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Abstracts

MASSIMO BUCARELLI, Mussolini, la questione adriatica e il fallimento dell'interventismo democratico

During World War I and in the early post-war years, the “Adriatic question” (that is the Italo-Yugoslav dispute over the possession of the former Habsburg territories along the Eastern Adriatic coast) was such a controversial and divisive issue, that the domestic political debate in Italy was dominated - and partly paralysed - by the quarrel with Yugoslavia. As the diplomatic struggle for political hegemony and naval supremacy in the Adriatic dragged on, a great division opened up in Italy’s political circles between nationalists and democratic interventionists. The nationalists were in favour of unilateral solutions, which Italy had to impose even against Yugoslavia’s will in order to complete the national unification process and fulfil all the strategic and military requirements. The democratic interventionists sought a compromise solution, since they were convinced that the national interests would have been best served by a close political and economic cooperation with Yugoslavia.

Benito Mussolini, founder and leader of the Fascist movement, took an active role in the national debate over the “Adriatic question”. Even though at the beginning of the war he had been more prone to compromise than the democratic leaders, Mussolini gradually moved closer toward nationalism and anti-Yugoslavism. The article argues that Mussolini’s political inconsistency and changes were not due to ideological reasons, since they were the results of opportunistic and selfish political considerations. As the public opinion in Italy took a clear uncompromising stand concerning the territorial dispute with Yugoslavia, Mussolini decided to change his approach towards the “Adriatic question” with the purpose of exploiting the increasing political consensus, which the nationalist propaganda was gaining among Italian public opinion. To sum up, Mussolini’s aim was not the defence of Italian communities along the Eastern Adriatic coast, but rather the defence of his leadership at home.