rather than healing Yugoslavia, he believed that creating only the Banovina of Croatia would end up opening even more wounds. Indeed, the fact that only one nationality question was settled was hardly re-assuring from the perspective of Yugoslav inter-ethnic unity. Moreover, the lack of any indications as to when it would occur or how it would be applied provided an additional cause for concern. As one Foreign Office official observed in what is arguably the most detailed minute on this topic, one could not be sure whether Cvetković and Maček envisaged a system where ‘Slovenia and the six other Banovinas will have identical powers or whether […] Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia would be the three chief political divisions of the country’.[635] Accordingly, he opined that though the *Sporazum* ‘probably’ represented ‘a fair compromise’, it was ‘difficult to reach a concrete opinion’ on it.[636] Whether the Agreement and its decrees actually succeeded in unifying Yugoslavia’s national groups, one Foreign Office official concluded, ‘will clearly depend upon the way in which they are carried out’.[637] Until then, it was no more than yet another failed attempt to satisfy one Yugoslav nationality without alienating all the others.

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[629] ‘Yugo-Slavia United’, *The Manchester Guardian,* 28 August 1939, p.8. See also Barbara Ward, ‘Reconciliation and Neutrality in Yugoslavia’, *The Contemporary Review,* 156 (1939), 562-570.; ‘A Federal Jugoslavia?’, *The Economist,* 26 August 1939, p. 9; ‘Cabinet Framing Reply to Germany’, *The Times,* 28 August 1939, p. 10; ‘Serbs and Croat: Cabinet of National Unity’, *The Times,* 28 August 1939, p. 10; ‘Jugoslavia, Federal but United’, *The Economist,* 2 September 1939, p. 13.

[630] TNA, FO 371/25030/4587, Campbell to Halifax, 4 April 1940.

[631] Ibid. There is no consensus in historiography as to whether the *Sporazum* weakened or strengthened Yugoslavia. Though all agree that its provisory nature and favouritism towards the Croats ensured that it did not lead to the internal unity which the Cvetković-Maček government hoped it would achieve, there are still some debates as to whether it made the country more conducive to disintegration in April 1941. For example, some, such as Lampe, have argued that whilst it certainly prompted some vocal opposition from different quarters, the domestic dispute over the Agreement would not lead to the destruction of Yugoslavia in the absence of the Nazi invasion. Others, such as Rothschild, Boban and Čulinović, suggested that since the authorities failed to call the elections as promised or implement the reforms that were supposed to follow the Agreement, by the time the Nazi invasion began, the public morale was too fragile to mount any form of joint defence. For example, see Lampe, p. 196.; Rothschild, p. 262; Boban, *Sporazum,* p. 377, Čulinović, p. 175. For the reaction of different parties in Yugoslavia, see Subašić, pp. 162-166.

[632] TNA, FO 371/23876/7549, Rapp to Shone, 6 September 1939; FO 371/23877/10537, Shone to Halifax, 20 November 1939. See also TNA, FO 371/23885/9975, Shone to Halifax, 4 November 1939; FO 371/23876/9649, Minute by Noble, 7 November 1939; FO 371/23877/10537, Minute by Brown, 30 November 1939.

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[633] TNA, FO 371/23876/6970, Minute by Brown, 5 September 1939.

[634] R. W. Seton-Watson to Ivan Meštrović, 21 March 1939 in *Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs*, eds Seton-Watson and Seton-Watson, vol. 2, p. 356.

[635] FO 371/23876/6970.

[636] Ibid.

[637] Ibid.

It is perhaps this mixture of indifference, wariness and careful optimism that most accurately captures the stance of the Foreign Office towards the Yugoslav constitutional question at the end of the interwar period. Though content that the Serbian and Croatian political leadership finally took some concrete steps to settle this problem, after Munich the Foreign Office simply had no interest in another intractable inter-ethnic dispute in East Central Europe, let alone in a country which dragged the same problem around for over twenty years. This was also in line with British foreign policy priorities at the time. During the late 1930s, regional security was at the heart of all British discussions on the SCS Kingdom; issues such as a relatively unimportant country's internal organisation were almost entirely irrelevant for British policymakers. In the light of contemporary affairs, the primary concern for British officials was that the country was internally stable enough to be able to resist slipping entirely under German influence; whether this meant greater centralisation or autonomy mattered little by that point.[638] Ultimately, as was the case in Czecho-Slovakia in October 1938, all Whitehall could do was to go along with any system of governance Belgrade and Zagreb managed to agree upon.

5.5 Conclusion

The British reaction to decentralising trends in Czecho-Slovakia and Yugoslavia during 1938 and 1939 reveals more about British foreign policy priorities at the time than they do about their actual stance on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional and national questions. When it came to Czechoslovakia, Britain's stance towards the internal organisation of the First Republic was another extension of their appeasement policy towards the Sudeten issue. As the situation began to escalate during the spring of 1938, London began pushing more and more for Prague to grant extensive territorial autonomy to its dissatisfied German minority. Though other alternatives, such as mere cultural autonomy or complete federalisation, were suggested by both officials as well as non-governmental observers, it was generally agreed in the Foreign Office that those posed too great a threat to the unity of the Czecho-Slovak state. Territorial autonomy, it was argued, was the only solution that had the potential to satisfy both Henlein and Hitler without going as far as granting the Sudetenland complete independence or incorporating it into the Third Reich. It was an approach completely informed by *Realpolitik* and the immediate concern of preventing Britain and the rest of Europe from being plunged into a war over what started off as an internal dispute between a national minority and the host state. Concerns about the European *status quo* trumped all others. Indeed, almost no consideration was given as to the long-term impact that the extension of territorial autonomy to Sudeten Germans would have on the relations between the Czechs and other national groups. In fact, aside from appeasing Berlin and protecting Czecho-Slovakia's borders, no other benefits of decentralisation were ever explored, further cementing the fact that such a system would never have been considered as an option for Czecho-Slovakia had an international crisis not demanded it.

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[638] Perica Hadži-Jovančić, 'Losing the Periphery: The British Foreign Office and Policy Towards Yugoslavia, 1935-1938', *Diplomacy & Statecraft,* 31.1 (2020), 65-90.

The proclamation of the Czecho-Slovak federation further demonstrates the extent to which these pro-decentralist inclinations were a product of practical concerns. Once the crisis over the Sudetenland was laid to rest, all concerns regarding Czecho-Slovak domestic organisation ceased almost completely. The creation of a federal Czecho-Slovakia was for the most part greeted as a way of settling yet another intractable domestic dispute that plagued the country. This, however, had nothing to do with an idealised picture of how multi-ethnic states should be organised and everything to do with internally consolidating the rump Republic as much as possible. In fact, the Slovak problem itself was not of much interest to British officials. Convinced of Slovak inferiority to the Czechs, the Foreign Office did not see the Slovak Question as something that required the same amount of attention as its German counterpart. Though incessant Slovak complaining was certainly seen as a destabilising factor, it was not considered to be a particularly great threat to the rump Republic for the simple fact that an independent Slovakia was widely regarded as an impossible and far-fetched outcome. As such, the federalisation of the country was of marginal interest to Whitehall. In fact, when compared to the annexation of the Sudetenland, it was also treated as a marginal change — a significant shift when thinking about how this would have been received not two years before. On the whole, the main argument was that by pacifying the Slovaks, the federal re-organisation helped safeguard Czecho-Slovakia from further German interference. This, in turn, secured a measure of stability for Europe and helped keep Britain from having to get involved in Prague's affairs (had they, of course, not already been completely shut out of participation in shaping the region's developments by Hitler and Mussolini). Nevertheless, since this was all that the Foreign Office really cared about at the time, there was simply not much to add when it came to the Czecho-Slovak federation; so long as it did not threaten British interests in the region at the time and not plunge Britain into a war it was not ready to wage, London would put up with it despite its traditionally pro-centralist views. Simply put, as the pace of Nazi re-armament began to quicken, there were much more pressing issues than that of Czecho-Slovak constitutional troubles.

The talk of war also overshadowed the creation of Banovina of Croatia. Throughout 1938 and 1939, the Foreign Office discussions about the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom were for the most part restricted to the country's military capabilities and its relationship with the Axis Powers. Since its inter-ethnic conflict did not threaten to set a torch to yet another European conflagration, the topic of Yugoslav domestic organisation was justifiably pushed into the background. Yet, on the rare occasion that London did touch upon it, the impact that the events in the Sudetenland had on it was unmistakable. Usually in favour of decentralisation when it came to Yugoslavia, in the aftermath of Munich and the emergence of a Czecho-Slovak federation, the Foreign Office advocated the existing centralist system on the basis that it offered more stability. Even the realisation that decentralisation was a popular trend in Yugoslavia, following the fall of Stojadinović in early 1939, did not convince British officials that this was the way forward. Sceptical of how events played out in Slovakia, many now thought that the most Croatia should be awarded was limited administrative autonomy, and they admonished the Croatian leaders for demanding more at a time of general instability. Familiarity perhaps bred contempt, but if London was to be asked in August 1939, contempt was certainly preferable to one of the politically most explosive successor states instituting the same system of governance that had helped topple its 'more stable' northern counterpart in less than six months.

At the same time, despite their reservations, Foreign Office officials were ultimately quite blasé about the signing of the *Sporazum.* Having spent the previous two decades watching the Yugoslavs live in a perpetual state of turmoil, the belief that prevailed in those circles was that there was nothing that could come out of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement that would make the Yugoslav domestic situation any worse than it already was. This view was largely a product of a belief that had become well established in the years since 1918: no matter what political development occurred in the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom, it was almost certain to prompt complaints from one corner or another, or bring one or multiple nationalities into opposition. The fact that this time it was the Croatian peasant party that became part of the government signalled to London that at least the *Sporazum* helped pacify what was always considered to be the most dissatisfied group.

As we have seen, the discussions concerning the Czecho-Slovak federation were not drastically different. Whilst doubtful of the permanence of the federal arrangement, the Foreign Office was ultimately entirely uninterested in the details of the agreement the Czechs and Slovaks reached so long as it was an agreement that was seemingly conducive to British aims in the region. Likewise, despite the conviction that a limited amount of autonomy would have sufficed in Yugoslavia (no doubt greatly informed by the failed Czecho-Slovak experiment), on the eve of the Second World War the Foreign Office simply did not care enough about this problem to actively weigh in and speculate about the impact that decentralisation could have on Yugoslavia. The fact that this was a solution they would have been thrilled to see in 1921 went completely unaddressed; as winds of war began sweeping across Europe once again, there was no time to dwell on whether and to what extent reality corresponded to the ideals envisaged in 1918-1921 — a time which now seemed a bygone age.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Throughout the interwar period, the dichotomy between centralism and federalism was at the very heart of the conflict between the Czechs and Slovaks, and the Croats and Serbs. Even before both proclaimed independence in October 1918, disagreements began to crystallise over how their new independent states would look and the position that each of these “state-making” national groups would occupy within them. Despite Slovak and Croat demands for federalisation of the two countries, both the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav regimes implemented heavily centralised systems in the aftermath of their unification which would survive mostly unaltered until 1938 and 1939 respectively. The implications that these divergent views would have on Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic developments were great, affecting not only their political, economic, social, and foreign affairs but also shaping the course of their history post-1945.

For the Foreign Office and non-governmental observers in Britain, the fact that the Czech-Slovak and Serb-Croat disputes permeated every aspect of their socio-political landscapes meant that the constitutional organisation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia would become a topic with which London would regularly have to grapple. The way British officials approached this contentious issue was primarily informed by one of the more fundamental aspects of British foreign policy at the time: to maintain stability and peace on the Continent. As Keith Middlemas notes,

> the central principle of British policy was to avoid any disruption of the existing order. To prevent shifts in the balance amongst great powers and to reconcile local difficulties and tensions was the constant aim of the Foreign Office. If peace anywhere were threatened, Britain could not ignore it.[639]

It was this credo that also shaped how Britain approached Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia virtually from the day of their inception. Aside from arguments that stressed the importance of recognising both countries on the basis of the national self-determination principle, their creation was also justified on the basis of their capacity to act as a bulwark against Germany, to fill the vacuum that would be created by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and later on, for their capacity to keep revisionist powers in check and help preserve the order that was established at Versailles. As such, British officials simply could not ignore Czechoslovak and Yugoslav debates on their constitutional question, especially when those made them increasingly volatile and unstable and thus potentially rendering them unable to fulfil the role Whitehall envisaged for them in 1918.

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[639] Middlemas, p. 10.

British attitudes pertaining to federalisation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia changed and evolved throughout the interwar period due to a variety of factors. From the very moment the two were unified, one of the most influential factors in the formation of British attitudes was the already-established assumption about the main "state-making" groups. Though prejudice and stereotypes were far from the only element that determined how the Foreign Office approached this issue, it is paramount to recognise their importance in the process of policymaking and attitude-formation. As this thesis has shown, the impact that prejudice had on how London approached the organisation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, particularly in the period prior to their unification, cannot be understated. Here, comparing the two is particularly interesting as it helps highlight how much importance British officials and observers attached to their preconceived beliefs about what they saw as the inherent characteristics of the Czechs and the Slovaks, and the Serbs and the Croats when making recommendations concerning the internal structure of their joint states. Indeed, whether British officials supported federal demands of different groups in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia heavily depended on how they perceived those groups, profoundly influencing the British view on the centralism-federalism dichotomy that shaped the political landscape of the two countries.

For example, the Slovaks, always seen to be inferior to their Czech counterparts, never received much support for their autonomist demands. Even occasionally when such re-arrangement was endorsed, it was still under the proviso that the vast majority of control would remain in Prague's far more capable hands. Though it was recognised that some degree of cultural autonomy — whereby they would have the ability to govern themselves in areas concerning culture, language, or education — was recognised as beneficial from the perspective of further consolidating the Czechoslovak state, it was never seen as a threat that could actually risk its the disintegration. It was the granting of political control to the Slovaks over their territory in matters of legislation that was viewed as dangerous because the Slovaks were generally regarded as too parochial, underdeveloped and therefore uncapable of governing themselves. Out of the two, the Czechs — regarded by London as much more progressive, organised, and socially, economically, and intellectually developed — were simply believed to be better placed to head the Czechoslovak state. If Prague thus claimed Czechoslovakia would best thrive under a centralist system, the anti-Slovak stance certainly made it unlikely for Whitehall to ever oppose this. Though this view emerged during the war, the same rhetoric would make a regular appearance in Foreign Office memoranda on Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. Likewise, prejudice also played a role when it came to the Sudetenland debates, where the fact that the Germans were seen as culturally and intellectually superior to their Slavic counterparts was brought up as yet another justification for granting this minority an autonomous status within the Czechoslovak state.

When it came to Yugoslavia, British attitudes were precisely the opposite because of their view of the group that demanded federalisation — the Croats. Regarded as more cultured and westernised due to their ties to Austria-Hungary, they were seen as far more equipped to govern their own territory. Indeed, the argument that the Croat dominance in the Yugoslav state could perhaps help civilise what were perceived to be more oriental and backward parts of the country was regularly stated when the topic of federal Yugoslavia was broached throughout the 1920s. Though this narrative would gradually lessen as the Croat opposition came to be seen as the main obstacle to the stabilisation of Yugoslavia, it never properly went away and was always brought up as a relevant factor by British diplomats and policymakers when the disputes between Belgrade and Zagreb reached a boiling point. Indeed, the exact details of what the Croat opposition demanded when they spoke of autonomy or federalism, and how this would affect the rest of Yugoslavia, especially other nationalities that clamoured for similar arrangements, was disregarded or dismissed on the basis that the Croats had the capacity and the knowledge to govern their own area according to their own customs and historic political traditions.

These pre-existing stereotypes that helped inform how London tackled the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav constitutional questions from the very start were further bolstered by their engagement with Czechoslovak and Yugoslav representatives in London during the First World War. In the Czechoslovak case, the Foreign Office support for centralisation of Czechoslovakia was profoundly affected by the fact that British policymakers predominantly dealt with those Czechoslovak leaders that were greatly in favour of centralisation but were not at all familiar with the Slovak opposition to this arrangement that existed in Slovakia. Moreover, Masaryk — as the figure Whitehall engaged with most often and was most familiar with — always made sure to not only stress the united character of a Czech and Slovak struggle for independence but to emphasise that Slovakia was not a separate nation but rather a mere province. Not only did their lack of contact with Slovak political figures further corroborate a British assumption that the Slovaks were essentially just a tribe of the Czechoslovak nation, but this also helped solidify the view that federalism was simply not necessary. After all, there was no reason to challenge the idea of a centralised Czechoslovakia if the Czechs and Slovaks were essentially one nation. Likewise, in the Yugoslav case, what helped propel the support for the creation of a federal Serb-Croat-Slovene state was precisely the exposure to differing attitudes of the Serbian wartime government and the Yugoslav Committee headed by two Croatian political figures — Trumbić and Supilo. British officials were consequently well aware of the dispute over the system of governance that Yugoslavia might adopt after the war, and thus from the very beginning they had a clear understanding that this issue would have a profound impact on the stability of the future South Slav state. Though the Yugoslavs were also seen as one nation composed of three “state-making” nationalities, British understanding of their differences was far more nuanced than it was in the Czechoslovak case. Whereas the Slovak demands (when they were heard or understood) were not even taken seriously enough to ever be considered as a serious threat to Czechoslovakia’s unity, the Croat and Slovene opposition was perceived as too strong to be neglected. This, combined with their far more favourable view of Austro-Hungarian Yugoslavs, thus ensured that Britain would back the idea of federal Yugoslavia in 1918 as the best solution for unifying the country.

These factors are paramount for understanding how Britain approached the constitutional debates in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia throughout the 1920s. Having reached a conclusion in 1918 that the two countries should respectively be centralist or federalist, many both inside and outside Whitehall came to regard these as the ideal arrangements for the two states. Accordingly, even when they were well informed of the developments in both countries, either by their own diplomats or the non-governmental observers who had a far sounder grasp of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav domestic affairs, they continued sticking to their old perceptions of the most suitable systems of governance. Time and again, British officials displayed the tendency to prioritise their formative and very patchy understanding of the relationship between the state-constitutive groups in the two states to form their opinion on federalisation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, over the actual developments on ground. More often than not, British officials in London would consider solely one or two viewpoints to form their opinion, and usually those that went in line with what they wanted to hear. Thus, even when all the evidence pointed to the fact that the Slovaks were not as supportive of centralised Czechoslovakia as London had been led to believe in 1918 or that a federal Yugoslavia was not as foregone a conclusion as was initially assumed, Whitehall continued to prescribe the same remedies without ever considering their broader implications. Indeed, the questions relating to the impact that denying the Slovaks autonomy would have on Czechoslovakia’s long-term stability, or the intractable difficulties that granting it to the Croats without addressing its complex ethno-territorial composition would raise, were never properly confronted. In the eyes of the Foreign Office, centralisation for Czechoslovakia and federalisation for Yugoslavia offered the only routes to consolidation, peace, and prosperity, and as such offered answers to every single one of their problems.

Preconceptions aside, however, another reason why federalism was glorified when it came to Yugoslavia but not Czechoslovakia in spite of their similar problems had much to do with how federalism itself was perceived in Britain. As Chapter One has demonstrated, federalism was not generally scorned, with many nineteenth-century British thinkers and politicians emphasising its capacity to build states, keep large ones together and to promote peace, particularly in a multi-national setting. However, it was also regarded as a rather weak form of government due to the division of sovereignty which reduced its ability to resist any centrifugal threats. As such, federalism was only to be implemented when there was no other option to pacify a certain country and get its constituent parts to work together, an attitude which significantly impacted how they approached the topic in both cases throughout the interwar period. This view, of course, cannot be divorced from their own domestic context, namely the situation in Ireland where debates over federalism also raged. As one article succinctly put in 1920,

> we were never in love with the politics of the Tower of Babel. We regard the Balkanization of Central and Eastern Europe as a world disaster, and we should use every resource of statesmanship, persuasion, and negotiation to prevent the Balkanization of the British Isles.[640]

The fact that it was the same solution that many in Ireland demanded further helped paint federalism with a negative brush, attaching a connotation to it that was a system that fed rather than suppressed centrifugal forces that could tear a country apart.

As such, federalism was regularly regarded as an organisational mode only appropriate when internal stability was lacking. This is particularly apparent when looking at particular moments in Czechoslovak and Yugoslav history when British officials chose to back autonomist movements. In the Yugoslav example, this was the case from the very start as it was already apparent in 1918 that the issue of Croatian autonomy would be a great source of chaos. As early as 1921, there were already concerns in the Foreign Office that this problem could lead to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a belief which was continuously corroborated throughout the 1920s and 1930s as the country went from one domestic crisis to another. Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, was — the Slovak Question aside — a relatively consolidated country, and by far the most stable in the region. For the greater part of its interwar existence, it seemed to British observers that centralism did not pose as much of a threat to Czechoslovak unity as it did to the Yugoslav. Unlike the Croat discontent, which was taken as a rather serious threat, the Slovak one was often dismissed as exaggerated, irrelevant, or minor. By extension, British officials really did not see the need to replace the centralised regime imposed by Prague as all the relevant factors — political, social, and economic stability — demonstrated the system did not cause that much trouble. Moreover, what is truly indicative of the argument that federalism was only seen as useful in moments of profound domestic instability is the fact that London actively endorsed it as soon as Czechoslovakia was faced with the far-more serious Sudeten problem. Between the two, centralism was a preferred alternative for British policymakers; federalism was only to be employed in extreme cases when complete collapse of the state was seemingly looming on the horizon.

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[640] [Anon.], ‘Order and Anarchy in Ireland’, *Nation*, 27. 4 (1920), 101-103 (p. 102).

Moreover, even when federalism was invoked, rarely was consideration given to how it would look in practice. This was predominantly down to the overall tendency to equate any system that was not centralisation with federalism. Often, British policymakers would talk of autonomy, decentralisation, and federalism in the same breath, completely disregarding the vast differences between them and indeed, different implications that the implementation of either of these would have on Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. For example, in the case of the latter, territorial autonomy for Croatia would regularly be conflated with general federalisation of Yugoslavia, even though it was rarely discussed how this arrangement would apply to Serbia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Montenegro or Macedonia. Likewise, when it came to Czechoslovakia during the Sudeten crisis, the Foreign Office loudly advocated for territorial autonomy of the Sudetenland but failed to take into account how this would affect Slovakia or Ruthenia, and whether they should be entitled to the same privileges. More often than not, accordingly, both British officials and non-governmental observers would advocate the British model, whereby the two countries would essentially be decentralised with their “problematic” regions — be it Croatia, Slovakia or the Sudetenland — becoming Scotland to Czechoslovakia’s and Yugoslavia’s England. Indeed, it was a model London would call upon whenever they lacked a clear idea of exactly how the two countries should be re-organised, treating it as somewhat a cookie-cutter solution when a state was faced with the issue of reconciling multiple regions within the same national framework. In the mind of British officials, their example alone showed that the existence of a common state did not necessarily preclude the erasure of national identity which they believed could solve all of Croat and Slovak problems. The fact that the circumstances in neither of the two could ever be compared to those in the United Kingdom — namely, the blurred ethno-territorial boundaries as existed in Yugoslavia or the fact that the Scots did not have a Germany of their own that would could utilise their demands for autonomy to justify its own expansion — were rarely given proper thought, further underlining the proclivity in British policymaking to rely on familiar remedies rather than examining each case on a properly individual basis.

The way in which the constitutional question of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia was approached by the Foreign Office between the two wars firmly followed in the tradition already established during the nineteenth century. The mindset was one of tradition and discussion; all problems the two countries faced could have been, at least as far as the Foreign Office was concerned, solved with already tried and tested methods (such as the British model), and through cordial and rational conversations between the Czechs, Slovak, Serb and Croat leaders. Numerous reports imbued with the disbelief that Czechoslovak and Yugoslav political figures could not recognise that this was the way to move forward, and indeed, regularly berated various Czechoslovak and Yugoslav political figures for being too emotional or irrational in approaching what British officials often-time saw to be an issue that can easily be tackled through “gentlemanly” compromise. This, as both Otte and Steiner have argued, was their heritage, something they were taught and brought up to see as the default approach to state-making as public servants in the Foreign Office. Yet, it was also a view tragically divorced from the realities on the ground. British officials were thoroughly informed on the problems facing Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, but their limited knowledge resulted in them only analysing it through a very narrow lens. The importance of historic political traditions was regularly underplayed, various nationalist ideologies misunderstood, and regional differences oversimplified when searching for justifications for endorsing decentralist streams in both countries. In their pursuit of stabilising the New Europe, British officials failed victim to the mindset from which they emerged. Seeing themselves as 'knowledge-based organisation', those sat in London perpetually failed to consider whether there were certain gaps in their knowledge or, indeed, the extent to which it was shaped by prejudice or misinformation of those who reported back to them from abroad.[641]

This is not to say that the view of the Foreign Office was shared by all in Britain. Outside of Whitehall, academics and experts who had a far firmer grasp of the circumstances in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia generally advocated decentralisation of both countries from the very start. The likes of Seton-Watson, Toynbee, Steed, or Wiskemann had a much more nuanced view of the relations between the Czechs and Slovaks, and the Serbs and Croats, and saw early on the need to pacify the groups clamouring for some federal measures. Many of them often did not have a clear idea as to how this could be implemented or exactly what the best solution would be, but unlike the rest of the British establishment, they nevertheless understood the complexity as well as the urgency of this task. This is not to say that they too did not harbour some idealistic illusions about the Czechoslovaks or the Yugoslavs. Even as the leading expert on the topic in interwar Britain, Seton-Watson often failed to properly grapple with the fact that the nationalist elements in both countries could not be so easily pacified by the implementation of his beloved British solution. Nevertheless, he and his contemporaries outside of Whitehall firmly understood what the Foreign Office eyes often refused to see: that temporary and surface-level stability was not conterminous with long-term peace and cohesion. Ultimately, however, this did not matter much. Though they were sometimes able to influence opinions, their cautions regularly fell on deaf ears, especially if they did not support the narrative that Foreign Office officials wanted to hear.

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[641] Otte, p. 5.

Britain's treatment of federal debates in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the 1920s and 1930s reveals as much about how British officials and intelligentsia viewed those countries as it does about how they approached policymaking during some of the most volatile years in European history. It demonstrates the complex interplay between personal prejudice, diplomatic contacts, geopolitics, and the British domestic tradition on constitutional thinking that went into determining attitudes towards problems most Britons in interwar period did not fully grasp. It sheds unique light on how federalism was conceived, especially in relation to the chief foreign policy concern at the time — to maintain peace at all costs. Federalism's merits were always weighed against these priorities and indeed, always emerged on top when stability and order seemed to be under threat. Though perhaps federalism has always, as Michael Burgess had remarked, been the 'dirty word' in British politics when it came to discussing its own domestic arrangement, it has certainly not been so when it came to searching for solutions to fix everyone else's.[642]

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[642] Michael Burgess, 'Federalism: A Dirty Word? Federalist Ideas and Practice in the British Political Tradition', *Federal Trust Working Papers*, No. 2, (London: Federal Trust for Education and Research, 1988), p. 1.

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