

## **WINSTON CHURCHILL AND THE SLOVENES**

*Winston Churchill was a great statesman. But he was a statesman of the imperialistic world, secret agreements and divisions into spheres of interest. The historical balance of the relationship between Churchill and Slovenes is, roughly, as follows: during WW1, as a member of Asquith's cabinet, he was an ardent supporter of the secret Treaty of London, which granted Italy in advance a third of the Slovene territory and a quarter of the Slovene population; during WW2, he pragmatically decided to support militarily and later also politically Tito's Partisan movement (which included the Slovene Partisan army), which between 1941 and 1943, in the completely occupied Europe, was more or less the only resistance movement worthy of mention; at the same time, he concluded a secret pact with Stalin about the division of spheres of interest in the Balkans, according to which influence in Yugoslavia was to be divided between them according to the fifty-fifty principle (if the outcome of the military operations had developed differently, there would probably also have been a physical division of Slovenia and Yugoslavia); at the end of WW2, he tried to realize the division of interest spheres according to the Greek scenario, but did not succeed because of the strength of Tito's army; in 1953, he agreed to a relatively just solution of the border issue with Italy, with which Slovenia lost Trieste, but gained access to the sea south of it.*

*Key words: secret Treaty of London 1915, Tito's Partisan movement, Slovene Partisan army, spheres of interest in the Balkans, Trieste, London agreement (Memorandum about consensus; Second London agreement) 1954*

British historian Ashley Jackson in the book *Churchill* from 2011 (one of many about Churchill)<sup>1</sup> tries to respond to Churchill's critics from the professional and human aspect. Among other things he wrote: "Churchill's personality and physical appearance, it also strikes a chord because it implies he was unfit for post-war government because he was old and unmodern. This is a shallow portrayal; older people are often more intellectually supple and balanced than their younger peers, and being over sixty-five is not a bar to service or utility. Churchill, in fact, was no different from the vast majority of ageing people. What is more, the image of Churchill the dinosaur (this refers to the comment by Aneurin Bevan – the health minister in Atlee's government after the war – about the ageing Churchill, saying that when he was the Prime Minister in the early Fifties, he "looked like a dinosaur at a light engineering exhibition", author's note) sits ill alongside clear evidence throughout his life of adaptability to changing circumstances and resilience in the face of both personal and public change and tragedy! (...) Harsh assessments of Churchill's capacities (or incapacities) are also sometimes founded on the tendency to view him in isolation, and to judge him by more exacting standards than those normally applied to politicians and noted public figures. Too often Churchill is portrayed as a giant in a historical landscape that he could (or should) have dominated, one largely devoid of other people and the swirling movement of real life and the manifold forces that shape it. Of course, life isn't like this,

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley Jackson, *Churchill*, Ljubljana 2018.

and even the most powerful men cannot command the tides of history, even if, on rare occasions, they have the opportunity to influence them. Should Churchill have known and understood everything?"<sup>2</sup>

It is certainly possible to agree with the opinion that when Churchill was in the key position from 1939 to 1945 "belonged not only to Britain, but to the world" and that because of this history is kind to him, which also applies generally to Slovenia. Biographers, other writers and film producers shows Churchill from very different standpoints, but for history mainly are important three: first, there is the passionate commitment to Britain's imperialist policy, which is then supplemented by the domination of white "English-speaking people" (during his time, the leading role was taken from Britain by the United States of America, while Churchill established the "special relationship" between the two states, which still holds). Second, he was convinced about the necessity for closer European ties although, to tell the truth, he saw Europe as the weakest link where above all else peace should be secured, and not as a supra-state formation, which could threaten the international position of Britain and the USA. Britain should be "only" an equal member of any European formation. Subsequent and present-day British politicians have not differed much in this respect as Brexit shows. Third: Churchill's we should add his belief that peace could be ensured only through war or a balance in armaments (including nuclear). Churchill adapted all his other standpoints (including passionate anti-Communism and the switching of parties) to geostrategic trends and the current situation.

In 1964, the Borec publishing house published the first book about Churchill in Slovene: *Druga svetovna vojna. Z epilogom o povojnih letih* (*World War Two. With an Epilogue About the Post-War Years*).<sup>3</sup> This was an abridged, but still over 1000 pages long publication of memoirs from a German series of 12 volumes published in Bern and Stuttgart. This was the first Churchill book in Yugoslavia. Slightly later the same year, Prosveta in Belgrade published a considerably more extensive Serbo-Croatian translation in three volumes, each of which had over 700 pages of small print. Later, many other books about Churchill were published, particularly about his attitude to Yugoslavia and Tito, and memories of the British emissaries to Tito during the war, while Slovene and Yugoslav libraries also contained English and other publications of this type of literature. The publication of Churchill's memoirs posed no particular ideological or political problem. During the war, he was accepted in Slovenia and Yugoslavia as a positive figure, depicted on posters and in newspapers together with Roosevelt and Stalin, and in caricatures as a bulldog fighting the Nazis and Hitler. This, of course, applied only to the victorious Partisan side. The collaborationist (anti-Partisan, anti-Communist) side was critical of him, both in the occupying forces' censored printed media, as well as in internal discussions. Firstly, because of the fear that, due to the collaboration during the initial attack on Yugoslavia, British forces would intern the fleeing Slovene politicians, then because of Churchill's support for Tito's Partisans, and at the end of the war and after it because the British did not start World War Three against the Soviet Union or at least a war against Tito's new Yugoslavia (which, as in Greece, would enable the collaborationists to fight in a civil war and return to power, backed by the West). Of course, there was also the reproach that Churchill and

<sup>2</sup> Božo Repe, "Winston Churchill in Slovenci", in: Jackson, *Churchill*, 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Winston Spencer Churchill, *Druga svetovna vojna. Z epilogom o povojnih letih*, Ljubljana 1964.

the British – in spite of being aware of what awaited them – returned the collaborationist Slovene Home Guard army from Carinthia, which was followed by the post-war massacres and other settling of scores.

There was quite a number of reports about Churchill in the Slovene media after the war, particularly when he took part at the Potsdam Conference of the “big three”. These reports were not only about politics, but also about social things, such as what Churchill had to drink during his private dinner with Stalin. The Slovene and Yugoslav media also followed the British election campaign in 1945 fairly objectively. It reported both Churchill’s and Attlee’s standpoints equally, but after Churchill’s defeat the conclusion prevailed that the Conservatives had lost because of supporting reactionary (including Fascist) forces in Europe and that the result was good both for the British and the wider European public. There again followed a fairly objective overview of reaction to the elections in individual European countries. The reasons for his defeat were mostly attributed to Churchill’s poor advisers rather than the programme, although from an extensive description of the Labour programme, it was clear that it was thought that Churchill – focused on the war and post-war geostrategic relations – had simply “forgotten about” the expectations of the British people after years of blood, sweat and tears, which he had promised them at the beginning of his mandate.

He appeared once again on the horizon of the Slovene and Yugoslav media a few years later, in 1953. There were two reasons for this and again, they were contradictory. The first was still the border issue (Primorska with Trieste, and Carinthia). Both were resolved in 1954 and 1955: Carinthia entirely to the detriment of Yugoslavia and Primorska partly so. The second reason was the visit of the Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito to Britain. The visit signified Tito’s glorious return to the international scene, which after the war was interrupted by the conflict with the Informbiro. The visit took place between 16 and 21 March 1953 – coincidentally but at the same time symbolically, only ten days after Stalin’s death. This was the first visit of any Communist leader to Britain. During his stay, Tito met Churchill for the second time (the first meeting occurred on 12 August 1944 in Naples). At decisive moments, Churchill thus twice opened up a path to the West for Tito, even though the second time in the shadow of the American policy toward Yugoslavia which, however, does not reduce the symbolic meaning of the visit. After its conflict with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was isolated and for a number of years on the verge of war, and saved by the USA and the other Western countries through the policy of “keeping Tito afloat”. Relations with Britain had thawed in 1952, when the Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden visited Yugoslavia. Many views (particularly about the German issue) were once more similar, but not those with regard to the Yugoslav border questions. The situation was certainly sufficiently mature for symbolic gestures. For Tito, this was his first journey abroad after over five years (after the war, he had travelled a great deal to Eastern European countries, where he received magnificent receptions; his last visit had been to Romania in December 1947).

Tito travelled to Great Britain on his ship “Galeb” (“Seagull”). When it sailed into the mouth of the Thames, he received on it the Duke of Edinburgh, who came to greet him. With this journey, “Galeb” attracted the attention of the world public, while with Tito’s subsequent travels and holidays, where he hosted prominent statesmen, well-known film stars and other members of the jet-set, it became a Yugoslav cult ship. The Central

Yugoslav Film News Studio made a short documentary after the visit (directed by Miodrag Mika Jovanović), which was screened around Yugoslav cinemas. In 2014, British Pathé made public its own record of the visit: the mooring of the "Galeb", Tito's disembarkation and handshake with Churchill and other politicians, and a part of his speech in English (with a Russian accent) to the people gathered there. The hosts were afraid that he would be assassinated and Scotland Yard carried out security checks on thousands of Yugoslav emigres. As he was climbing into his car, a flare actually did go off 36 metres away, but no one was hurt. However, during his visit, two pilots tragically died when they crashed during an air show staged to show Tito the newest British war planes.

During the visit, cameras also recorded Churchill and Tito joking. Churchill said: "I was angry with you because of Trieste and your sharp words," Tito laughed and asked: "And now?" Churchill replied: "Now I'm fond of you"<sup>4</sup>. After 1951, when Churchill became Prime Minister again, in contrast to the period at the end of the war, he already saw in Yugoslavia a country useful in the fight against the Soviet Union. He invested considerable efforts (again, he had tried this for the first time during the war) into forging Balkan connections. And as a result Yugoslavia signed a pact with Greece and Turkey. Since they were both NATO members, it indirectly became a part of this organisation (even though at that time it mainly bought American weapons), but after the gradual normalisation of relations with the Soviet Union, it distanced itself from the Balkan Pact.

At the time of Tito's visit, Churchill was finishing his memoirs of World War Two and in them he spoke positively, even romantically, about Tito and the Yugoslav Partisans. Of course, this was partly the result of his pragmatic decision in 1943 to support them and distance himself from the royalist Draža Mihailović, with whom he had more affinity, but who was passive during the war and collaborated with the Germans. In late 1945, according to some media reports (the Belgian journal *Europe-America*, the British political weekly *Time and Tide*), he regretted this. At a dinner in Brussels he said that trusting Tito was one of his biggest mistakes during the war, while in January 1946 his secretary John Colville in his report to the Foreign Office confirmed this statement, but added that Churchill was not prepared to say this in public.<sup>5</sup> The then Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, is also said to have felt guilty about the British "betrayal" of Mihailović.

In spite of the escalations and "sharp words", Tito also had a positive overall opinion about Churchill. Two years before his death, in 1978, he said to American journalists: "I had an opportunity to meet Churchill, one of the greatest personalities England has ever produced. I knew that before the war he had had a very negative attitude to Communism. At that moment, the main thing for me was that he skilfully and decisively reacted in the fight against Fascism, that he had the strength to give us priority when he realised that it was us who was fighting the Nazis and not the Chetniks. On the basis of this I concluded that he was an exceptional personality."<sup>6</sup> After his initial decision to support Tito's Partisans, Churchill's attitude to them was most influenced by Sir William Deakin – he came to Tito during the most dramatic battles on the River Sutjeska and was wounded together with him, while later he was a historian and Churchill's assistant in writing his memoirs – and

<sup>4</sup> Ivo Goldstein – Slavko Goldstein, *Tito*, Ljubljana 2017, 604.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Batty, *Hoodwinking Churchill. Tito's great confidence trick*, London 2011, 247.

<sup>6</sup> Goldstein – Goldstein, *Tito*, 605.

Sir Fitzroy Maclean, the head of the British mission to Tito, a Scottish Conservative (in 1949 Maclean wrote in his memoirs *Eastern Approaches* that Churchill sent him there “simply to find out who was killing the most Germans and suggest means by which we could help them to kill more. Politics must be a secondary consideration.”). In spite of their belonging to completely different social classes and worldviews, Maclean got on very well with Tito, did a great deal for the Partisan movement and earned himself eternal respect in Yugoslavia. The third informant about Tito and the Partisans was his impulsive son Randolph Churchill, otherwise often at odds with his father, who Churchill also sent to Tito, which must have been a sign of exceptional trust.

When in 1964 Churchill's memoirs were published in Slovene, the introduction was written by the politician, journalist and editor, diplomat and later Tito's personal secretary, Jože Smole. He adopted a critical stance to the book (Churchill conveyed personal views, his memories were in places not historically documented and even untrue), but he also said that this was a work which simply because of its author was important for the way it threw light on and offered a wider view of the events in WW2 and that there was no point in arguing with Churchill's views and anti-Communist stance. Smole's view with regard to understanding Churchill is in a way similar to Ashley Jackson's, i. e. that he should be seen through the prism of his opinions and social position. “It is more important to be aware of his class and political role,”<sup>7</sup> wrote Smole. He also wrote the introduction for the Belgrade edition.<sup>8</sup> In it, there were two introductions, the first, even longer one, was written by the Yugoslav diplomat Vladimir Velebit, one of Tito's main diplomats during WW2. Both are positive about Churchill, with critical notes about his specific views, of course. Smole sees the value of the memoirs particularly in Churchill's exhaustive and comprehensive views of the events in Britain and its military and international diplomatic activities. Smole emphasises in particular the author's relaxed style of writing, literary talent and his openness and candour. Velebit doubts Churchill's role of saviour, saying it is unlikely that “a nation that has and continues to give many brave, decisive and rebellious people, capable of placing themselves at the helm in case of danger, would not be able to find a capable leader during the crisis”. But at the same time he says that with Churchill at the helm “there was the spirit necessary for controlling danger, failure and problems, and that under him, a perfect organisation was created, which greatly contributed to victory.”<sup>9</sup>

Vladimir Velebit is certainly the best oral source with regard to relations with Britain and Churchill. By origin from a well-known Austro-Hungarian military Serbian Orthodox family, his mother a Catholic Slovene, he was a cosmopolitan and during the war an officer in charge of links with Western missions; in May 1944 he met with Churchill in London and attended Tito's meeting with Churchill in Naples. After the war, the Soviets accused him of being an “English spy” and he had to step down from the position of the assistant to the foreign minister; during the Informbiro he was the main Yugoslav interlocutor with the representatives of the USA and organised help for Yugoslavia; he also organised Tito's visit to London in 1953 and was Yugoslavia's chief negotiator during the Trieste crisis. In his foreword to Churchill's *World War Two*, he wrote that in order to better understand

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<sup>7</sup> Churchill, *Druga svetovna vojna*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Idem, *Drugi svetski rat. Tom 1. Bura se sprema*, Beograd 1965 (?), 31-45.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7-29.

Churchill's attitude to Yugoslavia, it was necessary to take into account that Churchill was unable to reconcile himself with the break-up of Austria-Hungary and the appearance of many national states, and therefore always wanted a larger state in the Danube area for political balance, even if in the shape of a federation or a confederation. He associated South Slavs with regal assassinations (just as in Sarajevo with the assassination of crown prince Franz Ferdinand in 1914, there was in the case of Alexander Karadjordjević also a band of assassins ready to kill the king). Churchill took the young king Peter Karadjordjević under his protection, partly out of his affection for monarchism and partly because of anti-Communism. He described Peter's flight from Belgrade as a romantic achievement, even though it was "an anecdote of suspicious value", but his protégé caused so many worries that Churchill eventually had to give him up. Churchill was fond of the Yugoslav court also because of its connections with the British court, and because Britain's pre-war political and economic influence (the latter was mainly connected with mines) in Yugoslavia was weak, people did not know it well (even less than in the USA, where there were many Yugoslav emigres). This is why the links with the Karadjordjević family were important.

Nevertheless, Churchill was able to assess the weight of the national liberation movement better than Stalin (who underestimated Tito and the Partisans), but at the same time he felt that after the war they would undermine his vision of post-war Europe. During the first part of the war, he gave priority to the military aspect and then, as the first among the great leaders, put political issues at the forefront. Here, Velebit is referring to bargaining with Stalin. According to the agreement reached about the division of spheres of interest in the Balkans at the meeting on 9 October 1944 in Moscow (which did not include Roosevelt, the USA representative was Roosevelt's special wartime emissary for Europe, Averell Harriman who, however, only conveyed messages), influence in Yugoslavia was to be divided fifty-fifty between the Soviet Union and "others", i. e. the West. During the negotiations, the two leaders showed an astonishing similarity in terms of their worldview. Velebit says that the undemocratic agreement contravened the principle of the independence of countries and nations and was also in contravention of the Atlantic Charter. Churchill manipulated the Atlantic Charter at the end of the war, during "one of the most unbelievable and blackest episodes among the Allies", when he considered it of top priority for the Western allies to come to the Julian March and Trieste and push out the Partisans since, according to what he wrote in a telegram to Truman, "possession is nine-tenths of the law", while at the same time he was sending telegrams to Stalin and Tito that the border issue must not be resolved through military occupation for just borders would be decided at a peace conference. Churchill, who was prepared to make far-reaching concessions and forget many principles in order to avoid a war with Italy (all you have to do is read his letter to Mussolini of 16 May 1940), and who whenever an opportunity arose, tried to reach agreements with the collaborationist Vichy regime, was at the end of the war prepared to attack the allied Yugoslav units and start a new war. He even convinced Truman about this. Since Churchill had to withdraw from large areas in Germany claimed by the Red Army, he also wanted to show that the smaller have to obey "the dictates of the bigger and stronger".

Velebit's assessments of Churchill's attitude to Yugoslavia and Slovenia are fundamentally accurate. They were later confirmed by the declassification and publication of

numerous documents,<sup>10</sup> and recently also Russian diplomatic sources.<sup>11</sup> The British and American documents show how Churchill persuaded Truman that the Yugoslav army, which was the first to occupy Trieste, should be pushed out by force (to which Truman agreed in his telegram of 10 May 1945), and that the British, American and Italian interests regarding the Adriatic must be aligned, as he says in his telegram to Foreign Secretary Eden on 18 April 1945. That Italy had been a Fascist aggressor which after its capitulation, uncleansed of Fascism – which soon became apparent in Zone A of the Julian March under the Allied occupation – changed sides and became a “co-fighter”, while Yugoslavia was an Allied force, no longer played a role. Churchill believed (telegram of 1 April 1945 to Field Marshal Harold Alexander, chief commander of the allied forces in the Mediterranean), that there would be a “terrible argument between the Italians and Yugoslavs for these territories”, which is why it was necessary to support Italy, which would break-up the Italian Communist forces since the Italians cared more for Trieste and Istria than for Communism, thus ensuring a pro-Western government in Italy. Alexander, Tito’s comrade-in-arms (in February 1945 he visited Tito in Belgrade and had a close look at how the fighting on the Strymian Front was progressing), was from the military point of view not really enthusiastic about pushing Tito out. He believed that his soldiers were not willing to go to war with Tito’s Partisans as they respected them, were exhausted and did not want another conflict. Because of Churchill’s annoyance, he then toned his position down, saying that the soldiers were changing their views about Tito’s army due to its brutal conduct. But Churchill and the government still said about Alexander, as written by the Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan, that he had a “too favourable impression about Tito”. Although the Partisans overtook Alexander, he came to Trieste, Gorizia and Monfalcone “in time to put his foot in the door”, as Churchill approvingly wrote to him while at the same time constantly demanding that Alexander should report to him how he was doing with the “gathering of forces against this Moscow tentacle, the barnacle at the end of which is Tito.”<sup>12</sup> Tito was willing to allow Alexander a free hand with regard to the port of Trieste and the railway communications to Austria, but was unwilling to withdraw from Trieste. Alexander then reported to Churchill that Tito would withdraw if he was assured that Yugoslavia would get Trieste, and received a sharp reply not to get involved in political issues which, of course, indicated that control of Trieste was in fact not a matter of further military operations in Austria, for which it would serve as a starting point and with which the demands for the withdrawal of Tito’s army were formally justified.

By then, Yugoslav and Slovene politicians had a clear idea about Churchill’s plans on the basis of what was happening in Greece, where after an agreement between Stalin and Churchill, Britain had 90% influence and a free hand. On 3 December 1944, Churchill used this to settle accounts with the supporters of the allied Greek Communist resistance movement. The Germans left Athens without a fight on 12 October, on 18 October the

<sup>10</sup> In Slovenia and Yugoslavia, for example, the books: Slobodan Nešović, *Velika zarota. Diplomatska igra okrog nove Jugoslavije*, Ljubljana 1978; Dušan Biber, *Tito – Churchill. Strogo tajno*, Ljubljana 1981.

<sup>11</sup> In 2015 there was, for example, an exhibition in Ljubljana, organised by the Russian Science and Arts Centre, about the liberation of Yugoslavia; it included Soviet telegrams about Yugoslavia sent by Stalin via Molotov to the Soviet ambassador Gusev, who handed them to Churchill, and Churchill’s replies.

<sup>12</sup> All these quotes are published in the above-mentioned books by Nešović and Biber, and in: Batty, *Hoodwinking Churchill. Tito’s Great Confidence Trick*, London 2011.

British came, while most of Greece was liberated by the members of the left-wing liberation movement ELAS, the armed wing of the left-wing national liberation front EAM, but they did not succeed in reaching Athens. The monarchists from the pre-war Metaxas Regime, closely tied to Britain, like the Yugoslav Chetniks, did not distinguish themselves in the fighting, many even betrayed their Communist opponents to the Germans, and so also in Greece, the real ally on the anti-Fascist side were the pro-Communist Partisans. From Lebanon, together with the British came the coalition government of Georgis Papandreu which, in addition to the liberal parties' representatives, also included the representatives of the Communist Party, the leading party in the EAM. Under British pressure, Papandreu wanted to disarm EAM/ELAS, which resulted in his ministers resigning and on 3 December calling mass demonstrations in Athens. The British came to Athens as liberators and were also greeted by many on the Left. But no price for the reinstatement of the monarchy was too high. At a mass demonstration on 3 December, the British army, together with the Greek police, killed at least 28 young people and wounded many more, even though in the spirit of the war alliance they were carrying Greek, American, British and Soviet flags and exclaiming "Long live Churchill, long live Roosevelt, long live Stalin!". The protest was also attended by some later well-known Greek names, among them the composer Mikis Theodorakis. The armed conflict that followed lasted 33 days, there were thousands of civilian victims, and with the support of the British forces, the Greek government won. "The British Army's active involvement in the 'December events' was of critical importance to the outcome of the battle. The 'December events' (*Dekemvriana* as they are called in Greece) constitute the only instance during the Second World War when hitherto Allied forces clashed with each other for power in the post-war era."<sup>13</sup>

After the suppression of the protests and the start of armed conflict, there followed a bloody civil war, in which first Britain and then the USA continued to support the royalists. The planned British "brutal and perfidious logic", as described by the Guardian, can be discerned from the telegram sent by Churchill on 17 August 1944 in strict confidentiality to Roosevelt. He expressed a concern that the EAM would occupy Athens before the British and seize power.<sup>14</sup> On 8 December, Churchill received the support of 279 votes against 30 in the House of Commons for his policy in Greece and "other parts of liberated Europe" and for the protection of the "friends of democracy."<sup>15</sup> On 25 December 1944, Churchill came to Athens personally and met with the representatives of all parties. Misleadingly, he told them that Britain did not care whether Greece was a republic or a monarchy, that this was its own business, that the British, with the approval of Roosevelt and Stalin, came to Athens only to save it from hunger and anarchy, and with an exclusive wish to help them in the restoration, now that after their difficult struggle, the Allied victory was near. In his speech, he asked why the British did not leave and answered that it was because "unexpected trouble" had broken out, in which the British were involved and in which

<sup>13</sup> Neven Budak – Alexei Kalionski – Christina Koulouri (eds.), *Teaching Contemporary Southeast European History. Vol. 1. The cold war (1944-1990)*, Thessaloniki 2016, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Ed Vulliamy – Helena Smith, "Athens 1944. Britain's dirty secret", *The Guardian* (London), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/30/athens-1944-britains-dirty-secret> (access 5/4/2018).

<sup>15</sup> Charles Eade (ed.), *The Dawn of Liberation. War Speeches by the Right Hon. Winston Churchill. 1944*, London 1945, 273-289.



they were doing what they considered their duty. But they had no intention of interfering in Greece's internal affairs.<sup>16</sup> The next day, immediately after returning to London, he had a meeting with the Greek king "about the Greek situation".

Churchill planned a very similar policy to the one he led in Greece also for Yugoslavia. Here, too, while he was in power, he had a fairly free hand since at the end of the terrible war the British public was not really interested in the situation in the Balkans. Tito's resistance movement was too strong for Churchill, but he did carry out his "Greek scenario" in the territories in the Julian March and Trieste with the intention of preventing the Soviet Union having access to the Adriatic in Pula and Trieste. Churchill's correspondence in connection with Istria, Trieste and the Julian March also shows that Yugoslavia's demands for Austrian Carinthia would be resisted (which, on the basis of the Moscow Declarations of 30 October 1943, the Allies with their differing view of its Nazi role, intended to leave to Austria, restored to its condition before the Anschluss). In connection with this, Churchill was also afraid that Yugoslavia would help the Macedonian minority in the Epirus Macedonia in Greece in its resistance against the Athens authorities that he supported. This is why the USA and Britain, which was becoming increasingly dependent on American decisions, with the consent of the Soviet Union, which had other interests and did not want another war because of Trieste, forced the Partisan army to withdraw from Trieste and the Julian March to the demarcation or Morgan line. Zone A of the Julian March under the allied authority, and Zone B of the Julian March under the Yugoslav authority were then established. The border issue was partly resolved at the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, but the issue of Trieste and its surroundings remained open.

The situation in the Julian March and Trieste was even worse than in Greece since, in addition to the political struggle, there was also inter-ethnic conflict between the Italians and Slovenes. The Italians (with the exception of workers) described liberation by the Yugoslav army as falling from the Nazi-Fascist slavery into an even worse position, they thought that liberty under Tito was worse than any Fascism, that Tito's army was carrying out ethnic cleansing, rumours were spreading about hundreds of thousands being killed on the basis of their nationality and thrown into Carst caves (*foibe*). This was what the Italian propaganda against Yugoslavia continued to be based on in the following decades. In 1945 the Italian authorities collected information about the 2472 people that the Yugoslav forces were said to have led away, but the Western allies wanted a response from Yugoslavia. According to research by the Friulian Institute for the History of the Liberation Movement into named individuals, 601 persons died as a result of Yugoslav arrests. In the Gorizia area, 901 people were killed or died in captivity and of these 653 were members of armed formations. The arrests and executions were "to a large extent directed against those who had participated in Fascism and collaboration. Among these, the members of the military, police and para-military units who symbolised the Fascist state can be included, but many of them did not deserve death, even by the then strict criteria. To a large extent those killed were the consequence of the conduct of the Italian authorities during the entire period following the occupation of Primorska in 1918, and particularly the conduct during the war. This was a period of settling of scores, not with the Italians

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<sup>16</sup> The whole speech in: *Ibid.*, 307-310.

as a nation, but with Fascism and Nazism, and of revenge for the many that had fallen, including those that died in the last battles for Trieste."<sup>17</sup>

The Allied military authorities adopted much of the Italian rhetoric, which served them well, of course. They dismantled the Slovene administrative bodies, which had appeared during the resistance period, allowed for the pre-war Fascist legislation to remain in place, and protected the Italian Right and Fascists, something that the Slovene and Italian workers' organisations justifiably criticised them for. During demonstrations in Škedenj on 10 March 1946 – similarly to what took place in Athens – members of the allied police shot at pro-Yugoslav demonstrators, killed two people (one was a mother of three children), badly injured two and lightly injured fifteen. There were tens of incidents and armed conflicts. "They treat our people in the same way or almost in the same way as individual parts of Germany, the same as parts of Austria and worse than Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria and, finally, worse than Italy. They are treating us the same as the countries that actively fought on the side of the Axis against the Allies," said Boris Kraigher, the secretary of the Main Committee of the Slovene-Italian Anti-Fascist Union of the Julian March in January 1946.<sup>18</sup> Although the Allied Military Administration formally established a commission for the prosecution of Fascists, out of 18,000 cases only 350 individuals from the former Fascist apparatus were purged, and the same applies to the courts. Criminal acts committed prior to 8 September 1943 (Italy's capitulation) remained largely unpunished.

The border issue was then partly solved at the Paris Conference in 1946. Zone A of the Julian March fell to Italy, and Zone B, with a few corrections, to Yugoslavia. Since the idea about Trieste as an independent city under UN jurisdiction was not realised, the city and its surroundings were divided into Zone A and Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT). In the following years, there arose between Yugoslavia and Italy, as well as between Yugoslavia and the USA and Britain, several tensions of varied intensity regarding the border. On 9 May 1952, with the London Agreement, the Western forces (on the basis of the tripartite declaration from 1948 with similar content) wanted to leave Zone A of the FTT to Italy, but Yugoslavia resisted this. On 8 October 1953, the governments of Britain and the USA announced that they would end their military administration over Zone A of the FTT and leave it to Italy. For the realisation of this decision, Italy focused its military units on Zone A's borders (even before, there were individual cases of provocation). Yugoslavia did the same and this led to the so-called Trieste crisis, which again posed a threat of war. Around Slovenia and Yugoslavia mass demonstrations began, but the most effective argument was the calling up of reservists and placing tanks on the Italian border (as a reaction to the Italian enforcements and preparations for taking over power from the allies). Tito made it very clear that he was serious and that the Yugoslav army would march into Zone A of the Julian March if a single Italian soldier entered it, and that the issue of Trieste would not be resolved without Yugoslavia's participation, which is what he said in a number of speeches. Although at that time Yugoslavia did not have great international support, the strength of its army and its readiness to fight for its borders were sufficient psychological factors. In addition, an equally strong factor was the fact that Yugoslavia was now once

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<sup>17</sup> Nevenka Troha, *Komu Trst. Slovenci in Italijani med dvema državama*, Ljubljana 1999, 71; Jože Pirjevec, *Fojbe*, Ljubljana 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Troha, *Komu Trst*, 83.

more an ally, this time against the Soviet Union. And Tito agreed to Trieste going to Italy in exchange for Istria and the present-day Slovene coast south of Trieste (at the time, most of these towns were Italian). The big forces judged that it was not worth escalating the conflict and endeavoured to resolve it through diplomacy. On 5 October, after lengthy negotiations, the (second) London Memorandum was signed, granting Zone A of the FTT to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia (the border was ultimately resolved by the so-called Treaty of Osimo between Yugoslavia and Italy in 1974).

Churchill never visited Slovenia nor dealt with Slovenes as a nation. But during the war, in connection with the situation in Yugoslavia, he probably did read reports about what was happening in Slovenia, since Allied war missions were also posted with Slovene Partisans, and many Partisan activities, particularly attacks on communications, were coordinated with those carried out by the Allies. In addition, Allied help also came to Slovenia, there were Partisan airports here at which Allied planes landed, Slovene Partisans saved dozens of British and American pilots and prisoners of war that the Germans and the collaborationist Home Guard wanted to get their hands on.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Churchill was strongly involved in the division of the Slovene territory. During World War Two this happened for the second time. During World War One, Prime Minister Asquith and the English Foreign Minister, Edward Grey, decided to give to Italy the Slovene territory (then as part of Austria-Hungary), which later became the subject of conflict at the end of World War Two. Although this was a complex issue of relations between Russia and Britain, it was basically simple: in March 1915 the British diplomacy decided to grant Russia the right to occupy Istanbul, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles; this gave Britain its concessions for the territory of northern Persia and the Suez Canal and, particularly, meant that Italian demands were fully met. The French joined the agreement for concessions in North Africa. Thus the two countries also got Russia on their side so that it did not sign a separate peace agreement with Germany. Tsar Nikolai did have doubts about the territories given to Italy since he supported the Serbs and their demands in the Adriatic, but the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles gave him "an entrance to the living room", while at the same time he desperately wanted Italy to join the war and relieve the Eastern Front.

The agreement between Russia, Britain and France paved the way for the London Pact, which was concluded only a short time later, and through which Italy took on the obligation of attacking Austria-Hungary. Churchill ardently supported this policy. In one of his numerous letters to his lover (or admirer) Venetia Stanley, Asquith wrote that he had an interesting discussion with Grey and that Churchill and Lloyd George, whom Churchill represented very well, "expect that, when the war is over, Russia would get Istanbul, Italy Dalmatia, France Syria and we would get an equal area of Mesopotamia with Alexandria or without it, an influential area in Persia and a few smaller German colonies..."<sup>19</sup> As can be seen from Lloyd George's memoirs (London 1933 – 1936), Churchill was well informed about the course of events while, in his opinion, Asquith played the leading part "in the Italian question" (since during the final negotiations Grey was on sick leave). As a member of the cabinet, Churchill ardently defended the agreement, except that Italy's acquisitions, with regard to its input, were in his opinion excessive, i. e. from the viewpoint that with

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<sup>19</sup> Uroš Lipušček, *Sacro egoizmo. Slovenci v krempljih tajnega londonskega pakta 1915*, Ljubljana 2012, 224.

Russia's withdrawal from the war and the appearance of Yugoslavia, the main geostrategic argument that the Italian rule of the Mediterranean would serve as a counterweight to Russia in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, now collapsed. The connection between Churchill's (British) imperialistic decision-making about the Slovene territory during and after both World Wars is obvious. After WW1, the historian A. J. P. Taylor wrote: "The Treaty of London is the only legal basis for Italian rule in Trieste; and anyone who wishes to maintain this rule is, inescapably, an advocate of the Treaty of London."<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the positive evaluation of Churchill's role in the resistance against Nazism, in the decades after the war the attitude to him in Slovenia or Yugoslavia was not uniform and this is still true. The reason is to be found not only in his anti-Communism, but also the border issue (Carinthia, the Julian March and Trieste). With regard to the latter, the Slovenes cannot deceive themselves: they were the subject of his imperialist logic and bargaining, far from the principles he declaratively advocated in the Atlantic Charter and in general.

The historical balance of the relationship between Churchill and Slovenes is, roughly, as follows:

1) During WW1, as a member of Asquith's cabinet, he was an ardent supporter of the secret Treaty of London, which granted Italy in advance a third of the Slovene territory and a quarter of the Slovene population.

2) During WW2, he pragmatically decided to support militarily and later also politically Tito's Partisan movement (which included the Slovene Partisan army), which between 1941 and 1943, in the completely occupied Europe, was more or less the only resistance movement worthy of mention.

3) At the same time, he concluded a secret pact with Stalin about the division of spheres of interest in the Balkans, according to which influence in Yugoslavia was to be divided between them according to the fifty-fifty principle (if the outcome of the military operations had developed differently, there would probably also have been a physical division of Slovenia and Yugoslavia).

4) At the end of WW2, he tried to realize the division of interest spheres according to the Greek scenario, but did not succeed because of the strength of Tito's army (on the other hand, even the Red Army, after liberating Belgrade and the eastern part of Slovene and Yugoslav territory, had to leave Yugoslavia). But he did, even at the risk of a new war, achieve that the Yugoslav army withdrew from the liberated Trieste and the Julian March, and supported the Italian territorial demands.

5) In the conflict between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in 1948, the British government, this time without Churchill, following the policy of the USA, supported Yugoslavia. After 1951, when he again came to power, Churchill continued this policy and in 1953, Churchill enabled Tito to be the first Communist leader to visit Britain, which meant the end of Yugoslav isolation and Tito's victorious return to international politics.

6) In 1953, he agreed to a relatively just solution of the border issue with Italy, with which Slovenia lost Trieste, but gained access to the sea south of it.

Without a doubt, Churchill was a great statesman. But he was a statesman of the imperialistic world, secret agreements and divisions into spheres of interest. This is a world that began to fall apart during the war, but has never truly disintegrated, just a few of the main players have been replaced by others.

<sup>20</sup> Alan J. P. Taylor, *Trieste*, New York 1945; quoted from Lipušček, *Sacro egoizmo*.